

by Paul Bril, *Landscape with Psyche and Jupiter* (fig. 29). Rubens covered the end of the cliff at the center with gray paint, then replaced it with landscape, and added the figures of Psyche and Jupiter. He also introduced the rainbows and the shimmering effects of spray from the waterfall on the right. Rubens retained the painting for himself, and it appears in the inventory of his collection at his death.⁷⁹ While this case doesn't represent a joint effort by Rubens with Bril, who was still living in Rome, it highlights Rubens's readiness to adjust and perhaps "improve" the work of another artist, an approach that notably recurs in *The Return from War* (cat. no. 2). That Rubens made a similarly dramatic revision of the composition established by Brueghel is indicative of the spirit of reciprocity in which they worked and the forthrightness that can exist between friends and equals.

Collaborative works executed with Jan Brueghel, Frans Snyders, and Osias Beert (?1580–1624) were but one aspect of Rubens's tremendous activity in the 1610s and 1620s.⁸⁰ In addition to the sacred images that defined devotional imagery in this period, Rubens devised complex iconographic programs in the form of book illustrations, as well as a program of ceiling paintings for the Jesuit church in Antwerp (1618–21), decorative cycles, such as the history of the Roman consul Decius Mus, and the politically charged series of paintings (1622–25) portraying the life of Marie de' Medici. Jan Wildens (1585/6–1653), recognized as an independent landscape painter of merit in Rubens's correspondence with Sir Dudley Carleton, contributed calm, broadly executed landscapes to the Decius Mus tapestry series and other history paintings, elements which were compatible with Rubens's own brushwork but always subordinate to his figures.⁸¹

After the death of Archduke Albert in 1621, Rubens served Isabella as a diplomat and political agent, until her death in 1633. In 1630–32 Rubens painted *The Saint Ildefonso Altarpiece* (fig. 30) for Isabella in memory of her husband. The monumental triptych recalls traditional Flemish devotional images in its format and rich, jewel-like palette, while also epitomizing the marvelous painterly brushwork of Rubens's late career. Rubens's own aversion to war and his frustration with the elusiveness of peace are a recurring theme in his later career, in works such as *The Horrors of War* (1637–38; Florence, Palazzo Pitti). In the late 1630s, Rubens oversaw the production of decorations for the triumphal entry of Archduke Ferdinand into Antwerp (1635), and the suite of over one hundred scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that were painted by his contemporaries and assistants for Torre de la Parada, the hunting lodge of Philip IV.⁸² Rubens's last years were spent in part at his castle, the Steen, at Elewijt, outside Antwerp. He died in 1640 after an illness and was eulogized on his epitaph as "the Apelles, not only of his own age but of all time."⁸³

THE WORKING FRIENDSHIP OF RUBENS AND BRUEGHEL

Rubens and Brueghel's professional and personal lives were closely intertwined, revealing the extent of their remarkable friendship. Shortly after Rubens decided to remain in Antwerp, Brueghel introduced him into the elite confraternity of Romanists, of which he had been a member for the preceding ten years.⁸⁴ One of the most often cited examples of their friendship, however, was Rubens's role as amanuensis for his friend. He acted

