

The genesis of the Netherlandish flower piece: Jan Brueghel, Ambrosius Bosschaert and Middelburg*

Karolien De Clippel and David van der Linden

No other country produced as many virtuoso still lifes as the Netherlands, and the bouquet, with flowers that are still such a vital part of the Dutch identity, was one of the earliest types.¹ Bouquets of flowers and their visual counterparts were extremely popular in their day, and in more recent times have been the subject of many a study and exhibition. Yet there is still a great deal of uncertainty about their genesis. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) and Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1573–1621) are widely acknowledged to be the pioneers of the Netherlandish flower piece, but it is still difficult to pinpoint the earliest period of the genre, as well as the specific share that each of them had in it and its chronological evolution. They were active in the southern and northern Netherlands respectively when they painted their first flower still lifes, and it seems that there was a simultaneous development on both sides of the border. The emancipation of the flower painting must undoubtedly be seen in the light of the development of botanical science and the new fashion for gardening that spread rapidly among the highest echelons of European society. It is a moot point whether this innovation sprang more or less simultaneously from a common visual tradition or whether it was due to an artistic exchange of ideas at personal meetings between the two pioneers, and if it was,

who initiated them and why?

We hope to contribute to a solution of this puzzle by adopting a combined analysis of the visual and written source material, which is why we have focused primarily on Middelburg as an artistic transit point and meeting place for artists from the northern and southern Netherlands, and in particular for Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder and Jan Brueghel the Elder, also known as “Flower Brueghel.” Starting in the first decade of the seventeenth century they devoted themselves to painting flower still lifes, ultimately becoming the preeminent specialists who carved out a lasting niche for the genre in both the Dutch Republic and the southern Netherlands.

Back in the 1950s Laurens Bol, the pioneer of the art history of Zeeland, had drawn attention in a series of articles in *Oud Holland* to the importance of Jan Brueghel’s work for artistic developments in Middelburg in the first half of the seventeenth century, and even spoken of a “genuine Brueghel group in Middelburg.”² In his Bosschaert monograph of 1960 he stated even more specifically that there was an artistic connection between Brueghel and Bosschaert, with the latter borrowing from his Flemish colleague for his works prior to 1610.³ In 1960, though, much of the early work of both of them was still unknown, and in addition Bol’s hypothesis was based

* This article is a partial result of a research project funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), *Cultural transmission and artistic exchanges in the Low Countries, 1572–1672: mobility of artists, works of art and artistic knowledge* (2009–14). We wish to express our gratitude to the other members of our team for their critical and stimulating comments on earlier versions of this paper, and to thank Fred Meijer for his encouragement to publish this article, as well as for his critical reading of the content. We are also grateful to Elizabeth Honig for her encouragement and to Marije Osnabrugge for her translation into Dutch of two Italian passages. The partial translation from the Dutch is by Michael Hoyle.

1 The bouquet is a special form of flower still life in which the flowers are displayed in a receptacle like a vase, glass or basket. See, for example, S. Segal, exhib. cat. *Geloof in natuur: bloemen van betekenis*, Amsterdam (Bijbels Museum) 2012, p. 9. Seventeenth-century sources usually refer to this type as a ‘blompot’, or flowerpot. See note 8 for examples.

2 L.J. Bol, “Een Middelburgse Brueghel-groep,” *Oud Holland* 70 (1955), pp. 1–20, 96–109, 138–54; 71 (1956), pp. 132–53, 183–203; 72 (1957), pp. 20–40; 73 (1958) pp. 59–79, 128–47; 74 (1959), pp. 1–19.

3 L.J. Bol, *The Bosschaert dynasty*, Leigh-on-Sea 1960, p. 22.

entirely on what he could see. He did not yet have any sources that would confirm how and when exactly Boschaert and Brueghel could have met. Thanks, though, to Sam Segal, Ingvar Bergström and Fred Meijer several early still lifes by both artists have since been identified, bringing their oeuvres into considerably sharper focus than in 1960.⁴ And new source material that has turned up sheds light on the circumstances of the interaction between the two of them. However, before getting down to the details and making a better assessment of the value of their contributions we must take a brief look at the events leading up to their interaction. Before presenting our own findings, we will therefore discuss several recent but previously unpublished views to provide a critical summary of our current state of knowledge about the earliest stage of flower painting.

PROLOGUE Flower arrangements had been significant motifs in portraits and religious scenes since the fifteenth century. They then gradually evolved into semi-autonomous scenes on the back of a diptych,⁵ on a cupboard door or the wing of a display cabinet,⁶ eventually becoming a category in their own right in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁷ This took place against the back-

ground of a growing interest in botany, which was reflected around mid-century by the publication of the herbals by Rembertus Dodonaeus (1517–85), Matthias Lobelius (1538–1616) and Carolus Clusius (1526–1609), and by the many flower gardens laid out by royalty and rich aristocrats. Although the reference books date the earliest surviving autonomous flower piece around 1600, it has now become clear that the genre was practiced earlier. It even seems that painted ‘flowerpots’, as they were called, enjoyed a certain popularity in the Low Countries before the turn of the century, for they are mentioned quite frequently in early seventeenth-century probate inventories and auction catalogues. In any event, examples can be found in Antwerp and Amsterdam, and in Middelburg too.⁸ One expert witness is Karel van Mander, who said in his *Schilder-boeck* that the Middelburg mintmaster, art collector and maecenas Melchior Wijntgis had “four large tondos, fires and fruit as well as pots of flowers” by Lodewijck van den Bosch (c. 1520–in or after 1568).⁹ Van Mander also referred to him and Pauwels Coecke van Aelst (c. 1525–before 1581) as painters of bouquets. He dwelt at greater length on van den Bosch, saying that he “[...] was very adept at fruit and flowers which he sometimes painted as if they were standing in a glass of water,

4 See, for example, S. Segal, “Een vroeg bloemstuk van Jan Brueghel de Oude,” *Tableau 4* (1981–82), pp. 490–99; I. Bergström, “Composition in flower pieces of 1605–1609 by Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder,” *Tableau 5* (1982–83), pp. 175–79; F. Meijer, “Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder: a still life of flowers in a vase,” in *Old Master paintings*, New York (Christie’s), 4 October 2007, nr. 106.

5 Such as Hans Memling’s *Jug of flowers*, painted around 1490 on the back of a portrait of a man in prayer, most likely half of a diptych, now in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Madrid.

