



Photo Sanne Peper

service and young, promising talent successfully following in the footsteps of the old guard. But even this distinguished tableau cannot conceal some rough edges towards the end of the production. De Vroedt appears not to have entirely succeeded in weaving the ingredients of the intrigue he has built up into a coherent whole, the initial episodes having left quite some loose ends. In the end the public is somewhat disappointed by the rather abstract apotheosis, although the final part offers several interesting plot twists.

But aside from the odd critical note it can be said that enough remains standing to make *The Nation* an event of the kind one only sees once every few years. Eric de Vroedt, since 2018 the new artistic director of Het Nationale Theater, together with his team of actors and staff has created an unparalleled tour de force. Following on from an already respectable production series at Het Nationale Theater, thanks to De Vroedt, *The Nation* is a production which does not lean on the great repertoire of the past, but which adds an original, monumental classic to the theatre canon. A contemporary, if not hypermodern and hyper-topical creation which begins from an apparently minor incident in a disadvantaged district of The Hague, but which eventually shines a light on the complex global world we live in.

JOS NIJHOF

Translated by Anna Asbury

[www.hnt.nl](http://www.hnt.nl)

1 The first three parts of *The Nation* are available in full on YouTube.

Episode 1: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a\\_8LrP\\_YEY&t=940s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6a_8LrP_YEY&t=940s)

Episode 2: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3xR\\_6xQzwY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3xR_6xQzwY)

Episode 3 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=us4rmh9rFRc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us4rmh9rFRc)

A brief 'encore' is also available on YouTube:

Episode 7: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7nu7TbY\\_2g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7nu7TbY_2g)

## Visual Arts

### Adriaen Brouwer Returns Home

Ask the average art-lover to name the most important seventeenth-century Flemish artists and it's quite likely that they will think of Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens. Adriaen Brouwer will rarely figure in the list, even though he undoubtedly belongs there. His contemporaries admired his work. Rubens, who was an inveterate collector, had no less than seventeen works by Brouwer. Rembrandt too had a sketchbook and several of his drawings. Van Dyck painted the master's portrait.

Very little is known with any certainty about Adriaen Brouwer. He was probably born in the Flemish town of Oudenaarde in about 1605-1606. He soon left his birthplace and moved to the Northern Netherlands via Antwerp. In 1625 he lived in Amsterdam and in 1626 in Haarlem, where he joined a local chamber of rhetoric. His name also appears in a deed concerning the sale of paintings. Some sources state that in that city Brouwer was apprenticed to Frans Hals or his younger brother Dirck. But there is no proof of this apart from a few similarities of style.

In 1631 Brouwer returned to Antwerp and joined the Guild of St Luke. His name often appeared in municipal documents, usually in connection with his debts. He also spent some time in prison. When he was released, he moved in with the well-known engraver Paulus Pontius, who worked for Rubens, Van Dyck, Jordaens and other artists. In the same period Brouwer also joined the chamber of rhetoric called *De Violieren*.

Adriaen Brouwer died in 1638, aged barely thirty-two. In spite of his short career, he established a solid reputation and his paintings were much in demand. This popularity only increased after his death. This is apparent from, among other things, the large number of copies and forgeries that were made of his work. Nowadays his paintings are to be found in the collections of several major museums. The largest collection is that of the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, which has nineteen works.

Brouwer was a genre painter. Such painters were very popular as from the sixteenth century thanks to Pieter Bruegel the Elder. In genre paint-



Adriaen Brouwer, *Feeling*, c. 1635, oil on panel, 24 x 20 cm, Collection Residenzgalerie, Salzburg (Austria)

ing, everyday things are depicted in a realistic manner. Adriaen Brouwer's paintings are populated by habitués of inns, drinking, smoking, gambling and fighting. What he portrayed especially was human vices, and his paintings in the main have a moralising tone. But above all he was brilliant at rendering such emotions as joy, pleasure and rage.

Brouwer cannot simply be called an imitator of Bruegel. He updated that sixteenth-century master's visual idiom, adapted the range of colours and introduced new subjects. The quality of his small, loosely painted scenes raised him to solitary heights and he had a considerable influence on the artistic development of the Northern and Southern Netherlands. He continued to gather followers until long after his death, including Adriaen van Ostade (1610-1685), Joos van Craesbeeck (1605-1606 to c. 1660) and particularly David Teniers II (1610-1661).

Even today, Brouwer retains his reputation as a cheerful pub-crawler. The subjects of most of his paintings certainly contribute to this, but his membership of several chambers of rhetoric also plays a part. In Flanders, a romanticised biography by the popular writer Felix Timmermans, published shortly after the Second World War, also reinforced this bohemian image. In Oudenaarde, his native town, he was absorbed into local folklore and a brown beer and certain annual festivities are among the things named after him. The town also has a statue in which the artist is holding a paint-

er's palette in one hand and a tankard of beer in the other. But is this an accurate portrayal? Anthony Van Dyck's portrait of the master in any case shows a completely different, much more conventional Adriaen Brouwer.

In late 2018, an ambitious exhibition of work by Adriaen Brouwer is being held in the local museum in Oudenaarde. It is more than thirty years since a retrospective of this sort was mounted (at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich). In Oudenaarde they want to assemble at least thirty works by Brouwer. They will be accompanied by about thirty-five paintings by his contemporaries. In addition to a thorough re-examination of his work, a technical study will be made of the materials he used in the paintings. The exhibition will be held in the renowned late-gothic town hall and will be laid out on the basis of five thematic clusters, each with one absolute masterpiece as its focus. These clusters will form the foundation for a portrayal of Brouwer's artistic personality. The town of Oudenaarde will receive works on loan from a great many international museums. Among those that can be admired will be *The Smokers* from the Metropolitan Museum in New York. This is the only painting in which Brouwer portrayed himself. He looks at the viewer in surprise, while smoking and drinking with his painter-friends. This is Brouwer bearing out his own reputation.

DIRK VAN ASSCHE

*Translated by Gregory Ball*

Adriaen Brouwer, *Master of Emotions* (curator: Katrien Lichtert), from 15 September to 16 December 2018 in Oudenaarde's historical town hall (MOU).

## **Drama with a Touch of Humour**

### **Jan Steen at the Mauritshuis**

Jan Steen (1626-1679) was one of the most productive and popular painters of the 'Golden Age' in the Netherlands. He worked for both the free market and wealthy collectors and is best known for his depictions of chaotic households, inn scenes, brothels, quack doctors and feast days including that of St Nicholas. What is less well known is that he also did serious history paintings show-