

# Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Sons

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## Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Sons

Pieter Bruegel , usually known as Pieter Bruegel the Elder to distinguish him from his elder son, was the first in a family of Flemish painters. He spelled his name Brueghel until 1559, and his sons retained the "h" in the spelling of their names.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, generally considered the greatest Flemish [painter](#) of the 16th century, is by far the most important member of the family. He was probably born 1529, in Breda in the Duchy of Brabant, now in The Netherlands. He was accepted as a master in the Antwerp painters' guild in 1551, and was apprenticed to Coecke van Aelst, a leading Antwerp artist, sculptor, architect, and designer of tapestry and stained glass. Bruegel traveled to Italy in 1551 or 1552, completing a number of paintings, mostly landscapes, there.

Returning home in 1553, he settled in Antwerp. Ten years later, Bruegel moved permanently to Brussels. He married van Aelst's daughter, Mayken, in 1563. His association with the van Aelst family drew Bruegel to the artistic traditions of the Mechelen region in which allegorical and peasant themes run strongly. Dated paintings have

survived from each year of the period except for 1558 and 1561. Within this decade falls Bruegel's marriage to Mayken Coecke in the Church of Notre-Dame de la Chapelle in Brussels. His paintings, including his landscapes and scenes of peasant life, stress the absurd and vulgar, yet are full of zest and fine [detail](#). They also expose human weaknesses and follies.

He was sometimes called the "peasant Bruegel" from such works as Peasant Wedding Feast (1567). It was in Rome, in 1553, that Bruegel produced his earliest signed and dated painting, Landscape with Christ and the [Apostles](#) at the Sea of Tiberias. The holy figures in this painting were probably done by Maarten de Vos, a painter from Antwerp then working in Italy. Among his patrons was Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle.

Granville was president of the council of state in the Netherlands, in whose palace in Brussels the sculptor Jacques Jonghelinck had a studio. He and Bruegel had traveled in Italy at the same time, and his brother, a rich Antwerp collector, Nicolaes, was Bruegel's greatest patron, having by 1566 acquired sixteen of his paintings. Another patron was Abraham Ortelius, who in a memorable obituary called Bruegel the most perfect artist of the century.

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