6 See K. Boström, “De oorspronkelijke bestemming van Ludger tom Rings bloemstillevens,” *Oud-Holland 67* (1952), pp. 51–55; A. Lorenz (ed.), exhib. cat. *Die Maler tom Ring*, 2 vols., Münster (Westfälisches Landesmuseum) 1996, vol. 2, p. 390, nrs. 76 and 77.

7 The pioneering article on the origins of flower painting in the Netherlands is J.G. van Gelder, “Van blompot tot blonglas,” *Elseviers Geïllustreerd Maandschrift 1* (1936), pp. 72–83, 155–66. See also S. Segal, *Flowers and nature: Netherlands flower painting of four centuries*, The Hague 1990; P. Taylor, *Dutch flower painting 1600–1720*, New Haven 1995; B. Brenninkmeyer-De Rooij, *Roots of seventeenth-century flower painting: miniatures, plant books, paintings*, Leiden 1996.

8 For instance, the first volume of E. Duverger, *Antwerpse kunstinventarissen uit de zeventiende eeuw*, 14 vols., Brussels 1984–2009, which covers the period 1600–17, lists 19 painted specimens owned by various types of collector and in different rooms in a house, although mainly in the basement room. They include “Eenen blompot op pannel met vergulden lysten” in “de groote Neercamer” (“A large bouquet on panel with gilt frames in the large basement room”), p. 11 (1600), while the

widow of the print publisher Hieronymus Cock had “Een geschilderden Blompot op paneel in lysten... in de cleyn Neercamer” (“A painted and framed bouquet on panel... in the small basement room”), p. 18, “Eenen Blompot op doeck in lysten, ... op ’t contoir staende op de voors. camer [the back room]” (“A framed bouquet on canvas standing on the bureau in the aforesaid room [the back room],” p. 19, and significantly, “Twaalf boecken van blompotten van thienen” (“Twelve books with ten pages bouquets,” p. 24 (1601).

Fourteen ‘flowerpots’ were offered for sale in Amsterdam on 20 March 1612 at the celebrated auction of Crispiaan Colyn, painter and art dealer of Mechelen. Most of them went very cheaply at 1 to 2 guilders, apart from one by Jacques Savery that fetched 17 guilders; see A. Bredius, *Kunstler-Inventare*, The Hague 1915–22, vol. 3, pp. 1067–86. With that exception they may have been “Brabant rubbish” imported from the southern Netherlands, and from Antwerp in particular; see E.J. Sluijter, “Over Brabantse voddens, economische concurrentie, artistieke wedijver en de groei van de markt voor schilderijen in de eerste decennia van de zeventiende eeuw,” in R. Falkenburg *et al.* (eds.), *Art for the market, Netherlands Yearbook for Art History 50* (1999), pp. 112–43, esp. pp. 121, and 138–39, notes 41 and 43.

9 H. Miedema (ed.), *Karel van Mander, The lives of the illustrious Netherlandish and German painters*, 6 vols., Doornspijk 1994–99, vol. 1, p. 127 (with comments in vol. 3, pp. 58–59): “...by Const-liefdigen Melchior Wijntgis te Middelborgh, daer van zijner handt is eenen seer schoonen Ieronimus, vier groote rondon, soo branden, fruyten, als bloem-potten, en ander stucxkens seer wel en suyver ghedaen.”

to which he applied much time, patience and precision so that everything appeared natural. He also painted heaven's dew on the little flowers and plants and some little creatures, butterflies, flies and suchlike around and about."¹⁰

That description may give an idea of the appearance of van den Bosch's pictures, but not a single one is known today. That is not the case with his intriguing contemporary, the Westphalian painter Ludger tom Ring the Younger (1522–83), who was already producing autonomous flower pieces in the 1560s, eight of which are still known. He, then, is the absolute pioneer in the genre.¹¹ The recent discovery by Jochen Luckhardt that Ludger was working in Antwerp from 1553 to 1568 is of particular relevance,¹² since it means that he did not paint his first flower still lifes in Münster, as had been thought, but in the Low Countries. So from now on he has to be included in any account of early Netherlandish flower pieces.

Although only eight of his floral still lifes are known today, they do display a clear evolution. The earliest, like the one recently acquired by the Mauritshuis, were still quite restrained (fig. 1), as can be seen from those made later, which are more spacious, have a greater variety of blooms and more incidental details like petals scattered nonchalantly on the shelf (fig. 2).¹³ The realization that Ludger's earliest flower pieces originated in a Netherlandish context necessitates a reappraisal of the history

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 127: "Daer is noch gheweest eenen *Lodewijck Ians* van den Bos, gheboren tot Shertoghen Bosch, die seer fraey was van Fruyten en ghebloemt, die hy t'somtijt maecte als staende in een glas met water, en gebruyckter grooten tijt, ghedult, en suyperheyt in, dat alles scheen natuerlijck te wesen: makende oock op de Bloemkens en Cruydekens den Hemelschen dauw: daer beneffens oock eenighe Beestgens, Vijfwouters, Vlieghskens, en derghelijcke, gelijk men zijn dingen hier en daer by den liefhebbers mach sien."

¹¹ For Ludger as a pioneer in the development of the autonomous flower still life in a vessel see S. Segal, "Blumen, Tiere und Stilleben von Ludger tom Ring d. J." in Lorenz, op. cit. (note 6), vol. 1, p. 21, and p. 146, note 80, and *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 394, cat. nr. 78.

¹² The evidence for Ludger living and working in Antwerp is presented in J. Luckhardt et al., *Das 'Küchenstück' von Ludger tom Ring d. J. (1562): Kunst in Antwerpen zwischen Münster und Braunschweig*, Braunschweig 2013, esp. pp. 28, 30, 46. It is true that these panel paintings were preceded by prints of bouquets in the florilegia, such as the one of around 1590 by Adriaen Collaert (c. 1560–1618), but those were in black-and-white and had a different function, although artists did use them as models, on which see the 12 books owned by Cock's widow that are mentioned in note 8.

¹³ A very good example of this is the work from the Weldon Collection that was sold in New York (Sotheby's), 22 April 2015, nr. 60.



1 Ludger tom Ring the Younger, *Narcissi, periwinkle and violets in a ewer*, c. 1562. The Hague, Mauritshuis



2 Ludger tom Ring the Younger, *Still life with wild roses, peonies and other flowers in a white earthenware vase*, c. 1580. Present whereabouts unknown (formerly Weldon Collection)

of the genesis of the flower still life in the Low Countries and increases the importance of its sixteenth-century trailblazers. On top of that, the discovery casts new light on the early career of one of the artists who are the subject of this article: Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder. He was born in Antwerp but emigrated to the north in 1589 with his Protestant parents. The family moved to nearby Middelburg, where Ambrosius was to pass most of his professional life as an art dealer and painter.¹⁴ He was

¹⁴ Bol, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–33.

