

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP4750

JAN BRUEGHEL THE YOUNGER
(1601 – Antwerp – 1678))

Noli me tangere

On copper, 9 ¼ x 14 ¾ ins. (23.5 x 37.5 cm)

PROVENANCE

Private collection, France, until 2015



The eldest son of Jan Brueghel the Elder, Jan the Younger followed closely in his father's footsteps. After training with his father in Antwerp, he travelled to Italy in 1622, but his trip was cut short following the unexpected death of his father in 1625. He returned to Antwerp and took over the running of the family studio. From that time until 1651 he kept a journal (*Dagboek*)ⁱ detailing his activities which included selling pictures left by his father and completing half-finished works. His journal also shows that he maintained close relationships with many of his father's patrons and collaborators. Jan the Younger adopted a similarly refined manner to that of his father, as well as many of his father's most successful compositions. In time, he developed a more personal style and a repertoire of his own subjects.

The episode known as *Noli me tangere* (touch me not) is found only in the Gospel according to St. John (20:14-18). After the Resurrection, Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene as she stood weeping by the empty tomb. At first, she did not recognise him, but supposing him to be a gardener, asked if he was the one who had removed Jesus's body. Jesus then called her by name, whereupon she recognised him, exclaiming "Rabboni!" (Master), but Jesus responded, saying "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father" and bade her go to the disciples with the message that he was now risen.

In this interpretation of the story, Jesus appears to Mary in a garden - an allusion to John's remark that at first Mary mistook him for a gardener. Jesus stands before her, draped in a brilliant red robe and holding a spade in one hand: the wounds of the Crucifixion are clearly visible on his body. The painting captures the moment of recognition when Mary reaches forward to embrace Jesus, but is cautioned not to touch him: her flying draperies are indicative both of her sudden movement and her agitated emotions. Mary and Jesus are surrounded by pots of flowering plants and clumps of tulips, artichokes and aquilegias. A basket and a wheelbarrow laden with garden produce stand close by: radishes and freshly cut artichokes are strewn across the ground. On the hillside behind, a little group of figures may be seen gathered before the entrance to the empty tomb - a reference to the slightly earlier episode in the narrative. Three crosses are silhouetted against the skyline, serving as a stark reminder of recent events. The city of Jerusalem rises in the distance on the right.

As far as we know, Jan Brueghel the Elder never addressed this theme, but it evidently appealed to Jan the Younger for he painted it on at least half a dozen occasions in a variety of compositions and with several different collaborators providing the figuresⁱⁱ. The earliest representation of the subject, painted just before or shortly after the artist's return from Italy, with figures contributed by Hendrick van Balen, was with the Van Haeften Gallery in 2011ⁱⁱⁱ. Most closely related to the present painting is a larger version on panel in the Kunsthalle, in Bremen, with figures by a painter in Rubens's circle (Fig. 1), dating from the late 1630s. Also from this period is a similar version which was sold at Lempertz in Cologne in 2005 (Fig. 2) and there is another poorly preserved version in the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco (Fig. 3). The present, smaller variant on copper, also with figures by a painter in Rubens's circle, can likewise be dated to the late 1630s. The central part of the composition is reprised in a large canvas by a member of Rubens's workshop preserved in the Rijksmuseum, in Amsterdam^{iv}.

Collaboration between artists who were specialists in different fields was a common feature of workshop practice in seventeenth-century Antwerp. As we have already seen, when Jan

Brueghel the Younger took over his father's workshop he continued to work with many of his father's former partners. Here, the robustly Italianate figures by an unidentified painter in Rubens's circle are skilfully integrated with Brueghel's delicately rendered landscape and still-life elements to form an harmonious and unified composition. The glowing colours and richness of detail, particularly in the naturalistic representation of the flora - both qualities enhanced by the copper support - are hallmarks of Brueghel's art.



Fig.1. Jan Brueghel the Younger, *Noli me tangere*, panel 59.5 x 100 cm, Kunsthalle Bremen.



Fig.2. Jan Brueghel the Younger, *Noli me tangere*, panel, 61 x 85 cm, Lempertz, Cologne, 2005.



Fig. 3. Jan Brueghel the Younger, *Noli me tangere*, panel, 57.5 x 92.7 cm, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

BIOGRAPHY

Jan Brueghel the Younger was born in Antwerp in 1601, the eldest son of Jan Brueghel the Elder and his first wife Isabella de Jode. He began his training in his father's studio at the age of ten, and following both his father's and grandfather's example, travelled to Italy in 1622. He stayed in Milan with his father's patron, Cardinal Federico Borromeo, before travelling to Sicily in 1623 in the company of his childhood friend Anthony van Dyck. Brueghel returned to Antwerp in 1625 after a cholera epidemic claimed the life of his father and three of his siblings. He joined the St. Luke's Guild that year and became head of his father's studio, selling paintings left by Jan the Elder and completing unfinished works. The following year he married Maria, daughter of the artist, Abraham Janssens, by whom he had eleven children. Jan the Younger was head of the Guild in 1630-31 and in the same year he was commissioned to paint an *Adam Cycle* for the French Royal House. He was recorded in Paris in the 1650s and worked for the Austrian court in 1651. He returned to Antwerp in 1657 where he died in 1678 at the age of seventy-seven.

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- ⁱ The original account book kept by Jan Brueghel the Younger has not survived, but its contents have been preserved in part in a copy made in 1770 by Jacob van der Sanden and covers the years 1625-51. See: M. Vaes, "Le Journal de Jan Breughel II", *Bulletin de l'Institut historique Belge de Rome*, vii (1926-7), pp. 152-223 & J. Denucé, *Brieven en documenten betreffende Jan Breghel I & II*, Antwerp, 1934.
- ⁱⁱ Klaus Ertz, *Jan Breughel der Jüngere*, Freren, 1984, cat. nos. 152-156.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jan Brueghel II and Hendrick van Balen, *Noli me tangere*, on panel, 61 x 87.5 cm, with Johnny Van Haeften, 2011.
- ^{iv} Workshop of Pieter Paul Rubens, *Noli me tangere*, on canvas, 200 x 177.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-2336.