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Pieter Bruegel the Elder: art discourse in the sixteenth-century Netherlands

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Conclusion

Hans Vredeman de Vries and Pieter Bruegel: An Artistic Confrontation

Throughout this study, I have argued that Bruegel's mediation of pictorial motifs and visual concepts from history painting for his representations of peasants and festivities serves multiple functions: to question what constitutes a proper work of art, to cultivate his own vernacular style and to appeal to the humanist ideal of employing classical frames of reference for subjects or events that are local in character. At the core of this artistic agenda are the concepts of *ars* (skill) and *ingenium* (imagination or invention) which facilitated the creative integration of art and nature. For the Pléiade group, for example, this meant the use of classical Latinate forms (art) to cultivate the vernacular language (nature). Despite the fact that Bruegel's later scenes of peasants have been categorized as paintings representing an indigenous idiom that eschews foreign influence, I have discussed in greater detail the hybrid nature of these images, which 'artfully' depict the 'natural' life of Brabant. Bruegel's pictures simultaneously question the uncritical acceptance of artistic standards and assumptions defined in Italy and push for the pictorial possibility of incorporating these very principles into what was increasingly recognized as a Northern idiom. The result is a vernacular style that is as capable of copious, apt and ornate expression as that of Italy. As I have discussed his art thus far, particularly the later peasant paintings, one might even go so far to say that Bruegel (standing on the shoulders of other artists such as Jan van Hemessen and Pieter Aertsen) created, developed and made artistically visible and viable the very idea of a sixteenth-century vernacular style. This is especially the case since if one were to point to any kind of "vernacular style" prior to Bruegel, it would be the slender figures of early Netherlandish artists such as Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden.

I have proposed the *convivium* tradition, especially the way in which these dialogues were enacted in the sixteenth-century domestic interior, as a model for gaining a better understanding of the analytical nature of the conversations that would

have taken place in front of these pictures. For images in which discovery and revelation were integral for visual analysis, a viewing process that is dependent on the participation of the “beholder’s share,” these texts offer examples of people who engaged various topics—art, poetry and religion—on multiple different levels during lengthy conversations, which were often competitive in nature. Whether the topic of conversation was a scripture verse, poem, painting, statue or garden, nothing was taken at face value, rather everything, even a single flower, was taken as a point of departure for further inquiry and discussion on a deeper level, both semantically and analytically. While the food they ate cultivated the body, participants of dinner parties gave primary concern for the cultivation of the mind through open-ended dialogue.

In terms of Bruegel’s art, I have based my research primarily on pictures themselves and the visual evidence they provide, both within his own work and that of his influential predecessors and contemporaries, such as Hemessen and Aertsen. The issue that I would like to return to in this concluding section is this: to what degree were Bruegel’s viewers privy to the various visual discourses at play in his pictures. To do so, I will examine one piece of written evidence that offers an indication that Bruegel’s “vernacular scenes” were viewed and discussed as operating within the artistic and viewing contexts I have described.

In his *Schilder-boeck*, published in 1604, Karl van Mander conveys an anecdote about Bruegel that provides us with an example of an artistic discourse, both visual and verbal.⁴⁶⁴ Describing the life of Hans Vredeman de Vries, a painter and designer of architectural scenes who may have known Bruegel personally, Van Mander recounts an incident that occurred soon after Vredeman’s return to Antwerp after living in Aix la Chapelle and Liège.⁴⁶⁵ “He received a commission from the treasurer of the town, Aert Molckeman, to paint a view of a summer house in perspective; he painted an open door in the picture to increase its beauty. Pieter Bruegel happened to visit while Vredeman was away; he took his tools and, in the doorway, painted a peasant with a

⁴⁶⁴ See A. Monballieu, “Een werk van Pieter Bruegel en H. Vredeman de Vries voor de tresorier Aert Molckeman,” *Jaarboek van het Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1969), 113-135 and Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006).