¹⁶ On the importance of Middelburg as a city with a highly developed floral culture for the origins of Bosschaert's oeuvre see M.S.W. Pennisi, *The flower still-life painting of Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder in Middelburg ca. 1600–1620*, diss. Evanston (Northwestern University) 2007. See also A. Goldgar, *Tulipmania: money, honor, and knowledge in the*



3 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flower piece*, 1605. Present whereabouts unknown

extremely successful as an artist, and his flower still lifes exercised a powerful influence on the development of the genre in the northern Netherlands.¹⁵ He must have been drawn to the subject by the many horticulturists and botanists in the city.¹⁶ He may also have been inspired directly by the still shadowy figure of Lodewijck van den Bosch, whose “four large tondos, fires and fruit as well as pots of flowers” were in Wijntgis's collection in Middelburg.¹⁷

Bosschaert's first known dated work is from 1605 (fig. 3), which is relatively late in his career, for he was already

Dutch Golden Age, Chicago 2007, pp. 20–28.

¹⁷ See notes 9 and 10. Further: Bol, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 18; M.J. Bok, “Art-lovers and their paintings: van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* as a source for the history of the art market in the Northern Netherlands,” in G. Luijten *et al.* (eds.), exhib. cat. *Dawn of the Golden Age*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 1993, p. 147; and Pennisi, *op. cit.* (note 16), pp. 149–51.



4 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Still life of flowers, including irises, narcissi, lily-of-the-valley and carnations, in a tall glass vase set on a stone ledge*. Present whereabouts unknown

30 years old at the time. It is a bouquet with just a few flowers in a Wan-Li vase standing on a ledge, on which there are two buds, a bluebottle, a butterfly and a caterpillar. Given its high quality and the fact that Bosschaert was already registered as a member of the Middelburg Guild of St Luke in 1593, it can probably be assumed that this was not his earliest still life.

¹⁸ See Segal, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 127–32, and Meijer, *op. cit.* (note 4), nr. 106, and *idem*, “Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder: a still life of flowers,” in *Old Master and British paintings*, sale London (Sotheby’s), 3 December 2014, nr. 35.

¹⁹ There are replicas of it Vienna and Milan. The latter was made for Federico Borromeo and was sent to him in the summer of 1606; see Segal, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 490–99. See also K. Ertz and C. Nitzte-Ertz, *Jan Brueghel der Ältere (1568–1625): kritischer Katalog der Gemälde*, 4 vols., Lingen 2008–10, vol. 2, cat. nr. 433. Interestingly, the Vienna version and this dated one are on panel, which suggests that they were intended for the local market. Brueghel usually painted export ware on copper,

In this respect it is relevant to cite a group of works (fig. 4 among them) that were initially associated with Ludger tom Ring, and perhaps not unrealistically so, in the light of Luckhardt’s discovery, and then placed between Ludger and Bosschaert before being given to the latter.¹⁸ It consists of five flower pieces on panels of Baltic oak that are typical of Middelburg panel production in their size and the way they are cut. And they are indeed reminiscent of Ludger’s work, although more luxuriant, with a greater variety of blooms and less austere compositions. The stylistic similarities between them and Bosschaert’s earliest signed work, as well as the repetition of flowers and leaves that was to become his hallmark, make a very strong case for his authorship, as well as documenting his artistic activity prior to 1605.

The sort of schematic compositions that one finds in Bosschaert’s work around 1605 ran into competition around then from a new and far more complex type of floral still life with a much larger number of blooms. The innovator was none other than Jan Brueghel the Elder, and as chance would have it his first known dated flower piece is also from 1605 (fig. 5).¹⁹ It is a lavish bouquet in a spherical stoneware vase and is composed of 58 species and 72 varieties of both spring and summer flowers. Compared to Bosschaert’s work (fig. 3), Brueghel’s is larger and more dynamic and colorful. The simultaneity of date permits an instructive comparison,²⁰ but also immediately raises questions about the context in which the two pictures were made. Brueghel’s painting not only ushers in a new phase in flower painting but is also a key work in his own career. From his debut around 1592 until 1605 he had worked exclusively as a landscapist, and with this picture he embarked enthusiastically on a second specialization of relatively large flower pieces. This new departure may have had something to do with his visit to the court of Rudolf II in Prague in 1604,²¹ where there was a lively interest in natural history and an early pres-

such as the version for Borromeo. See [http://www.janbrueghel.net/Talk:Flowers_in_Earthenware_Vase_\(Vienna\)](http://www.janbrueghel.net/Talk:Flowers_in_Earthenware_Vase_(Vienna)), viewed on 27 August 2014.

²⁰ Bergström, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 176–78.

²¹ It is clear that Brueghel must have been in Prague in the spring of 1604 from a drawing in the British Museum (*Woodland road*, inv. nr. 1853,0813.44), which is not only signed and dated but is also inscribed “fecit in praga”. Other visual evidence of his stay there is the painting *Fish market on the bank of a river* dated 1605 in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (inv. nr. 1883), which includes a view of St Vitus’s Cathedral and several of the Prague Castle buildings. See M. Winner, “Zeichnungen



5 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Flower still life*, 1605. Netherlands, private collection

des älteren Brueghel," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 3 (1961), pp. 211–14, and A. Zwollo, "Pieter Stevens, ein vergessener Maler des Rudolfinischen Kreises," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 64 (1968), pp. 172–74.

²² Segal, op. cit. (note 4), p. 493.