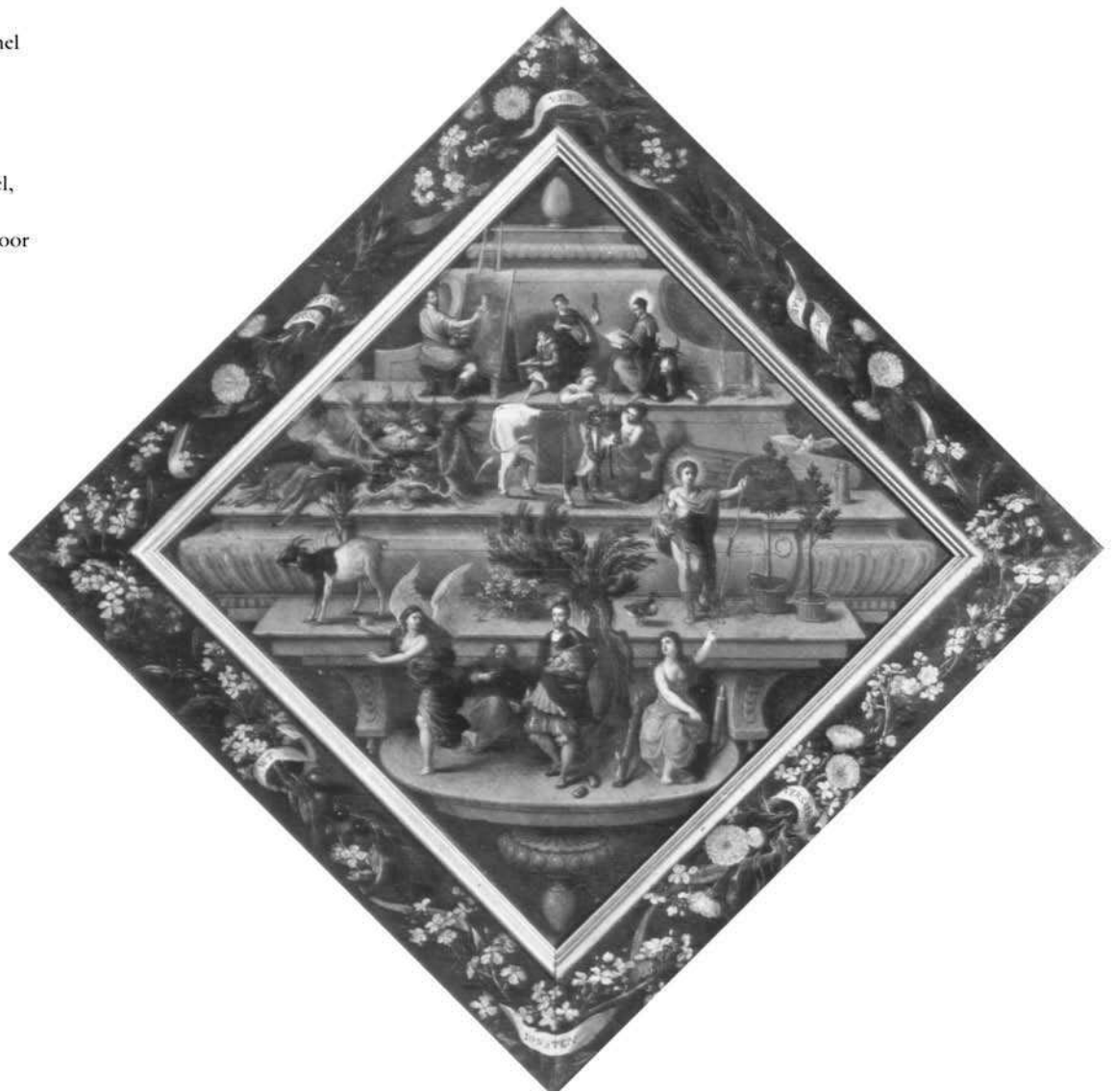
as Brueghel's secretary to Cardinal Borromeo and his agent Bianchi. Starting in October 1610, over two dozen letters in Italian from Rubens's hand are known, continuing up to Brueghel's death in 1625.⁸⁵ Although Rubens and Brueghel together painted at least one garland for Borromeo, Rubens facilitated his friend's exchanges with his Milan patrons regardless of the content. His briefer, more elegant style is evident when compared with the lively but irregular grammar of those written by Brueghel himself.

The intimacy and warmth of their personal relationship were conveyed in Rubens's splendid portrait of Jan Brueghel and his family, painted at about the time they resumed their painterly collaborations in 1610–12 (frontispiece). The affectionate interactions between Jan, his second wife, Catharina van Marienberghe, and their children Elisabeth, on the left, and Pieter are emphasized by the tight format of the Netherlandish portrait tradition. The strong lighting, simple background, and sculptural quality of the figures lend the group a polished immediacy that mitigates the simplicity of this older portrait type, and underscores the familiarity of the painter with his subjects. Jan Brueghel's angled posture conveys the relaxed naturalism that seems to have been a revised objective of the painting.⁸⁶ Rubens's first wife, Isabella Brant, was present at the baptism of the Brueghel children,⁸⁷ and Rubens himself was godfather to Brueghel's older children, Jan and Paschasia. At Brueghel's death, he served as one of the executors of his friend's will and guardian of his children.⁸⁸ As a mark of esteem for Brueghel and his family, Rubens painted *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter* to decorate the tomb of Jan's father, the celebrated Pieter Bruegel the Elder, in Notre Dame de la Chapelle, Brussels.⁸⁹

