

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

CS0402

JAN BRUEGHEL the Elder
(Brussels 1568 – 1625 Antwerp)
and
HENDRICK VAN BALEN the Elder
(1575 – Antwerp – 1632)



An Allegory of the Five Senses

Signed lower left: *V BALEN*

Oil on panel, 24¼ x 39¾ ins. (61.5 x 100.2 cm)

PROVENANCE

Emerentiana Gallo de Salamanca, widow of Don Lionel de Lima (sister of Antonio Gallo de Salamanca, Lord of Noirmont); her estate inventory, May 1654, "De Vijff Zinnen van Breugel ende Van Bael"ⁱ

Private collection, Belgium, before 1979

Private collection, Germany, 1979

With K. and V. Waterman, Amsterdam, 1987

Private collection, Japan

Anonymous sale, Christie's, New York, 26 January 2001, lot 10

With Johnny Van Haeften Limited, London, 2002

Private collection, United Kingdom, 2002-2022

EXHIBITED

London, Brod Gallery, *Jan Brueghel the Elder – a loan exhibition*, 21 June-20 July 1979, no. 36

On loan to the Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, until 1987, inv. no. 1692LG.

London, Johnny Van Haeften Limited, *Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings*, 2002, no. 8.

LITERATURE

K. Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere (1568-1625)*, Cologne, 1979, p. 613, no. 334.

Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse Kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Brussels, 14 vols, 1984-2006, vol. 7, pp. 36-40 (the painting is listed on p. 37).

J. Luckhardt, "Allegorie der fünf Sinne, um 1617/18", in *Das Kunstwerk de Monats*, Münster, Westfälisches landsmuseum, 1985, pp. 22-25.

A. Blankert, "The Five Senses" by Jan Brueghel & Hendrick van Balen, *Tableau*, 10, no. 2 (1987), p. 1.

B. Werche, *Hendrick van Balen (1575-1632): Ein Antwerpener Kabinettbildmaler der Rubenzeit*, Turnhout, 2004, p. 206, cat. no. 177, illustrated in black and white, p. 446.

K. Ertz and C. Nitze-Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere (1568-1625): Kritischer Katalog der Gemälde*, 4 vols, Lingen 2008-10, vol. III, p. 1153-1154, cat. no. 538, illustrated in colour p. 1155.

Allegory of the Five Senses is a collaborative work between two master painters—Hendrick van Balen, who was among the first specialists in small history scenes, and Jan Brueghel the Elder, famous throughout Europe for his landscapes and still lifes. Each artist’s contribution reflects his particular speciality and this panel is an example of both painters at their best. Van Balen arranged five female figures representing the five senses in varying states of undress within the landscape. Their status as allegorical figures allowed Van Balen to display his skill as a figure painter by depicting the nude from multiple points of view. Brueghel painted the landscape setting and provided the figures with their defining attributes. From the basket of fruit upon which Taste leans to the polished wood of Hearing’s musical instruments, Brueghel exhibits his remarkable painterly range in both the natural and man-made realms. The damp of the forest floor, together with the fruit trees, rose bushes, and small animals that inhabit the forest, are characteristic of the artist’s ability to depict elements of the natural world with unparalleled liveliness and delicate beauty.

There were many kinds of collaborative painting in Dutch and Flemish art of the seventeenth-century. Landscapists employed *staffage* painters to people their outdoor scenes and history painters brought in landscape specialists to execute the backgrounds of large figural paintings. In cases such as this, the finished painting was considered to be the work of the artist who employed the specialist and was issued from their studio. However, other examples of collaboration between artists suggest a range of possible relationships as yet not fully understood. Paul Bril, a Flemish painter living in Rome, for example, sent a finished landscape, a rocky scene with waterfalls and rainbows, to Antwerp in 1610 in order to have Rubens add the figure of Psyche sitting on a rock visited by Jupiter in the form of an eagle.ⁱⁱ It is not known whether Bril sought Rubens’ collaboration or Rubens commissioned a landscape from Bril, but the painting was certainly known as a work by both artists since its creation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Examples of similar collaboration between Jan Brueghel the Elder and Rubens, such as the exquisite series of the senses in the Prado and *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (c. 1615) in the Mauritshuis^{iv}, demonstrate Brueghel’s significance as a collaborator. The Mauritshuis painting is particularly interesting with regard to the issue of definition and authorship in collaborative works. Both artists signed the panel: PAVLI RVBENS FIGR at the lower left and IBRUEGHEL FEC. at the lower right. With his signature, Rubens specifically indicated his contribution as a figure painter whereas Brueghel simply signed the panel as he would any other. Early critical accounts of the painting clearly emphasize Brueghel’s authorship. In 1711, a German traveler described it as a “Paradise by Bruegel to which Rubens added the figures” and in 1718 Arnold Houbraken waxed lyrical about “the most outstanding work of art” by Brueghel, only mentioning Rubens’ “Adam and Eve painted most minutely” at the very end of the passage.^v Thus, contrary to the established hierarchy of genres, which placed history painters far above landscape and still life specialists, in this case Brueghel’s contribution was considered the more significant part of the collaboration.