²³ He was not a court painter like Rubens but was entitled to call himself "fine art painter to Their Highnesses" ("constschilder Harer Hoogheden") in 1608. See A. Woollett, "Twee vermaarde schilders — de samenwerking van Rubens en Brueghel van ca. 1598 tot 1625," in: exhib. cat. *Rubens & Brueghel: een artistieke vriendschap*, Los Angeles (J. Paul Getty Museum) & The Hague (Mauritshuis) 2006–07, p. 13. It is revealing in this context to read Brueghel's own words to Cardinal Borromeo in a letter of 14 April 1606 about a bouquet that he was making for him: "...senza ordine ho principiata et destinato a vs Ill.mo una Massa de vario fiori gli quali reucerani molto bello: tanto per la naturàlleza come anco delle bellezza et rarita de vario fiori in questa parto alcuni inconita et non peiu uisto: per quella io son stata a Brussella per ritrare alcuni fiori del natural, che non si troue in Anuersa" ("Without having received a commission I began on a wood with various flowers that are

ence of flower still lifes by Roelant Savery (1576–1639), Jacques de Gheyn the Younger (c. 1565–1629) and Joris Hoefnagel (1542–1600).²² It was also around then that Brueghel found himself in favor with Archdukes Albert and Isabella, in whose gardens he had the opportunity to study beautiful, rare and exotic blooms.²³ It was for them, in fact, that he painted one of his first luxuriant bouquets, subsequent to the work that he had made for his greatest admirer and patron, Federico Borromeo.²⁴

Clearly, then, the genesis of the painted flower piece around 1600 cannot be seen in isolation from the contemporary interest in botany in the humanist and courtly circles of western Europe, where a cultivated taste for emulation stimulated talented artists to depict as subtly as possible the exquisite kinds of flowers that were collected so eagerly. There is a great compositional similarity between the floral works of Hoefnagel, de Gheyn, Savery and Bosschaert from around 1600, with the bouquet being built around a number of fairly large blooms, interspersed with small flowers. Those artists, who may have influenced each other, built a bridge between the sixteenth-century Netherlandish tradition and the baroque bravura orchestrated by Jan Brueghel.

Bosschaert's later work displays qualities that are far closer to Brueghel's than to the earlier tradition. There was a marked turning-point in his oeuvre in 1606–07 that can be followed closely in his dated works from this period.²⁵ Whereas the composition of his earliest flower piece of 1605 is still very simple, the arrangement was already becoming more complex in 1606 (fig. 6), finally

a great success, intended for Your Lordship, for both the naturalness and also the beauty and rarity of the various flowers, some unknown in this region and never seen again. For that purpose I went to Brussels to portray several flowers from life that one does not find in Antwerp"). Cf. G. Crivelli, *Giovanni Brueghel, pittore Fiammingo: sue lettere e quadretti esistenti presso l'Ambrosiana*, Milan 1868, p. 63.

²⁴ Crivelli, op. cit. (note 23), p. 168: "Il prima che io fece e quella del sig. Cardinal: il secondo ho fatto per le ser.mo Enfante in Brussello" ("The first one I made [the one on copper] is the cardinal's, I made the second one for the illustrious Infante in Brussels"). Brueghel wrote this to Giovanni Paolo Bianchi, but there is a bouquet of his with an earlier date, which suggests that he may have wanted to flatter Borromeo and his retinue, which included Bianchi, and give them the honor of being the first owners of unique works. It is also possible that the earlier picture was a sort of trial which he had retained in his studio.

²⁵ The first to draw attention to this change of course was Fred Meijer in a report for Johnny van Haeften, London, dated 4 April 2001, concerning a *Still life of a floral bouquet in a beaker* by Bosschaert, which was made in late 1607 or early 1608.



6 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flowers in a glass*, 1606. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art

displaying a clear sense of depth around the beginning of 1607. He achieved this by allowing the blooms to overlap and employing chiaroscuro effects, as can be seen in a work that was offered for sale by Hall & Knight in 2003 (fig. 7). It was that very same three-dimensionality and complexity that was so typical of Brueghel. What is also particularly striking is that Bosschaert actually went so far as to borrow individual blooms from his Antwerp colleague.²⁶ This convinced Fred Meijer that “sometime in 1606 Bosschaert must have seen some of Jan Brueghel’s flower paintings for the first time, with a clear impact on his style and manner of composing.” He even argued that Bosschaert had access to one specific work of Brueghel’s from that period: a small vase of flowers that is now in the Städelsches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt (fig. 8). According to Meijer he not only borrowed flowers from this picture for his own works but probably made and kept a copy of it as well. He goes even further by suggesting that Bosschaert kept that copy in his studio as a model for

²⁶ For a list of the borrowings see Bol, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 22–24.



7 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flowers in a glass*, 1607. Present whereabouts unknown

a whole generation of flower painters in Middelburg.²⁷ In this reading that would account for the great similarity between the Mannerist still lifes that Brueghel and Bosschaert executed around 1608–09 (figs. 9–10). They are flower portraits in the form of a rather artificially and symmetrically composed bouquet painted with seemingly scientific accuracy, combined with some exotic shells and little insects or petals that have dropped onto the ledge.

This blend of the sixteenth-century ‘flowerpot’ manner and the innovative approach displayed by Bosschaert and Brueghel can be considered an important moment in the history of still-life painting. It is nowadays generally

²⁷ Meijer, van Haeften report, cit. (note 25).



8 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Flowers in a vase*, c. 1606. Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut

accepted that both artists were important for the further development of the genre in the seventeenth century, and that was also the case in their own day. As early as the second quarter of the century Constantijn Huygens acknowledged that both of them occupied an important position in the story when he called them, and no one else, “the two celebrities in the painting of flowers.”²⁸ The interaction of those two masters is moreover of paramount importance for the development of the flower still life in both the northern and southern Netherlands, a development which consequently can no longer be considered as consisting of two separate traditions with different origins.

The artistic link between the two artists is quite widely acknowledged, and it was even suggested in the past that Bosschaert must have been a pupil of Brueghel's. That was dismissed by Bol, who pointed out that Bosschaert was already a member of the Middelburg guild in 1593, when Brueghel was still in Italy. That is correct, and it



9 Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Flowers in a blue vase*, 1609. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

may very well be that he never studied with Brueghel, but that is not to say that there could not have been exchanges between them or their works at a later date, as suggested above. The affinity between two artists who worked in two separate territories that were at war with each other raises all sorts of questions about the way in which they could have got to know each other's work. Until now, though, there has been no proper research into the question of the mobility of artists and works of art between Antwerp and Middelburg in that period.