Despite their disparate styles, Brueghel and Rubens exercised an artistic relationship that was based on mutually held principles. From their earliest known collaboration (cat. no. 1), conceptually innovative and technically challenging projects were the norm. Unlike their work with other colleagues, in which the painting styles are similar, Rubens and Brueghel's joint works are distinguished by the evident separateness of their hands in a composition. While only one collaboration bears the names of both artists (see cat. no. 4), and a handful of others Brueghel's name (see cat. no. 8), their established specialties and styles of painting serve as the visual equivalent of a signature. Most unusually for Rubens, in certain works, notably *The Battle of the Amazons* (cat. no. 1) and *The Return from War: Mars Disarmed by Venus* (cat. no. 2), there exists a visual equality between his work and that of Brueghel. His willingness to allow certain features of Brueghel's approach, such as a high viewpoint or tilted foreground, as well as the strong and even lighting Jan preferred, to be employed suggests that he perceived these as more truly collaborative ventures than his works with other artists such as Snyders, which were carried out under his direction. In instances where the composition is dominated by Brueghel's contribution, such as in the allegories of the senses (see cat. no. 8) and the garlands (fig. 1 and cat. no. 12), it is the type of painting that determined which of the two partners took the primary role. There are also instances of friendly reciprocity; in *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (cat. no. 4) Rubens shared the role of animal painter and may even have contributed grapes to the foreground still life in *The Return from War*. The artists certainly had access to each other's studios, and Brueghel's repeated borrowing of animal motifs from Rubens in the years around 1612–13 attests to the close association they enjoyed and which they acknowledged in paint.

FIGURE 31

Hendrick van Balen, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Frans Francken the Younger (1581–1642), and Sebastian Vrancx (1573–1647), *Blazon for the Rhetorician's Guild "De Violieren,"* 1618. Oil on panel, 73 × 73 cm (28¾ × 28¾ in.). Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. 366 ©IRPA/KIK-Brussels



While Rubens and Brueghel's artistic camaraderie was unusual, in the close-knit Antwerp artistic community there were bonds of affinity and family between many leading painters. It was not uncommon for the principal families to be connected by marriage. Many of these connections were facilitated by the common membership in the Guild of Saint Luke, the body that regulated and protected the work not only of painters but also of sculptors and goldsmiths.⁹⁰ A related corporate body, the rhetoricians (*rederijkers*), brought together painters and so-called *liefhebbers*, amateur art-lovers, in a learned dramatic society. Membership in the guild and other civic corporations provided ample opportunity for feasting and merrymaking. The blazon (*blazoen*) of 1618 (fig. 31) presents the ideals of the group as a delightful rebus, in which the art of painting receives the protection of its patron, Saint Luke, and the goddess Fortuna.⁹¹

In their joint works Rubens and Brueghel largely adhered to their respective specialties, although each could, and did, paint other elements on occasion. Their working relationship on a practical level reflected the Flemish tradition of specialized contributions to a single painting by artists and their workshops. While, as we shall see, only Patinir and Metsys's partnership offers a possible precedent for the close artistic relationship of Rubens and Brueghel, the examples of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century practices outlined below testify to the truly elaborate and complex methods of coproduction in which paintings resulted from the participation of different contributors. Until a comprehensive study of collaboration in the Netherlands is completed, it is only possible here to touch on the main elements of the rich tradition that informed the collaborative mode employed by Rubens and Brueghel.

Collaboration was an essential component of structured workshop practice and was quite common in the Low Countries by the fifteenth century.⁹² Important precedents for the rapid development of genres and the associated practice of specialization in the early sixteenth century are found in manuscript illumination. As J. G. Alexander has observed, collaboration between different illuminators was "very common, especially in the later Middle Ages . . . facilitated by the fact that the manuscript was still unbound and could be distributed for different artists to work on at one time."⁹³ A scribe in the late fourteenth century recounted how he traversed the streets of Paris in the rain carrying a colophon between two studios.⁹⁴ A hierarchy of status and expertise was implicit in this process. Broadly speaking, under the direction of a lead illuminator, who might execute the most important miniatures, other artists, perhaps studio assistants, would paint the remaining miniatures and the borders, which themselves might be separated into decorative and figural components. It became increasingly common for one artist to execute the figurative elements and another the landscape or elements from nature.⁹⁵ Model books, transfer, pouncing, and other methods helped artists keep pace with demand.