⁴⁶⁵ There is evidence, albeit inconclusive, that Bruegel worked with Vredeman in the same studio in Mechelen, that of Claude Dorisy. In any event, he would have been well acquainted with Vredeman’s work through their mutual cooperation with the publisher Hieronymus Cock. On their connection, see *Tussen Stadspaleizen en Luchtkastelen* (2002), 11, 161.

soiled shirt in intimate relation with a peasant woman. People laughed very much about this; it pleased Molckeman so much that he would not have the painting altered for any amount of money.”⁴⁶⁶

The accuracy of this story has been doubted partly due to the fact that, as Walter Melion has observed, Van Mander often invents anecdotes to elaborate on artistic theory and practice.⁴⁶⁷ The author describes certain biographical or behavioral aspects of an artist, which on occasion turn out to be fictitious, in order to support his own claims about the artist’s status and practice.⁴⁶⁸ This would no doubt be the case for this story involving Bruegel and Vredeman since it supports one aspect of Van Mander’s description of Bruegel’s life: “few pieces by his hand can be looked at earnestly without laughing.”⁴⁶⁹ There has been additional scepticism because Van Mander places the event sometime during the 1570’s, post-dating Bruegel’s death in 1569. However, Adolph Monballieu has plausibly suggested that Vredeman painted the picture for Molckeman sometime in the 1560’s when Bruegel was living in Brussels, where Vredeman, although based in Antwerp, had many artistic contacts.⁴⁷⁰ Furthermore, Christopher Heuer has argued convincingly that the source for Van Mander’s information about Vredeman’s life was a letter written by the artist himself,

⁴⁶⁶ Karel van Mander, *Schilder-boek: Dutch and Flemish Painters*, trans. Constant van de Wall, New York: McFarlane, Warde, McFarlane (1936), 300. “en creegh stracs te Brussel te Schilderen / voor den Tresorier Aert Molckeman, een Somer-huys in Perspectijf / daer versierende onder ander een open deur / waer in/in’t afwesen va[n] Vries / Pieter Brueghel vindende hier de reetschap / hadde ghemaect eenen Boer met een beseghelt hemde / vast doende met een Boerinne / waerom seer ghelacchen / en den Heer seer aenghenaem was / die’t om groot gelt niet hadde laten uytdoen,” Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boek*, Utrecht: Davaco Publishers (1604 / 1969).

⁴⁶⁷ Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991), 167-168. Historical accuracy is also a question taken up in Jürgen Müller’s published dissertation, *Concordia Pragensis, Karel van Manders Kunsttheorie im Schilder-Boeck: Ein Beitrag zur Rhetorisierung von Kunst und Leben am Beispiel der rudolfinschen Hofkünstler*, München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag (1993). See also Hessel Miedema’s review in *Oud Holland*, vol. 109, no. 3 (1994), 149-155; R. Genaille, “Carel van Mander et la jeunesse de Bruegel l’Ancien,” *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk museum voor schone kunsten Antwerpen* (1982), 119-151; Hessel Miedema, *Karel van Mander*, vol. 3 (1996), 252-267; J. Muylle, “Pier den Drol—Karel van Mander en Pieter Bruegel. Bijdrage tot de literaire receptie van Pieter Bruegels werk ca. 1600,” in *Wort und Bild in der niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, Erfstadt: Lukassen Verlag (1984), 137-144.

⁴⁶⁸ For example, his claim that Jan Gossaert was originally a blacksmith or that Bruegel was a peasant follows a pattern of traditional tropes from antiquity that assert humble backgrounds to significant artists. On artist anecdotes as cultural mythology, see Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, New Haven: Yale University Press (1979), 11, 124-25.

⁴⁶⁹ As reprinted in Roberts-Jones, *Pieter Bruegel* (2002), 332.

⁴⁷⁰ Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), 11. Monballieu, “Een werk van Pieter Bruegel en H. Vredeman de Vries” (1969).

in which case the story would have been conveyed directly rather than hearsay or legend.⁴⁷¹

Despite our inability to assess the empirical validity of Van Mander's anecdote, it is important to take seriously this story of artistic behaviour and reception. At the very least, the event offers a glimpse into a possible visual discourse between two well-known artists and how the confrontation of their different artistic styles was evaluated in the latter portion of the sixteenth century.⁴⁷²

Vredeman, often called the "Flemish Vitruvius," created plausible but imaginative architectural representations that incorporated a mixture of designs from classical and gothic sources. These depictions are highly ornamented and palatial and often provided decorative backdrops for historical scenes; the human staffage for which were usually added by other hands such as Lucas van Valckenborch and Marten van Cleve. He received commissions from a number of important patrons, including the court of Rudolph II in Prague and the House of Stuart in Wales.⁴⁷³

