

# JAN BRUEGHEL I & JOOS DE MOMPER II

(Brussels 1568 – Antwerp 1625)

(Antwerp 1564 – Antwerp 1635)

## *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower*

oil on panel  
45.1 x 67.3 cm (17¾ x 26½ in)

**Provenance:** Anonymous sale; Briest, Paris, 26 May, 1999, lot 38, (as Jan Brueghel the Younger and Joos de Momper the Younger)..

This delightful composition has recently been identified by Dr. Klaus Ertz as a previously unrecognised collaborative work between Jan Brueghel I and Joos de Momper II. The pathway from the harbour is filled with lively activity as figures gather around a fishmonger. A woman in a red skirt and blue apron kneels on the ground, next to her wares. She turns to the woman over her left shoulder, as they discuss a potential purchase. Next to her a man with his back to the viewer leans right over the basket, as he inspects the catch. Nearby, several laden donkeys wait patiently on the path for their owners. A figure with her back to the scene waves at a mother and child who appear at the doorway of the large fortified tower that dominates the landscape. Above the pair, the edifice looms with its many arches, arrow slits and cannon mounted on the battlement facing out to sea. The viewer's eye is led from this foreground group by the jetty which weaves its way into the distant open bay.

The composition of the painting is typical of Brueghel's work, and



Jan Brueghel I, *Coastal Landscape with the Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew*, 1608, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden (Figure 2)



Jan Brueghel I, *Harbour Scene with Christ Preaching*, 1598, Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Figure 1)

elements of it derive from his time in Italy. He lived there from 1589 to 1596, working in Rome for two of those years for Cardinal Colonna (1560-1608). During this period Brueghel made a number of studies of ruins in and around Rome, which he later employed extensively in his paintings, including two drawings of a building on the Via Appia, known as the Tower of Scipio.<sup>1</sup> As Leopoldine Prosperetti points out, Brueghel used the motif of this tower early in his career, in works such as *Harbour Scene with Christ Preaching*, of 1598, see figure 1, although it “had not yet gained the impressive presence it would assume in subsequent pictures”.<sup>2</sup> The motif started to become increasingly

<sup>1</sup> Louvre, Paris, Cabinet des Estamps, inv. No. 364, possibly after a Mathys Bril prototype; and Paris, Fondation Custodia.

<sup>2</sup> Leopoldine van Hogendorp Prosperetti, *Landscape and Philosophy in the Art of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625)* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Surrey, 2009) p.129.









Jan Brueghel I, *Fish Market (The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew)*, c.1608, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg (Figure 3)

prominent in two works of 1608; *Coastal Landscape with the Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew*, see figure 2, and another of the same subject in the Hermitage (fig. 3). Although the compositions in these paintings are the reverse of the present work, *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower* is comparable to them. Ertz believes that the present panel was painted slightly later, between 1610 and 1620, by which time Brueghel developed the theme so that the tower is “the hero of the picture” as it looms over a less cluttered foreground.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the tower, there are other recurring motifs in all the works, such as the figures of the woman on her knees and the man plunging headfirst into the basket with his back to us, a grouping which can be seen in all three paintings.

Brueghel’s interest in the Tower of Scipio itself, may have owed much to Matthijs Bril (1550-1583), who himself drew the tower on more than one occasion, see figure 4, but the broader context of the painting, with a tower on a high spur overlooking a harbour, is also bears the influence of Paul Bril (1554-1626), with whom Brueghel was in contact with during his Italian period. A drawing by Brueghel, recorded by Ertz in the Beck Collection, Berlin,<sup>4</sup> recalls a drawing of 1606 by Paul Bril sketched in Rome, of a landscape with a fortified tower on a spur overlooking a harbour with a winding natural jetty.<sup>5</sup> In fact it seems a strong possibility that there is a direct connection between Bril’s drawing and the present composition. One can see the use of this winding mole elsewhere in Brueghel’s work, including the aforementioned work in the Hermitage.