Panel painters' workshops in the fifteenth century were structured in a similar fashion. Documentary evidence, such as accounts, contracts, and guild records, suggests that the master painter executed the important aspects of a commission and assistants in the studio would carry out the rest. Essential preparatory materials for painting, including drawings of motifs, enabled successful painters to produce multiple versions of successful or popular compositions.⁹⁶ Designs, drawings, and other precious resources of a workshop might also be passed to the son of a painter or other family member, who would continue in his father's manner.⁹⁷ The most famous example of a jointly produced painting in the fifteenth century was *The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, also known as the *Ghent Altarpiece* (fig. 32), by Hubert van Eyck (d. 1426) and his brother Jan (ca. 1390/1400–1441). A fragmentary inscription on the outside of the altarpiece is today largely accepted as evidence that Hubert began the polyptych and that his younger brother Jan finished it.⁹⁸ Workshop resources were protected and passed on to descendants in the seventeenth century as well. Rubens closely guarded his drawings and retained preparatory oil sketches for future reference.⁹⁹ While it is assumed that Jan Brueghel the Elder worked with his son Jan the Younger, before the latter's departure for



FIGURE 32
 Hubert van Eyck (d. 1426) and
 Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390/1400–
 1441), *The Ghent Altarpiece*
(Adoration of the Mystic Lamb)
 (open), completed 1432. Oil on
 panel, 350 × 461 cm (137¾ ×
 181½ in.). Ghent, Cathedral of
 Saint Bavo ©IRPA/KIK-Brussels

Italy in the spring of 1622, it was at the unexpected death of his father in 1625 that Jan II inherited the contents of the workshop and its “resources.”¹⁰⁰ The younger Brueghel capitalized on the successful compositions and relationships established by his father and produced, for example, numerous versions of the Five Senses and garlands.¹⁰¹ Documents attest to his continued contact with Rubens, though the latter was pursuing diplomatic ventures and must have largely operated through his studio.¹⁰² Jan the Younger’s journal (*Dagboek*) for the period 1625–51 provides insight into the market-driven collaborative relationships the younger Brueghel maintained with Abraham Janssens (ca. 1575–1632), Lucas van Uden (1595–1672), and his brother-in-law, David Teniers the Younger (1610–1690), as well as his careful perpetuation of his father’s inventions.¹⁰³

Early in the sixteenth century, according to Karel van Mander, particularly in the burgeoning port city of Antwerp, the growing phenomenon of varieties or specialties (*verscheydenheden*) in which artists worked began to gather momentum. The favorable economic climate in the city, whose population would double over the next fifty years, is often considered one of the contributing factors to the change in artistic practice. Opportunities for selling works of art increased with the establishment of yearly markets (*pandts*) and later with the building of the new bourse with its upper gallery of shops where artists and painters could sell on the open market. In this dynamic and competitive marketplace, it has been argued, a specialized product was often advantageous.¹⁰⁴ Many painters moved to Antwerp from towns in the southern Flemish regions, setting

up workshops and establishing themselves as specialists. Of the leading sixteenth-century Antwerp painters, Joachim Patinir, the innovative landscape painter, and Quinten Metsys the leading figure painter in Antwerp, best anticipate the working relationship of equals enjoyed by Brueghel and Rubens. The *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (see fig. 21) is the only painting that can be securely attributed to both artists, whereas Brueghel and Rubens, remarkably, produced many paintings together. Like Brueghel and Rubens, Patinir and Metsys worked with other artists, but their elements often dominated those of the other painter.

UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEIVING COLLABORATION

While Walter Friedländer pessimistically described the increasing tendency toward specialization as the seventeenth century approached as “a kind of collaboration, which often took excessive forms in the seventeenth century, especially in Antwerp” that “implied a dubious division of labor, a pernicious specialization,”¹⁰⁵ there is little evidence to indicate that specialties were perceived negatively in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even the painter Karel van Mander, whose biography of the eminent artists of the time relied heavily on information supplied by descendants and others for fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century artists, and for whom the ideals of the master history painter were at odds with the Northern expertise in landscape, adopted a matter-of-fact approach. While it is clear that an artist with talent in all areas was considered most admirable, Van Mander often simply states that a painter such as Patinir was famous for a particular subject.¹⁰⁶