The door, like the one which acts as a stage for Bruegel's peasants in Van Mander's anecdote, was an important motif in Vredeman's work. In images that aim to create spatial recession, the open door is a device that intensifies the illusion of depth and simulates views into buildings and gardens, inviting the eye to pass unsuspectingly into a fictive space.⁴⁷⁴ Other instances in which Vredeman used this device include the burial chapel of Jacob Moor in St. Peter's, Hamburg, in which two painted doorways opened onto flights of steps in an illusion so powerful that,

⁴⁷¹ Vredeman is the first living artist to receive a chapter in Van Mander's *Schilder-boeck*, and it is possible that the two men knew each other after 1600. Christopher Heuer explains that the actual place the *Schilderboeck* seems to have been written was Zevenbergen castle, north of Haarlem, around 1601-1602. Since Vredeman was living in Amsterdam, a mere seven kilometers at this time, a meeting between Van Mander and Vredeman almost certainly occurred. If this is the case, Vredeman could have personally conveyed this story to Van Mander. See Christopher P. Heuer, *The City Rehearsed: Print, Performance, and the Architectural Imaginaries of Hans Vredeman de Vries*, Oxford and New York: Routledge (forthcoming, 2008). I am thankful to Dr. Heuer for sharing with me a chapter of his book prior to publication. See also H.E. Greve, *De bronnen van Carel van Mander voor "Het leven derf doorluchtighe Nederlandsche en Hoogduytsche schilders"* (*Quellenstudien zur holländischen Kunstgeschichte II*), The Hague (1903), 161.

⁴⁷² On this issue, see Marc Gotlieb, "The Painter's Secret: Invention and Rivalry from Giorgio Vasari to Honore de Balzac," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, no.3 (September 2002), 469-490. On the importance of artist anecdotes for the criticism of art and the disciplinary discourse of art history, see Catherine Sousloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1997), 94-100, 138-158.

⁴⁷³ *Tussen Stadspaleizen en Luchtkastelen* (2002), 11; Heuer, *The City Rehearsed* (forthcoming, 2008).

⁴⁷⁴ Melion, *Shaping the Netherlandish Canon* (1991), 32.

according to Van Mander, visitors placed bets on the truth of the vistas. In the courtyard of Hans Lomel's house in Hamburg, he painted a doorway on a wooden fence screening a coppice that seemed to frame a view to trees and a pond. The trees rising above the fence seemed continuous with the trunks visible through the doorway.⁴⁷⁵ Regarding a commission by Gillis Hofman, Van Mander writes that Vredeman: "*maakte op een plaats tegenover een poort, een grote perspectivische schildering die een doorkijk in een tuin toonde.*" He comments further that after the painting was finished some visiting German nobles, along with the *prins van Oranje*, thought it was a real building and an actual view into a garden.⁴⁷⁶ Vredeman's painting of a summer house in perspective for Molckeman no longer exists, and we are not told whether it is a mural or panel painting. However, we can imagine its effects from the still extant depictions by the artist of buildings set within a rural landscape, such as the *Lazarus Before the Palace of the Rich Man* (ca. 1583, fig. 106), which are all skillful perspectival constructions. A painting of a scene such as this, commissioned by an important municipal official, indicates the high standard of living with which Molckeman wanted to be associated. As an architectural design that created the illusion as if looking through a window, it also represents a style of art that had acquired a certain status in the North as a result of the influx of humanist ideas.⁴⁷⁷ Vredeman certainly was highly influenced by Vitruvius and Serlio and his work followed certain standards of representation set out by Italian artists and writers.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-boeck*, Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek (1995), 285.