THE MIDDELBURG CONNECTION The interaction between Bosschaert and Brueghel must be understood within the wider framework of artistic ties that bound Antwerp and Middelburg together. Middelburg had

28 C. Huygens, *Mijn jeugd*, ed. C.L. Heesakkers, Amsterdam 1987, p. 75.



10 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Flowers in a blue vase*, c. 1608. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

already been closely linked to the major artistic centers of Brabant and Flanders since the beginning of the sixteenth century, in particular to Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges. All the major painters working there before the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt had also spent time in Antwerp. Jan Gossaert (1478–1536), for instance, had become a master painter in Antwerp before moving to Middelburg in 1509, where he executed his renowned *Deposition* for Middelburg Cathedral, as well as religious scenes for the wealthy elite.²⁹ Marinus van Reyerswaele (1493–c. 1567), though born in Zeeland, was

trained by the Antwerp glass painter Simon van Daele. Settling in Middelburg in 1509, he became famous for his scenes of moneylenders and tax collectors.³⁰ Gysbrecht Thomasz, finally, who painted a *Last Judgment* for Middelburg City Hall in 1560, was probably trained by the famous Antwerp master Frans Floris.³¹

Compared to Antwerp the local production of art nevertheless remained limited. In 1579 the Middelburg Guild of St Luke listed only 39 members, among them just a handful of painters, as opposed to more than 200 artists in Antwerp. Yet demand for art was not lacking. Precisely because of the proximity to Antwerp, where artists were able to deliver mass-produced as well as high-quality paintings, it was more convenient for consumers in Middelburg to commission or import art from Flemish painters. Much of the religious art ordered by the Catholic churches and convents was therefore imported rather than produced locally.³² For example, when in 1567 the Middelburg city council ordered the restoration and replacement of religious art that had been destroyed during the Iconoclasm of 1566, most commissions went to southern artists. The Antwerp painter Huybrecht Beuckelaer (c. 1530–c. 1605) was commissioned to repaint the wings of two altarpieces in the Franciscan friary, while Christiaan van der Perre from Brussels was paid to deliver a *Resurrection* for the altar of the Fishmongers' Guild in the church of St Martin.³³

The outbreak of the Dutch Revolt and the rise of Calvinism led to a dramatic drop in religious commissions, however. After the Iconoclasm struck Middelburg in the summer of 1566, the authorities initially managed to force Protestants underground by persecuting them as heretics, but in February 1574 rebel forces loyal to William of Orange captured the city and introduced Protestant worship, forcing the Catholic clergy to leave and confiscating all of their property.³⁴ As commissions from churches and convents dried up, painters were forced to shift their production to secular subjects in order to make ends meet.

29 M.W. Ainsworth (ed.), *Man, myth, and sensual pleasures: Jan Gossaert's Renaissance*, New York 2010, pp. 9–20.

30 A. Mackor, "Marinus van Reyerswaele: painter, lawyer and iconoclast?", *Oud Holland* 109 (1995), pp. 191–200.

31 P.J. Meertens, *Letterkundig leven in Zeeland in de zestiende en de eerste helft der zeventiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 1943, p. 54, identifies him as Thomas van Zirickzee, who is mentioned as a pupil of Frans Floris by van Mander; see Miedema, op. cit. (note 9), vol. 1, pp. 228–29.

32 K. Heyning, "Kunst van gene zijde: Zeeland en de Schelderegio," in M. Ebben and S. Groenveld (eds.), *De Scheldedelta als verbinding en*

scheiding tussen Noord en Zuid, 1500–1800, Maastricht 2007, pp. 51–67.

33 Ibid., p. 58; W.S. Unger, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van Middelburg in den landsheerlijken tijd*, The Hague 1923–31, vol. 2, pp. 512–14. See also the resolutions of the Middelburg city council, 5 August 1567, Zeeuws Archief (hereafter ZA), Handschriften Rijksarchief Zeeland (hereafter MS RAZ), 847B, p. 25.

34 C. Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland*, Goes 1996; F. Nagtglas, *De algemeene kerkeraad der Nederduitsch-hervormde gemeente te Middelburg, van 1574–1860*, Middelburg 1860, pp. 3–9; P. Brusse and W. Mijnhardt (eds.), *Geschiedenis van Zeeland*, 4 vols., Zwolle 2012–14,

Clerical demand was partly replaced by commissions from the urban authorities, who ordered tapestries and paintings to commemorate their victories against Spain and to demonstrate their loyalty to the Prince of Orange. Daniel van Queborn (c. 1555–1602) was one of the painters who benefited from this upsurge in government commissions. Trained in Antwerp by his father Christiaen, he moved to Middelburg in 1585, where he specialized in handsome portraits for the elite. In 1588 he produced a double portrait of William of Orange (who had been murdered in 1584) and his son Maurice for the town hall of Arnemuiden, and he delivered a portrait of William to the admiralty of Zeeland as well.³⁵ Jeronimus Hermansz from Brussels and Aelbrecht Ebelen from Antwerp also based their Middelburg careers on government commissions. Both men worked as “cartoon painters” for Jan de Maecht (d. 1598), a tapestry entrepreneur from Brussels who had moved his workshop to Middelburg in 1593, where he received a major commission from the States of Zeeland in 1595. He was to weave a series of tapestries celebrating the victories of Zeeland over the Spanish forces during the first years of the Revolt, a commission that was only completed after his death.³⁶

Yet by far the biggest expansion of the Middelburg art market occurred in the private sector. In fact, even before the outbreak of the Revolt the inhabitants of Middelburg regularly purchased paintings on the Antwerp art market. Because of its strategic location in the Scheldt estuary, Middelburg had become an important trade hub on the route to Antwerp, creating a class of prosperous merchants and artisans that conspicuously spent its money on paintings, statues and silverware produced in Flanders and Brabant. A sample of 24 Middelburg inventories from 1567 demonstrates that on average they possessed 12 works of art, a figure close to that of Antwerp households in the period 1565–85, where the average number of paintings alone amounted to 12. Moreover,

the Middelburg inventories contain not just religious scenes, but also profane subjects like landscapes, which were clearly produced in Antwerp.³⁷ Another indication that southern Netherlandish artists supplied the Middelburg art market are the guild registrations in 1579 of the Antwerp painters Hans Willems and Daniel van Queborn (c. 1555–c. 1605), as well as Balthasar Flessiers (c. 1550–1626) from Brussels.³⁸ All three would come to work in Middelburg after 1585, but the reason for them becoming guild members six years previously had much to do with regulations. In 1539 the Middelburg guild had ordered that only registered members could sell works of art there, a measure that was carefully policed, given the fines that were regularly handed out to tradesmen from the south.³⁹

The arrival of southern migrants escaping persecution, warfare and the economic crisis in the southern provinces considerably expanded the demand for art in Middelburg. In 1578 the new governor-general of the Netherlands, Alessandro Farnese (1545–92), had launched an offensive to recapture and re-Catholicize the rebellious Calvinist towns in the south. His *reconquista* was remarkably successful: Tournai surrendered in 1582, and in 1584 he captured Ypres, Bruges and Ghent, followed in 1585 by Brussels, Mechelen and, most famously, Antwerp. The prolonged military operation came at a heavy price, though, because the sieges and Spanish troops plundering the countryside disrupted the economy. The combined result of these economic and religious pressures was a massive exodus, in particular to the towns of Holland and Zeeland. The population of Middelburg thus grew from a modest 7,000 in 1576 to some 18,000 in 1600. Most newcomers had fled the captured cities of Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp. Out of the 2,429 citizens who purchased Middelburg citizenship between 1580 and 1594, an impressive 1,822 (75%) came from the south.⁴⁰

vol. 2, pp. 217–26.