There is very little documentary material to tell us how collaborative paintings were perceived by early viewers or patrons. It seems likely, particularly in the fifteenth century when verisimilitude was especially valued, that a successfully unified surface was the artistic and aesthetic goal. The intriguing inscription on the *Ghent Altarpiece* is all the more suggestive, as the question of which parts of the polyptych were painted by which artist has remained contentious even as the work was famously celebrated as the work of the brothers Van Eyck. In an interesting case from Bruges about 1520, an artist’s decision to subcontract out a portion of the work on a large altarpiece gave rise to a lawsuit when the disgruntled patrons sought to require him to paint the entire composition.¹⁰⁷

Statements by artists themselves concerning their authorship versus others’ participation in a work are very rare and should be understood as exceptional occurrences. Brueghel’s attestations that he painted certain pieces while others were the work of a *knecht* (assistant) have usually gone unnoticed but allow a rare glimpse into his working arrangements.¹⁰⁸ Rubens’s famous declaration to Sir Dudley Carleton that certain works were “by my hand” while others were “retouched by my own hand” amounts to an acknowledgment of the negative perception of his workshop process and the desire for wholly autograph works among potential patrons, and reveals his methods for reassuring his important clients.¹⁰⁹ Brueghel, too, often promoted his colleagues—including Rubens—to Cardinal Borromeo. In a letter of September 1621, Brueghel offered a garland to Borromeo and promoted its magnificence and the contribution of

his colleague in glowing terms, noting that Rubens had demonstrated his skill with a beautiful painting of the Madonna in the middle, perhaps aware that the cardinal was among the few patrons in Europe who remained cool to Rubens's talents.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the best evidence of the status of the collaborative process generally, as well as the regard for the products of Rubens and Brueghel's partnership, is the frequency with which paintings of joint authorship are identified in contemporary documents. Patinir and Metsys's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (fig. 21) was attributed in the 1574 inventory of the Escorial to "Master Quinten and Master Joachim," followed by a description of their respective contributions.¹¹¹ Brueghel regularly identified his collaborators in his correspondence with Borromeo.¹¹² *Prometheus Bound* (cat. no. 22), clearly described by Rubens in correspondence with Carleton, is the best-known example in Rubens's oeuvre for which the second artist is named.¹¹³ However, *The Head of Medusa* (cat. no. 24) was identified in 1635 as "by Rubens and Subter [Snyders]," and several works that entered prominent aristocratic and royal collections (for example, cat. nos. 6 and 12) were also recognized as collaborative works. The inventories of paintings at the archducal hunting castle of Tervuren identify works of joint authorship, as do numerous household inventories, including those of painters' estates. Three paintings were clearly identified as by two artists in the *Specificatie* drawn up at Rubens's death, and Frans Snyders owned three such paintings, including, extraordinarily, a "Psyche by Titian and Rubens" (untraced).¹¹⁴

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RUBENS AND BRUEGHEL'S APPROACH TO CREATING WORKS OF EXTRAORDINARY beauty and refinement represents a late phase in the development of the collaborative artistic process in the Low Countries, and much about their technical method, such as their general adherence to figure and landscape specialties, reflects the practical and long-held approaches to working pursued by their sixteenth-century predecessors. Brueghel, however, challenged the traditional secondary role of landscape by transforming settings, both interior and exterior, with encyclopedic detail, from the lush menagerie of the paradise landscape to the crumbling shadowy forge. Because every painting Rubens and Brueghel produced was initially unique, their mode of working varied. It is often difficult today to discern with certainty how a particular work was painted.¹¹⁵ Both men shared forceful and energetic personalities, evident in the quickness and surety of their brushwork. The joyful camaraderie of their collaborative ventures is evident from the multiple levels of meaning in their allegories, where even politics and eroticism could coexist (see cat. no. 10). Equally evident is the delight both artists took in illusionism and new ways of viewing. The juxtaposition of armor painted by their two hands in *The Return from War: Mars Disarmed by Venus* (cat. no. 2) amounts to friendly competition, whereas Brueghel's transfixingly descriptive fruit and flower garlands, whether supported by Rubens's weighty putti (see fig. 1) or inhabited by Brueghel's lively birds and animals (see cat. no. 12), compete with the ostensible

primacy of Rubens's central painted icon, creating a highly intense viewing experience and aid to devotion. It is only with a clearer understanding of Brueghel's achievement as an equal and even as a lead collaborator that the significance of their mutual exchange becomes apparent. Ultimately, Rubens and Brueghel's joint efforts were distinguished by the cachet that their high status brought to each piece, as well as their close association with their royal patrons, the impact of their shared political and spiritual beliefs on the invention of new subjects, and, not least, their own profound friendship.