⁴⁷⁷ I emphasize style here because it has been recently argued that Vredeman as an artist was somewhat of a failure; see Heuer, *The City Rehearsed* (forthcoming, 2008). On the important relationship between painting and architecture, especially within a domestic interior, and the necessity of representing "reality" in painting (that which does or could exist in the world), see Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Ingrid D. Rowland, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), 7.5.1-5. Leon Battista Alberti wrote that painting should be like "a transparent window through which we look out into a section of the visible world," and later in Book 1, "the art of painting begins with a drawn rectangle, which is to me like an open window from which the *historia* is contemplated," *On Painting*, London: Penguin Books (1991), 37-59. In addition, Karel van Mander praises Pieter Aertsen's ability to fool the viewer with illusionist depictions so realistic that one has the impression of being able to stretch one's hands out to grasp them, Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boek*, Haarlem (1604), fol. 33v, stanza 53:e-h and stanza 55:a-f.

⁴⁷⁸ Krista de Jonge, "Vitruvius, Alberti and Serlio: Architectural Treatises in the Low Countries, 1530-1620," in Vaughen Hart (ed.) *Paper Palaces: The Rise of the Renaissance Architectural Treatise*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press (1998), 281-296.

Considering that Vredeman's commission was for a summer home, it is important to understand that such "places of retreat" for wealthy merchants or government officials were located outside the city walls in the countryside. Walter Gibson points out that the designations of these country places in contemporary records as *hof van plaisance* and *speelhuys* suggest that they were indeed retreats, providing escape for their owners from the business world of Antwerp. It has been estimated that between 1540 and 1600 at least 250 country residences existed within a twenty-kilometer radius of Antwerp.⁴⁷⁹ Therefore, not only were these second homes located in the vicinity of rustic life, the mentality with which they were viewed ("playhouses" or "pleasure palace") provides an interesting context for Vredeman's painting and especially for the peasant couple Bruegel appends.

With the knowledge that the human staffage in Vredeman's architectural designs were often added by other artists, on the one hand, Bruegel's graffiti wittily equips his depiction of a residence in the countryside with "proper" rustic ornamentation. Not only do peasants fittingly decorate a summer house in the suburbs outside of the city, their erotic embrace functions to comically aid in the achievement of the paintings probable effect on the viewer, namely to remind the owner of the pleasurable atmosphere of his "*speelhuys*" beyond the city walls, away from work and worry. On the other hand, Van Mander's account of Bruegel's graffiti, a peasant with a soiled shirt busy with his female companion in front of the open door, seems to indicate that the artist also violates social decorum. For example, Vitruvius writes that one's design must take into account what is fitting to the occasion, the public, the situation, the character and status of the patron. Decorum brings with it a concern for the unity of content, form and purpose.⁴⁸⁰ By interjecting characters into the scene whose origin, costume and behavior disrupt Vredeman's pristine, fictive space in the house of a wealthy patron who is a high-ranking government official, Bruegel creates a tension that elicits laughter from the viewer. Nevertheless, Bruegel's viewers do not

⁴⁷⁹ Walter Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), 78-79. Roland Baetens and Bruno Blondé speculate that the number of villas near Antwerp was around 370; "Habiter la ville: la culture de l'habitat urbain," in Jan Van der Stock (ed.) *La ville en Flandre: culture et société, 1477-1787*, Brussels: Crédit Communal (1991), 59-70. See also Goldstein, "Keeping up Appearances" (2003).

⁴⁸⁰ Caroline van Eck, review of Alina A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, in *Art Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2001.

exclusively respond with laughter; according to Van Mander, Molckeman reveals his respect for the artist by asserting that he would not have Bruegel's intervention painted out for any amount of money.

In his recent book, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder and the Art of Laughter*, Gibson is one of the few scholars who take up Van Mander's story.⁴⁸¹ He does so in order to support his thesis that Bruegel's contemporaries reacted to his depictions of rustic life with amusement and outright laughter. For Gibson, this anecdote offers evidence that Bruegel's peasants were not always viewed with an eye toward didactic moralism, but were often portrayed in the context of simple, relaxing humor.⁴⁸² I argue, however, that to contend that Bruegel's graffiti on Vredeman's picture was merely appreciated as funny neglects a fundamental issue at play in the story. Two questions must be posed: why did Bruegel's act of depicting two peasants on Vredeman's painting of a summer house in perspective elicit such laughter, and why was this juxtaposition valued so highly by Molckeman? As the story is told by Van Mander, it seems that the viewers of this unexpected collaboration were not just laughing at Bruegel's peasants; rather, they were laughing at the fact that this motif of rustic lovers had been imposed upon what was most likely a sophisticated, perspectival design of a Renaissance palace in the woods. Vredeman's lofty painted space, itself located within a lofty social setting, was now inhabited by lowly, befouled characters. The inspiration to laugh emerges from the tension created by Bruegel's disruption of the illusion. The high Renaissance style of the architecture, coupled with a pair of peasants whose actions are sexually suggestive, considered to be a low subject, was an artistic provocation that undercut Vredeman's ambitious design.⁴⁸³ I would extend this observation a step further to say that, in this context, Bruegel's peasant with the "*beseghelt*" shirt offers further visual commentary. "*Beseghelt*" also means "sealed," as in "provided with a seal or mark of authentication." Referring to this term, Gibson draws attention to a woodcut by Pieter Flöttner of ca. 1535, in which an impoverished artisan raises a banner bearing the image of a large wine jar and a turd; in the accompanying poem,