35 J. Briels, *Vlaamse schilders en de dageraad van Hollands Gouden Eeuw, 1585–1630, met biografieën als bijlage*, Antwerp 1997, pp. 370–71; R. van Luttervelt, “Portretten van Daniël van den Queeckborne,” *Oud Holland* 67 (1952), pp. 199–209.

36 Briels, op. cit. (note 35), pp. 323 and 336. On Jan de Maecht and his firm see K. Heyning, *De tapijten van Zeeland*, Middelburg 2007, pp. 59–66; G.T. van Ysselstyn, *Geschiedenis der tapijtweverijen in de Noordelijke Nederlanden: bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der kunstnijverheid*, 2 vols., Leiden 1936, vol. 1, pp. 57–64, and vol. 2, pp. 61–73.

37 Heyning, op. cit. (note 32), pp. 56–57. For the Antwerp average see B. Hendrickx, *Het schilderijenbezit van de Antwerpse burger in de tweede helft van de zestiende eeuw: een socio-economische analyse*, unpublished master thesis, Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit) 1997, pp. 104–05.

38 A. Bredius, “De gildeboeken van St. Lucas te Middelburg,” in F.D.O. Obreen (ed.), *Archief voor Nederlandsche kunstgeschiedenis*, 7 vols., Rotterdam 1877–90, vol. 6, p. 149.

39 G.J. Hoogwerff, *De geschiedenis van de St. Lucasgilden in Nederland*, Amsterdam 1947, pp. 207–08.

40 G. Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, London 1985, pp. 208–16; J. Briels,

These immigrants included at least 15 painters of southern origin, such as the Bosschaert family, who moved to Middelburg in 1589. Because of the long-standing ties between Middelburg and the artistic centers in the south, Flemish painters were already familiar with the local art market, which meant that relocating their workshop was a well-considered career move rather than a leap of faith. In addition, they knew that the massive influx of southerners in Middelburg created new opportunities. Immigrants from Flanders and Brabant were accustomed to buying paintings on the open market, including popular genres such as still lifes and landscapes, and continued to do so after their arrival.⁴¹ The flourishing art trade in Middelburg also suggests that paintings sold well to the lower and middling classes, too. Much of this trade was carried out inside the local exchange (Beurs), which was built in 1583 following the example of Antwerp, where the exchange also functioned as a hub for art dealers. The Middelburg art trade became so successful that by 1611 the other merchants protested that it was interfering with their own businesses, prompting the burgomasters to ban the sale of paintings during regular opening hours.⁴² Among these dealers was Ambrosius Bosschaert, who in 1612 obtained permission from the States of Zeeland to export “a large quantity of beautiful paintings” to England, while the following year he sold works by different masters to the Amsterdam art dealer Abraham Decker for the phenomenal sum of 2,100 guilders.⁴³

Paintings from Antwerp also continued to find their way to the Middelburg art market. From 1585 onwards the Dutch fleet had closed off the river Scheldt to hinder all enemy shipping, but since this proved to be a costly operation the States-General decided in 1587 that merchants could resume their trade with Antwerp, as long as

they paid toll duties at the border fortress of Lillo. Before long, river trade was bustling again, reaching pre-Revolt levels by as early as 1588 and doubling in volume within a decade.⁴⁴ In 1588, for example, the Middelburg merchant Adolf Piers exported a shipment of tapestries to Antwerp, and in November 1590 the southern Netherlandish merchant Jacques de Gruytere paid toll at Lillo to pass two casks of paintings and prints to Zeeland.⁴⁵ The import of cheap paintings from Antwerp even seemed to threaten the Middelburg art market, because in 1592 the burgomasters ruled that “no one is allowed to import paintings from Brabant or elsewhere if he is not a member of the Guild of St Luke.”⁴⁶

BOSSCHAERT AND BRUEGHEL IN DIALOGUE In other words the artistic exchange between Bosschaert and Brueghel, both of whom had Flemish roots, is part of a broader pattern of artistic interaction between Middelburg and the south. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about Bosschaert’s apprenticeship. He was in Middelburg from the late sixteenth century to 1615, when he moved to Bergen op Zoom before going on to Utrecht and Breda. In Middelburg, like so many painters, he may have combined commercial activities with his career as an artist. A great deal of research has been done on both Bosschaert and Brueghel since Bol wrote his articles, and the same is true of the development of printmaking and painting in the northern and southern Netherlands in general. As a result we are in a better position than before to gauge the opportunities and preconditions for any possible exchange between the two men, and can at least say that once he had arrived in Middelburg Bosschaert would have had sufficient reason to keep in touch with the southern Netherlands, for both family and business reasons.

Zuid-Nederlanders in de Republiek, 1572–1630: een demografische en culturele studie, Sint-Niklaas 1985, p. 189; Brusse and Mijnhardt, op. cit. (note 34), vol. 2, pp. 105–07.

⁴¹ K. Heyning, “Zeeland, buitenland?” *Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 14 (2007), pp. 18–44. For similar trends in Amsterdam see M.J. Bok, “The rise of Amsterdam as a cultural centre: the market for paintings, 1580–1680,” in P. O’Brien et al. (eds.), *Urban achievement in Early Modern Europe: Golden Ages in Antwerp, Amsterdam and London*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 186–209; J.M. Montias, *Le marché de l’art aux Pays-Bas, xve–xviiie siècles*, Paris 1996, pp. 55–90.

⁴² Resolutions of Middelburg city council, 8 May 1583 ZA, MS RAZ 847B, p. 206; *ibid.*, 8 January 1611, ZA, MS RAZ 847C, p. 148. On the Antwerp exchange see F. Vermeylen, *Painting for the market: commercialization of art in Antwerp’s Golden Age*, Turnhout 2003, pp. 50–61.

⁴³ Bol, op. cit. (note 3), p. 26; Bredius, op. cit. (note 8), vol. 4, p. 1354.

⁴⁴ H. van der Wee, *The growth of the Antwerp market and the European economy*, 3 vols., The Hague 1963, vol. 2, p. 274; V. Enthoven, *Zeeland en de opkomst van de Republiek: handel en strijd in de Schelddelta, c. 1550–1621*, diss., Leiden (Leiden University) 1996, pp. 109–21, 220; K. Heyning, “Kostelycke waren: Zeeuwse kooplieden en de Antwerpse luxenijverheid in de zeventiende eeuw,” *Mededelingen van het Koninklijk Zeeuws Genootschap der Wetenschappen* 2003, pp. 5–30.