Like Rubens, Hendrick van Balen was considered among the foremost history painters of his day. Both artists studied in Antwerp with Adam van Noort and both were in Italy between 1600 and 1602. *Allegory of the Five Senses* was painted around 1617, only two years after *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man*, and, while no similar documentation for Van Balen and Brueghel’s painting exists, it may have been received much as the Mauritshuis painting was. However, there are a few significant differences—the *Allegory of the Five Senses* includes

many more than two figures by Van Balen and was signed by Van Balen only (at the lower left). If authorship is thus determined by the relative contributions of each artist, as it seems to be in certain scholarly publications, then is it simply a question of counting figures versus counting trees?^{vi} Or is the concept of authorship itself in question in works such as these? Perhaps, as with Flemish picture gallery paintings, collaborative works such as *Allegory of the Five Senses* were meant to engage the viewer in a sort of visual game. In addition to working out the complex iconography of the scene and identifying its textual and visual references, the viewer must recognize its authors and identify their specific contributions.^{vii} These are the roots of connoisseurship.^{viii}

Jochen Luckhardt has conducted a detailed study of the iconography of *Allegory of the Five Senses* and, while certain aspects of the scene can be clearly read, its range of associations is vast and its ultimate meaning obscure.^{ix} Taste reclines in the center of the composition, leaning on a basket piled with fruit and receiving a plate of figs, a ripe melon, and a flagon of wine from adoring putti. Hearing sits to her left in a vibrant red drape, facing away from the viewer and plucking the strings of a harp. She is accompanied by putti playing various instruments and is surrounded by a beautiful still life with a violin, a viola da gamba, and open music books. The figure representing the sense of smell emerges from the wood at the far left and approaches the male figure at the table in the center of the composition. She holds an impossibly large bouquet of freshly cut flowers and, like the goddess Flora, wears a floral wreath. Sight stands to the man's right staring intently in his direction and holding up a mirror. A group of putti to her left engage in various activities representing sight—one watches through a telescope the arrangement of the red drape behind the male figure as others follow the movements of a bird flying overhead. Touch stands on the man's other side, pulling up her dress to reveal a fleshy thigh and holding aloft a writhing snake. Putti surrounding her demonstrate the positive and negative aspects of touch—they both embrace and fight as one warms his hands over a small fire.

The main puzzle in the painting's iconography involves the seated male figure. He holds a compass in one hand and gestures towards Touch with the other as winged putti prepare to crown him. He appears, as do the five senses, in classicizing dress and has been described alternately as Apollo and as a representation of mankind. As Apollo, he appears as the god of art and the ruler of the senses.^x As a personification of man, he represents man's taming of the senses through temperance. No overt attribute defines him one way or the other but his status as focal point of the senses is undeniable. Indeed, the theme of the five senses is reinforced by the animals that surround him, each associated with one of the senses: the eagle with sight, the deer with hearing, the dog with smell, the monkey with taste, and the turtle with touch. He holds them all within his immediate reach, keeping taste and touch (the basest of the senses) especially subjugated, and they appear to submit to him. However, the overall scene is one of sensual pleasure and joy. Hearing provides music for dancing, Smell offers man an exquisite gift, and Sight allows him to see himself being crowned. These are the virtuous senses that contribute positively to man's life, but Taste and Touch are no less joyous. Although each is accompanied by an attribute alluding to their potential danger—a monkey between Taste's legs and a goat to one side of Touch—neither is overtly vilified.