⁴⁸¹ Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), 10-13; Jürgen Müller also discusses the anecdote, *Concordia Pragensis* (1993).

⁴⁸² The debate whether or not Bruegel's peasants should be seen in a comic or moralistic light dates back to the polemical exchange between Svetlana Alpers and Hessel Miedema; see n. 43.

⁴⁸³ On the peasant as a low subject, see Raupp, *Bauernsatiren* (1986) and Vandebroeck, *Beeld van de Andere* (1987).

Flöttner tells us that the banner has been “sealed with a turd [*versigelt mit eym dreck*].” One might presume, then, that the shirt of Bruegel’s peasant is “sealed,” or soiled, in a similar way.⁴⁸⁴ What Bruegel paints on Vredeman’s design provides insight into how Bruegel and his viewers might have understood his artistic action. As the peasant’s shirt is sealed, so Bruegel “*beseghelt*” the painting with carousing peasants, his own signature or “mark of authentication.”

In order to clarify further complexities of the issue, I will risk making an anachronistic comparison between Van Mander’s anecdote and a similar story involving two very different artists, one Renaissance and one Modern. Probably the most well known act of artistic graffiti in the twentieth century is Marcel Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*, a cheap postcard-sized reproduction of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* upon which the artist drew a mustache and a thin goatee beard (fig. 107). On the one hand, Duchamp’s *Mona Lisa* defaces (literally) a cherished work of art from the height of Italian Renaissance painting and draws attention to its descent to the level of an ordinary reproduction. A simple mustache and goatee transform a once dignified and refined painting of a woman into an image that is ridiculous. The title makes the point, too, since when pronounced in French “L.H.O.O.Q.” is revealed to be a pun on the phrase “*Elle a chaud au cul*,” which translates colloquially as “She’s hot in the ass.”⁴⁸⁵ One could argue, however, that Duchamp’s acts of artistic vandalism, against both the painting and its title, transform an image of the distant past into an object of a more familiar modern vernacular. The viewer must puzzle out the joke, creating an element of surprise and laughter upon the discovery of the artist’s witty intervention. Conversely, if Duchamp’s graffiti removes *Mona* from her ancient pedestal, it also works in the other direction, elevating the crude commercially printed card from the realm of the cheap distributable image to a signature work of art. By imposing what Duchamp asserted to be a radical new standard of art, though a standard subsequently acknowledged by his viewing public, onto one of the most well-known icons of the Renaissance canon, the artist questions the very nature of art itself as it was understood

⁴⁸⁴ Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), 162, n. 49.

⁴⁸⁵ For discussions on this work, see Florence de Mèredieu, *Duchamp en forme de ready-made*, Paris: Blusson, 2000; Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-gardism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994; Robert A. Baron, *Mona Lisa Images for a Modern World*, <http://www.studiolo.org/Mona/MONALIST.htm> (January 31, 2007).

up to the second decade of the twentieth century. Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* can be seen as one work of art in a string of objects categorized as "readymades"; works that he did not make in the traditional artistic sense, but whose artistic value lie in the way they push the boundaries of art by leading the viewer to see everyday, ordinary objects from a new, more critical, perspective. Duchamp's mustache and goatee, along with his new French colloquial title, not only serve to make an enigmatic portrait more familiar but also function to elevate the familiar and practical, a postcard reproduction, to the level of a complex work of art. The combination of what was traditionally considered to be high and low can serve to both mock that which is elevated as well as make sophisticated that which is common. More importantly, however, it calls into question, or even erases, the very distinction between the two.⁴⁸⁶