NOTES

1. While some insight into Jan Brueghel the Elder's workshop can be gleaned from the documents published in Denucé 1934, a study of his studio arrangements is needed; see the observations in Honig 2005. For Rubens, see Hans Vlieghe, "Rubens's Atelier and History Painting in Flanders: A Review of the Evidence," in *Boston–Toledo 1993–94*, pp. 159–70; and A. Balis, "'Fatto da un mio discepolo': Rubens's Studio Practices Reviewed," in *Tokyo 1994*, pp. 133–41.
2. "Peter Paul Rybent und Brügel zweene berühmte Mahler. Hierauff sahen sie auch ben den beyden vortrefflichen Mahlern Peter Paul Rybent und Brügeln viel herrlich Gemähde und Kunststück. Rybent mahlet meistlich grosse Stück und alles in rechter natürlicher grösse, aber überauß künstlich schön, und nach dem Leben. Soll alle Wochen auff 100 Gulden arbeiten können, mag leicht ein Stück seyn er verkauffet solches umb 2, 3, 4, auch 500 Reichsgulden. Brügel aber mahlet kleine Täfflein mit Landschaften, aber alles so subtil und künstlich, daß mans mit Berwunderung ansehen muß": Neumayr 1620, p. 261.
3. The joint oeuvre of Rubens and Brueghel has been investigated in Merriam 1994 and Van Mulders 2000, Tamis 2001–02, Van Mulders 2004, Van Mulders 2005, and Honig 2005, and the exhibition *Kassel–Frankfurt 2004*; it will be the subject of a forthcoming volume in the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchardt* series by Christine Van Mulders.
4. For collaboration generally in seventeenth-century Flemish painting, see Van der Stighelen 1990; Peter C. Sutton, "Painting in the Age of Rubens: Collaboration," in *Boston–Toledo 1993–94*, pp. 35–37; Honig 1995; and Vlieghe 1998, pp. 7–8. Some of the chief specialist studies include Van Puyvelde 1949; Müller Hofstede 1968; Hairs 1957; Hairs 1977, pp. 13–33; and the additional references cited below in conjunction with specific partnerships.
5. Crivelli 1868, p. 241 (letter of December 9, 1616).
6. See cat. nos. 7, 8, 9A and 9B. De Maeyer 1955 remains the most thorough consideration of Rubens's (pp. 93–130) and Brueghel's (pp. 144–59) work for the archdukes, but see also Christopher Brown, "Rubens and the Archdukes" (pp. 121–28), and Barbara Welzel, "Armory and Archducal Image: The Sense of Touch from the Five Senses of Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens" (pp. 99–106), in *Brussels 1998–99*.
7. For the government and religious policies of the archdukes, see Pasture 1925 and Elias 1931. For Antwerp's circumstances after 1585, see Thijs 1990.
8. The most thorough treatment of Jan Brueghel's career is Ertz 1979; aspects of this study have been revised and updated by the same author in *Brussels 1980*, *Essen–Vienna 1997–98*, and *Antwerp 1998*. See also Crivelli 1868, Winner 1961, Winner 1972, and Bedoni 1983.
9. On the output of Pieter Brueghel the Younger's industrious workshop, see *Maastricht–Brussels 2001–02*.
10. "Jan van zyn Groote-moeder de Weduwe van Pieter van Aelst hier van water-verwe hebbende gheleert, quam en leer de van Oly-verwe by eenen Pieter goe-kindt, daer veel fraey dinghen waren in huys" (Jan learned to work in watercolor from his grandmother, the widow of Pieter [Coecke] van Aelst, and became a student of oil painting with one Pieter Goe-kindt, in whose house there were many handsome works): *Van Mander 1604*, fol. 234r; *Van Mander/Miedema 1994–99*, vol. 1, p. 195 (translation: author).
11. "Hij reysde voort nae Colen, en soo in Italien..." (he then traveled to Cologne and so on to Italy):