⁴⁵ For Piers’s trade see I.J. van Loo (ed.), *Resolutiën van de Gecommitteerde Raden ter Admiraliteit in Zeeland, 1584–1648*, 5 vols., Middelburg 2012, vol. 1, pp. 219 and 224. De Gruytere’s shipment is noted in the 1590 Lillo toll register, ZA, Rekenkamer B, 5071, fol. 3r.

⁴⁶ Hoogewerff, op. cit. (note 39), pp. 208 and 235, note 76. Guilds in Holland expressed similar fears, see Sluijter, op. cit. (note 8).

Although Laurens Bol thought in 1960 that Bosschaert and Brueghel could not have met, and in 1989 was still convinced that Brueghel never visited the northern Netherlands,⁴⁷ we now have archival sources that flatly contradict the latter assumption and bring such a meeting into the realm of possibility. Of crucial importance to this story are a number of documents that have never before been used in the art-historical literature on the development of painting in Antwerp and Middelburg, nor in connection with these two artists. They consist of a series of letters by and to Jan Brueghel that are now in the State Archives of Belgium in Brussels, supplemented by the Lillo transients' register, which is preserved in the Zeeland Archives in Middelburg. The latter is a record of the people who crossed from the northern to the southern Netherlands and vice versa at the guard post at Fort Lillo near Antwerp. And the register shows that one of them was Ambrosius Bosschaert. Specifically, on 20 August 1604 he and his future brother-in-law and budding painter Hans or Johannes van der Ast (before 1590–after 1616) journeyed to Antwerp. It is impossible to discover why they went there or where they stayed, but they remained for some time, for the next time that their names appear in the register is on 10 September 1604, when they crossed the border back towards Middelburg.⁴⁸ In view of his family ties and business activities it is not inconceivable that Bosschaert went on other trips to the south, but they are not documented by the sources.

Brueghel, on the other hand, left more traces of his travels, including his visits to the Dutch Republic, and to Middelburg in particular. The first evidence of a trip to the north, which has been overlooked in the Brueghel literature until now, comes in a letter of 10 October 1596 to his friend and patron Cardinal Federico Borromeo,

which was written a month after his return to Antwerp after his long stay in Italy from 1589 to 1596. He told Borromeo that he had been in Holland and Flanders in the past month to see “our” paintings.⁴⁹ The letter suggests not only that he wanted to catch up on what had been painted in ‘his’ Low Countries while he had been away but is also evidence that he had been in the northern provinces before 1600. Unfortunately, there is no information about his itinerary.

It was already known that he traveled to the north from Antwerp in June 1612 in the company of Rubens (1577–1640) and Hendrik van Balen (1575–1622), and that they called at Leiden, Haarlem and Utrecht.⁵⁰

However, what has escaped attention until now are several letters from the first decade of the seventeenth century to and about Jan Brueghel written by and to Archduke Albert. The first one dates from 4 March 1604 and is an order from the archduke to provide the artist with a passport for him and his servant to go on an eight-month trip to Frankfurt by way of the islands of Holland and Zeeland in order to return various objects that had belonged to his wife, Isabella de Jode, who had died in 1603. The archduke also gave him permission to take four of his own small paintings with him.⁵¹ This document contains a great deal of interesting information.

In the first place, it refines the reconstruction and dating of Brueghel's trip to Prague. Up until now it had been assumed on the evidence of several sightings that he was there in the summer of 1604, but thanks to this document we now know that he set off on his journey in March 1604, and that he went by way of Holland and Zeeland to Frankfurt and then Prague. Although the document dates from 4 March that year, he did not leave before the 13th, when he acted as executor of the will of Philips van

47 In one of his last publications, L.J. Bol, *Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne: painter and draughtsman*, Doornspijk 1989, p. 11, stated that Velvet Brueghel could not have had any direct personal influence on Middelburg artists, because he “never visited the northern Netherlands.”

48 For the entries in the toll register see ZA, Rekenkamer C, inv. nrs. 311, 321, 331, cited in K. Heyning, “Naar Antwerpen en weer terug: Zeeuwse kooplieden en de Antwerpse luxenijverheid in de zeventiende eeuw,” in J. Parmentier (ed.), *Noord-Zuid in Oost-Indisch perspectief*, Zutphen 2005, p. 45, note 9.

49 Crivelli, op. cit. (note 23), p. 214: “Io sono stato per tutti i Hollandia e Fiandro per veder la pittura di nostra.”

50 R. Desmet, “Een nauwkeuriger datering van Rubens' eerste reis naar Holland in 1612,” *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1977), pp. 199–220.

51 Brussels, Algemeen Rijksarchief, Papieren van Staat en Audiëntie, nr. 1046, fol. 107: “Et scavoir vous faisons que audit Jehan Breughel avonde donné, comme donnons par ceste, congé, permission et licence de avecq son serviteur et les quatre painctures susdittes pouvoir part laditte voye de Hollande et Zeelande se transporter audit Francfort pour y entendre au retournement des biens de sadite feue femme. [...] et après en retourner tant par eau que par terre par la mesme voye de Hollande et Zeelande ou aultre, le tout Durant le terme de huict mois.” See also M. Forrier, exhib. cat. *Omtrent J. Brueghel de Oude, P.P. Rubens, A. van Dyck: kunst en kunstenaars in de rijksarchieven*, Brussels (Algemeen Rijksarchief) 1999, p. 125.