Returning now to Van Mander's anecdote: is a similar conclusion possible for Bruegel's marks on the painting of Vredeman? I think Bruegel's addition of frolicking peasants was not only valued because it humorously ornamented the work of his Renaissance counterpart and violated social decorum, but also because it raised questions about the very nature of what constituted a proper painting, thereby pushing the boundaries of art. The juxtaposition of a lofty, pristine architectural design with lowly, "beseghelt" peasant characters not only disrupts Vredeman's fictive illusion, it also argues for Bruegel's depiction of the rustic man and woman as worthy subjects of art. Van Mander's account of the varied responses to the picture points us in this direction. On the one hand, much like the modern audience of Duchamp's postcard, viewers of the picture responded to the provocation with laughter. On the other hand, Molckeman, the commissioner of the design, cherished it greatly. With this sentiment, we can understand Bruegel's action not only as a friendly joke of graffiti but also as a competitive game of one-upmanship.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁶ Gibson and Ramakers argue for a similar kind of slippage between 'high' and 'low', 'learned culture' and lower classes in sixteenth rederijker and humanist circles; see Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (2006), 98 and Ramakers, "Bruegel en de rederijkers" (1987). Meadow also describes the slippage between "high" and "low" in relation to Dutch proverbs and classical *adagia*; see *Pieter Bruegel's Netherlandish Proverbs* (2002).

⁴⁸⁷ As a possible topos, Pliny offers an anecdote that recounts a similar visual interaction between Apelles and Protogenes. Apelles went to visit Protogenes's studio, but on his arrival only an old woman was present keeping watch over a large panel placed on an easel. The woman explained that Protogenes was out and asked the name of the visitor. Apelles replied by picking up a brush and drawing a line of extreme delicacy across the board. On the return of Protogenes the woman told him what had happened.

By the late 1560s, Bruegel's pictures of peasant festivities defined him as an artist as much as architectural designs defined Vredeman. Van Mander's anecdote about Bruegel's artistic intervention and Molckeman's response to it offers us rare insight into the artistic atmosphere in the Netherlands during the latter portion of the sixteenth century, one in which, as I have argued, norms and values about what constitutes a proper work of art were being reconsidered.⁴⁸⁸ In this particular context, two artistic identities are pitted against one another, yet we are told Molckeman's final judgement is that the combination of the two surpasses Vredeman's work on its own. Provocation leads to tension, tension leads to laughter, laughter leads to appreciation, appreciation leads to a renegotiation of artistic values. Further, Molckeman's value judgement is even more important since, as a wealthy, educated municipal official, he is representative of the people who owned many of Bruegel's paintings during the artist's lifetime, such as Nicolaes Jongelinck and Jean Noiroit.

On the one hand, the peasants Bruegel added to Vredeman's painting can be understood in similar terms as someone writing on a public wall, "John was here." It was the artist's "mark of authentication" and subsequent viewers could have immediately attributed the source of the man and woman to him. On the other hand, Bruegel's act also provoked a response beyond what a simple mark of graffiti would illicit. The laughter and appreciation of Molckeman and his friends not only communicates that they were mindful of the tension created by the juxtaposition of these two artistic modes, but Molckeman's desire to keep the crude figures on the wall of his home also indicates that Bruegel's artistic program for the development and validation of a visual vernacular had already taken root.

When he had considered the precision of the line he at once declared that his visitor had been Apelles. Then in another color Protogenes drew a second still finer line upon the first, and went away, telling the woman to show it to Apelles if he returned, and add that this was the man he was seeking. Upon Apelles return, he saw the mark and was ashamed to be beaten. He drew a third line of another color, cutting the two first down their length and leaving no room for any further refinement. After Protogenes saw that he was beaten, he found Apelles and they agreed that they would hand down the painting just as it was to posterity; a marvel to all, but especially to artists. *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, trans. K. Jex-Blake, Chicago: Argonaut Publishers (1968), 123.

⁴⁸⁸ On the changing art market and the emergence of new genres and art theoretical ideas in the sixteenth century, see Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes* (2006).