

## PIETER BRUEGEL: PAINTING A WORLD IN DISRUPTION

**Coordinator:** Don Ray

Pieter Bruegel the Elder was painting for less than 20 years—500 years ago—and left behind no explanations. His art spoke for him, but in varied moods, and later he was pigeonholed as a Bosch imitator, or a satirist of peasants and fools, or an illustrator for our calendars. In our time he is coming into focus as an original who thought deeply by way of painting and drawing, whatever the subject. Great in mind as in technique, Bruegel rewards our attention to the what, how and why of his art. It emerged from a gem-like Flemish devotional tradition, into a broader, more contested engagement with the world. Humor seasoned his morality; humanism widened his sharp eye. A modern at the end of the Renaissance, he is modern again today.

**Don Ray** has coordinated a dozen study groups in different fields. He has long been intrigued by art as a window into culture as well as inner life.

**Type of Study Group:** Lecture and discussion with visuals

### **Readings and other Materials/Online Services:**

Brief reading selections or a YouTube link will be e-mailed for some sessions.

Several of Bruegel's works are to be viewed before each class. Many of his greatest are in the Vienna Museum of Art and its "insidebruegel" website.

\*\*\*\*\* **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** \*\*\*\*\*

### **WEEK 1**

**TOPIC:** Bruegel's *Nederlandisch* roots and audience

#### **READING/VIEWING:**

*Book of the Painters* by Van Mander (1604), pp.153-7;

Artworks:

Bruegel: "The painter and the connoisseur" drawing; "Fall of the Rebel

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Angels” and “Lust” (to compare with H. Bosch).

### **QUESTIONS:**

In his drawing, what is Bruegel saying about the relationship between painter and connoisseur?

Does Van Mander’s short bio sidestep certain topics, e.g....?

Bruegel emulated Bosch in places; yet how are they different?

## **WEEK 2**

**TOPIC:** The “world landscape”

### **READING/VIEWING:**

BRAFA Art Talk 2019 on Pieter Bruegel by Prof. Dr. Manfred Sellink

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCW0N2LkC8c>

Artworks:

Patinir: “Penitence of St. Jerome”;

Bruegel: “Harvesters” (in the “Seasons”); the Alpine drawings; 3 “Adoration of the Magi” paintings.

### **QUESTIONS:**

Compare and contrast Patinir’s landscape with Bruegel’s.

How do we recognize Bruegel as Northern and not Italian?

What happens to the “Magi” subject as his works progress?

## **WEEK 3**

**TOPIC:** God in the world

### **READING/VIEWING:**

Artworks:

Bruegel: “Christ Carrying the Cross” and “St. John Preaching”

### **QUESTIONS:**

In the painting of Christ carrying the Cross, why is He hidden in the crowd?

What narratives can you make out in the main story? Does the picture offer a moment in time, or a series of events?

How would you describe the crowd in “Sermon of St. John”? How may it address the religious turmoil of Bruegel’s time?

**WEEK 4:** Folly and wisdom

**WEEK 5:** Peasants

**WEEK 6:** Last works and enigmas

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