BIOGRAPHIES

Hendrick van Balen was born around 1575, most likely in Antwerp. He was greatly influenced by Peter Paul Rubens and, according to Van Mander, studied with the same master, Adam van Noort. He travelled to Italy between 1592-1602 and, due to the similarity of their subjects and compositions, most likely met the German artist, Johann Rottenhammer, in Venice. In 1605 Van Balen married Margareta Briers in Antwerp. From 1609-10, he was dean of the city's St. Luke's Guild. Two of his sons became painters and, in 1635, his daughter Maria married the painter Theodoor van Thulden. Throughout the course of his career, he taught more than twenty pupils, among them Anthony van Dyck and Frans Snyders. Van Balen painted histories, mythologies, and allegories and his works tend to be small in format and defined by intense areas of saturated colour. There are also studies by the artist for stained glass windows. Van Balen worked with the greatest masters of his day, Peter Paul Rubens, Jan Brueghel the Elder and his son, and Joos de Momper. His former pupil Van Dyck included him in his *Iconography*, a series of prints depicting the most famous leaders, soldiers, scholars, and painters of his time. Van Balen appears as a *pictor doctus* and, in reference to his inspiration from antiquity, holds an antique head in one hand. The artist's collaborative paintings, such as this one, are among his finest works.

Jan Brueghel was born in Brussels in 1568, the second son of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1520/25-1569) and Maeycken Coecke van Aelst. His father died shortly after his birth and biographer and art theorist, Karel Van Mander, relates that he studied with Peeter Goetkindt. Brueghel traveled to Italy between 1589 and 1596 and in Milan met Cardinal Federico Borromeo, one of his most important patrons. Upon his return to Antwerp, he joined the St. Luke's Guild and became dean in 1601. He travelled to Prague and Nuremburg between 1604 and 1606, and was appointed court painter to the Archdukes Albert and Isabella in Brussels in 1606. Around 1613, he visited Holland on a diplomatic mission. He painted an extensive range of subjects, from landscapes and still lifes to history paintings. His works were highly prized and made him wealthy. He taught his son, Jan Brueghel the Younger and Daniel Seghers and his grandsons included Jan van Kessel and David Teniers III.

ⁱ We are grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Alice Honig, University of California, for this information. The inventory is published in Erik Duverger, *Antwerpse Kunstinventarissen* see literature above. Emerentiana Gallo de Salamanca had a fantastic art collection which included several works by Brueghel, as well as works by Metsys and Floris, and portraits of her parents by Van Dyck, church interiors by Hendrick van Steenwyck and Neefs, and a *kunstkammer* by Frans Francken II. Her main gallery contained 76 works, among them "De Vijff Zinnen van Breugel ende Van Bael".

ⁱⁱ See Christopher Brown, *Rubens's Landscapes: Making and Meaning*. London, National Gallery, 1996, p. 26-30.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Landscape with Psyche* was signed and dated by Bril and remained in Rubens' collection to the end of his life, described as "Un paysage de Paul Bril avec l'histoire de Psyche" in the 1640 inventory. It entered the Spanish royal collection by 1666 and now hangs in the Prado, Madrid. See the Inventory of Rubens' collection, number 26, in Jeffrey M. Muller, *Rubens: the Artist as Collector* (Princeton, 1989) p. 100.

^{iv} Johnny van Haften Ltd were recently privileged to have funded the cleaning, conservation and research conducted on this magnificent painting. For further information on the results of the cleaning and conclusions and discoveries made during the research, please see the Mauritshuis' excellent publication detailing all the work involved.

^v See catalogue no. 8 in Ben Broos, *Intimacies & Intrigues: History Painting in the Mauritshuis* (The Hague, 1993), p. 88-95.

^{vi} This concept of authorship is reflected in the catalogue of the exhibition, *Van Brueghel tot Rubens: De Antwerpse schilderschool 1550-1650* (Antwerp, 1992), in which two collaborative works by Van Balen and Brueghel are catalogued separately. A densely populated Bacchanal (cat.15) is given to Van Balen while a scene of Diana and her Nymphs in a landscape (cat.17) is attributed to Brueghel.

^{vii} Brueghel and Rubens' *Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* was sold to Stadholder Willem V in 1766 for an astronomical sum (7,350 guilders) and, again inferring from this example, one wonders whether collaborative works were generally more highly valued than compositions by a single master. See Broos, p. 88.

^{viii} For an excellent study of the role of gallery paintings in the emergence of the *liefhebber*, or lover of art, see Z.Z. Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp 1550-1700* (Princeton, 1987).

^{ix} See Jochen Luckhardt, in literature above.

^x Klaus Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere 1568-1625* (Cologne, 1979), p. 362. This is also Luckhardt's interpretation See Jochen Luckhardt in literature above, p. 22.