52 J. Denucé, *Brieven en documenten betreffend Jan Bruegel I en II*, Antwerp 1934, pp. 20–21.

Hoeswinckel.⁵² To be more precise, he probably left on 15 March, which is when a “Jan Brueghele” is listed in the Lillo transients’ register as heading from Antwerp in the direction of Middelburg.⁵³ It had previously been assumed that he was back by the beginning of December at the latest, which is when he bought a house in Antwerp,⁵⁴ but in view of the archduke’s passport application he must have been back in the southern Netherlands by 4 November 1604 at the latest, for the document expressly states that the period of eight months started on the day the document was drawn up. On top of that, his name reappears in the transients’ register on 3 September 1604, this time with Antwerp recorded as his destination.⁵⁵ That suggests that this crossing was the final stage in his return from Prague, by the same or possibly a different route from the one that Albert had stipulated in his letter of 4 March.⁵⁶

What is of course relevant about this 1604 journey for our purpose is Brueghel’s passage through Holland and Zeeland in wartime on both the outward and return legs. It shows that Brueghel was in the northern Netherlands at least four times in the period 1596–1612, either passing through or with a Dutch destination, and that throws an entirely new light on his possible impact on or artistic exchanges with northern artists, or both. What is also particularly interesting is that both he and Bosschaert were in Antwerp between 3 and 10 September 1604, which makes a meeting or even reciprocal influence eminently plausible. That timing is made all the more important by the fact that shortly afterwards both of them sent their first dated flower still life out into the world. It is very tempting to speculate that it was then, while they were in Antwerp together, that they laid the foundation for the later genre of flower painting from a shared ambition to produce illusionistic floral pictures that would exploit

the great love of plants among their potential clients. Brueghel, after all, was completely imbued with the botanical hype that he had absorbed at the court of Rudolph II, and Bosschaert must have undergone a similar experience in Middelburg, where the abundance of gardens would have stimulated an interest in painted scenes of plants and flowers.⁵⁷

We also now know that Brueghel took four of his paintings with him on his journey of 1604.⁵⁸ It is not known for whom they were intended, but it is self-evident that export of his work could only have benefited the dissemination of his distinctive figurative vocabulary throughout Europe. Even more than that, it clearly emerges from later correspondence between him, the archdukes and the licensing authorities in the spring of 1606 that he clearly had a clientele for his works in Holland. In a letter of 18 March 1606 he asked the archdukes to intervene to exempt him from acquiring a license for ten pictures that he would be sending to Holland in the next six months on which he had not yet started work. The archdukes granted his request on 30 March.⁵⁹ All of this suggests that he was working on commission. On 27 May the archdukes honored another request that he might send six of his paintings to Zeeland toll-free.⁶⁰

These last examples illustrate not so much Brueghel’s mobility as that of his art. Unfortunately, it is impossible to identify the works in question or give any details about them. It is important to note, though, that Bosschaert was not only an art dealer with contacts in the south but also that his own working method as a flower painter underwent a radical change after 1606, shifting towards the more luxuriant and three-dimensional flower piece that Brueghel had started painting from around 1605.

53 ZA, Rekenkamer C, nr. 311: Passantenregister Lillo, jaren 1603–04, rekening maart 1604 (n.f.), 15 March 1604.

54 The next trace of him in the southern Netherlands is in early December 1604, which was when he bought his house De Meerminne in Lange Nieuwstraat in Antwerp; see Denucé, op. cit. (note 52), pp. 21–22.

55 ZA, Rekenkamer C, nr. 311: Passantenregister Lillo, jaren 1603–04, rekening september 1604 (n.f.), 3 September 1604.

56 Brussels, Papieren, cit. (note 51), nr. 1046, fol. 107: “...et après en retourner tant par eau que par terre par la mesme voye de Hollande et Zeelande ou aultre.”

57 See Pennisi, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 76–210, on the garden culture in Middelburg in relation to the development of flower still lifes.

58 Brussels, Papieren, cit. (note 51), nr. 1046, fol. 107: “Portant quand et luy, quatre petites painctures faictes de sa main.”

59 Ibid., nr. 1238: “Et qu’en oultre, V.A.S. soit servie escrire lettres ausdicts officiers des licentes en Anvers, afin de laisser sortir vers Hollande dix pieces de painctures francz des droictz des licentes, et ce endedans six mois prochainement venans, attend que Durant icelluy terme le suppliant les doibt encoires faire et ouvrir.” See C. Duviuier, “Documents concernant le peintre Jean Brueghel,” *Revue d’Histoire et d’Archéologie* 2 (1860), pp. 329–30.

60 Brussels, Papieren, cit. (note 51), nr. 1239, p. 333: “Nous vous ordonnons de, à la requisition du peintre Hans Breugel, laisser passer vers Zelande six piecettes de peintures exemptes de tout droict de licentes.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS When, in the 1950s, Laurens Bol deployed numerous visual examples in his convincing illustration of Jan Brueghel the Elder's role in the development of painting in Middelburg in general, and of Bosschaert's floral art in particular, he was unable to back up his hypothesis with archival material. What strikes us as being crucial is the new, integrated approach to the cultural heritage of the northern and southern Netherlands, in which artistic exchanges and cultural transmission play a key part in the explanation of innovation,⁶¹ as opposed to the nationalistic and closed approaches that set out primarily to demonstrate the Dutchness of Dutch art and the Flemishness of Flemish art. One factor of prime importance for the present story is the hitherto underestimated role of Middelburg as a creative hub and point of artistic interchange.

A comparative close reading of the life and work of two artists who worked primarily in the northern and southern Netherlands respectively has made it possible to clarify possible artistic innovations and changes of professional direction. A combined study of visual and written source material exposed relations and interactions, helping to explain the context surrounding the genesis of the flower still life. The story of Brueghel, Bosschaert and Middelburg also tells us that artists from the north and south continued to travel, even at a time of all-out war, and that they looked at each other's work and working methods in order to learn from and vie with each other.

To return to Fred Meijer's assumption that Bosschaert saw and even owned one or more flower paintings by Brueghel, we can only say that the visual and written sources back each other up in a way that leaves little doubt about an artistic interaction between these "two celebrities in the painting of flowers" and the very real impact of that reciprocity on artistic innovation. There are clear indications that both Bosschaert and Brueghel traveled back and forth between north and south, and that on several occasions at least they were both in Antwerp and Middelburg at the same time. All of this makes it likely that they met in the period 1604–06, very probably in Middelburg but possibly in Antwerp as well. So it can be no accident that a startling change took place shortly after Brueghel's return from Prague and Bosschaert's visit to Antwerp in September 1604, moving Bosschaert's work in the direction of Brueghel's idiom. That became apparent in 1606, after Brueghel had sent several of his paintings to Zeeland and Holland. Bosschaert may have acted as the dealer on that occasion, but the one thing that is certain is that as an artist he took a very close look at the work by Brueghel that came into his hands.

MODEMUSEUM
HASSELT

FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

⁶¹ This is the method underpinning the nwo project, *Cultural transmission and artistic exchanges in the Low Countries, 1572–1672: mobility of artists, works of art and artistic knowledge*; see note 1. For a historiographical study of the relationship between the art of the Dutch

Republic and that of the Habsburg Netherlands see K. De Clippel, "Dutch art in relation to seventeenth-century Flemish art," in W. Franits (ed.), *The Ashgate research companion to Dutch art of the seventeenth century*, forthcoming.