



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-



Jan Steen, *Lot and His Daughters*, 1665, oil on canvas, 86 x 68 cm, Collection Städtische Wessenberg-Galerie, Constance (Germany).

ing stories from the Bible and classical antiquity. Most of them date from the end of his life, after he had moved to Haarlem. The Mauritshuis in The Hague has now devoted an exhibition to this relatively unfamiliar part of his oeuvre. The occasion was its acquisition in 2011 of the history painting *Moses and Pharaoh's Crown*, which is a fine complement to the other fourteen paintings by Steen in the Mauritshuis collection. This painting has now been joined by twenty more exceptional history paintings, mostly from abroad. The informative, superbly produced catalogue, with its numerous illustrations of details, discusses and reproduces many more of Steen's history paintings.

The stories from the Old Testament or classical antiquity that Steen chose to depict are full of excitement and drama. In the works exhibited, a colourful collection of lively and richly costumed figures express their state of mind through their body language and facial expressions. Two of the paintings show *The Wrath of Ahasuerus*. When Esther, the Jewish wife of the Persian king Ahasuerus, reveals during a banquet that his trusted aide Haman was working on plans to destroy the Jewish people, Ahasuerus explodes with fury. In the painting from Birmingham, he leaps up wide-eyed and with clenched fist, much to the alarm of his courtiers, while Haman tries to duck away with

his face in his hands. This violent action knocks the peacock pie off the table and this also symbolises the pride that comes before a fall, Haman's in this case. A porcelain dish is already lying shattered on the floor. In the version from Cleveland, the same moment is portrayed slightly differently. On the extreme right, a jester with a bauble and red slouch hat is looking at the viewer with a grin; a minor but telling motif, because in sixteenth-century literature and art it was the jester's mockery that was intended to highlight the relative nature of human deeds and emotions.

The scene showing Anthony and Cleopatra, taken from Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, is also set at a banquet. The Egyptian queen Cleopatra had bet her lover, the Roman military leader Mark Anthony, that she could easily spend the astronomical sum of ten million sesterces on a single feast. The dishes that Cleopatra had had served during the banquet were not extravagantly expensive, so Mark Anthony was already thinking he had won. But during the dessert, Cleopatra took a particularly precious pearl from her earring, dissolved it in vinegar and drank the mixture in one gulp. Before she could repeat this stunt with the other earring, she was declared the winner. Steen and his clients were evidently fascinated by this wager, because we know of four works that he painted on this subject. In the work from Göttingen exhibited here, Anthony's amazement is portrayed splendidly. In one of the other versions Steen included a self-portrait. While looking towards the viewer, he laughs at such decadence and waste.

Another striking painting is *Lot and His Daughters*, a story from the book of Genesis. Following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Lot's wife had been turned into a pillar of salt, his daughters were under the impression that they and their father were the only people left in the world. Since they saw it as their duty to produce offspring, they made Lot drunk so that they could have intercourse with him. In this painting, Lot is apparently enjoying it. With sublime self-mockery, Steen gives him his own broadly smiling face, which we know from his self-portraits; the jester's red slouch hat, symbolising idiocy, is lying on the floor in front of him. In this way Steen emphasises not only the stupidity of the daughters' misapprehension, but also implies that every man

can fall victim to his own lecherousness. Inappropriate sexual desire is also the subject of *Amnon and Tamar*, from the book of 2 Samuel in the Bible. Amnon, King David's eldest son, was in love with Tamar, his half-sister. When he feigned illness and Tamar took cakes she had baked herself to his bedside, he sent everyone out of the room so that he could rape her. He later took a dislike to the girl and called a servant to send her away. However, the consequence of this was his death.

The drama and the passions that Steen depicted can be seen as expansions of situations from everyday life presented as if on a stage. His characters play their parts with violent gestures and dramatic facial expressions. It is striking that they are wearing turbans, old-fashioned trunk-hose and open sleeves with slits that look as if they have come out of the costume chest box. The figure who looks straight at the viewer from the painting, offering a comment, also reminds us of the stage practices of that era. The most appealing theme in theatre, literature and opera is still that which Steen incorporated into many of his history paintings: women as temptresses or as the victims of male desires, and men who are unable to control their passions or other emotions. But what distinguishes Steen's paintings from those of his fellow artists is his mockery of the idiotic behaviour of his main characters. This mockery and humour are expressed above all in the clownish minor characters, the commentator or laughing jester, or Steen's grinning self-portrait. In his work, these familiar stories become an entertaining farce. The painter appears to want to tell us that people act with stupidity and that their emotions are only fleeting; but what's more, it's better to laugh at human behaviour than cry.

Jan Steen was one of those people who put human life very much into perspective. The ease with which he was able to capture dramatic moments appealed not only to the public of his day, but still makes him an attractive artist to a modern public too.

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Translated by Gregory Ball

Jan Steen's Histories, at the Mauritshuis in The Hague, until 13 May 2018 (www.mauritshuis.nl)

The Catalogue of Rubens's Oeuvre Fifty Years of Work in Antwerp

The year 1968, half a century ago, saw the publication of *The Ceiling Paintings for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, the first part of what should, by 2020, become the complete catalogue of Rubens's oeuvre: the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*. How did this massive project, carried out in Antwerp, come into being?

As early as 1919, the Antwerp art historian and museum director Paul Buschmann expressed the wish that the Rubens House there, which it had been decided to restore, should have a Rubens documentation centre to cater to the needs of researchers. When the plans for restoration gradually took shape in the years that followed and were finally carried out, it became clear that the building would be too small to serve this purpose. So, for this documentation centre, which by then had been named the 'Rubenianum', those concerned started thinking about a separate building adjacent to the restored Rubens House. The dilapidated Kolveniershof, where Antwerp's archer's guild had once met and which adjoined Rubens's garden, was discovered by chance during the Second World War. This building turned out to be the perfect location for the Rubenianum. After the war, the city council purchased the building. However, it was only many years later, in 1975, that work was able to start on the restoration of the old Kolveniershof and a new wing to extend it. In the meantime, as from about 1950, an academic library had been installed in the Rubens House, specialising in the Flemish art of Rubens's day. The intention was that it would one day be housed in the Rubenianum.

One of the milestones in the history of the development of the Rubenianum was the purchase, in 1963, of the complete documentation collected by the German-British art historian Ludwig Burchard (1886-1960), who had dominated the field of *Rubensforschung* (research into Rubens) since the 1930s. The collection amounted to about 8,000 books and many tens of thousands of photos.

Thanks to a focussed purchasing policy, the Rubenianum has gradually been able to develop into an important research centre that is open to students, scholars and others with a specific interest in Rubens and the Flemish art of his era. It was