The composition of *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower* is therefore effectively an adaptation of two distinct, but related, motifs employed by Brueghel: the Scipio tomb on a spur overlooking a harbour and the tower overlooking a harbour by a winding pier, both of which appear to be influenced to some degree by Matthijs and Paul Bril. These two motifs are seamlessly merged by de Momper in the present work with a naturalness that reveals the closeness between the two artists. The friendship between Brueghel and de Momper is well known: as early as 1612-1613, Brueghel claimed to have painted the figures in six paintings by de Momper, in addition to

<sup>3</sup> Leopoldine van Hogendorp Prosperetti, *Landscape and Philosophy in the Art of Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625)* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Surrey, 2009) p.130.

<sup>4</sup> Ertz, K., *Jan Brueghel der Ältere* (Cologne, 1979) p.173, fig. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Rijksprentenkabinett, Amsterdam, inv. No. A42.



Jan Brueghel II & Joos de Momper II, *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower* (Detail)

the staffage for a series of *The Four Seasons*. In a letter to Ercole Bianchi in 1622, penned on Brueghel’s behalf by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), he specifically referred to de Momper as ‘Mio amico Momper’, and collaborative works by the two artists were sufficiently common to appear with dual labels in David Teniers II’s (see inventory) cabinet pictures.

Although the extensive provenance of *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower* is unclear, it is interesting to note that the painting seems to have remained in Antwerp for at least 100 years after it was painted, as a copy exists which was painted by Carel Beschey (1706-1770) (fig 5). Beschey, along with his brother Balthazar (1708-1776), made a career from painting copies and pastiches of the Brueghel school. This was a flourishing industry in eighteenth-century Antwerp, where there was great demand for these works due to the great technical perfection of the Brueghel family, and in addition to the Beschey brothers, artists including Joseph van Bredael (1688-1739) and Pieter Gysels (1621-1690) worked in a similar vein. The fact that Beschey chose to copy the present work is an indication of the esteem in which it was held.



Mathys Bril, *Scipio's Tomb, on the Via Appia in Rome*, 1593, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 3)





Carel Bescheij, *Coastal Landscape with a Fishmonger in front of a Tower*, Private Collection (Figure 5)

Brueghel was the second son of the great peasant painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c.1625-1569). Unlike his brother Pieter Brueghel the Younger (1564-1637), Jan did not merely imitate his illustrious father's work, but forged a highly unique and original style of his own. As mentioned above, at the age of twenty-one, he made the traditional trip to Italy, where he had a highly beneficial and reciprocal artistic relationship with the Bril brothers. When in Milan, he also won the favour of the renowned collector Cardinal Federigo Borromeo (1564-1631), for whom he executed paintings throughout his career. By October 1596 he had returned to Antwerp, where he soon joined the Guild of St. Luke, becoming dean in 1602. He went on to become one of the most important and sought after of Flemish artists, alongside his close friend Rubens. Both artists served as non-resident painters at the court of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, the Habsburg regents of the Netherlands.

'One of the most celebrated and successful Flemish artists of his day', Brueghel specialised in both landscapes and still lifes. His subtly detailed paintings and finely observed surfaces earned him the sobriquet 'Velvet Brueghel'. It is thought that he operated a large workshop, possibly comparable in size to that of Rubens. He also collaborated repeatedly with other artists, including Rubens, Hendrick van Balen, Frans Snyders and Sebastian Vranx (see inventory), and most frequently, de Momper. In addition to the present work, the two artists are known to have worked together on at least 58 other paintings. Theirs is perhaps the most interesting of Brueghel's artistic collaborations because 'it was Brueghel who, in an unusual role reversal, supplied the figures for De Momper's landscapes', in contrast to Brueghel's more usual role as a landscape artist.<sup>6</sup>

After his death from cholera in 1625, Brueghel was followed by many imitators, including his son Jan Brueghel II (see inventory). Brueghel II's *A Coastal Landscape with a Capriccio of the Scipii*, see figure 6, is a fine example of the way he adapted themes and motifs from his father's work.

Like Brueghel, de Momper was a key figure in the Antwerp artistic community. By the age of seventeen he had already become a master at



Jan Brueghel II & Joos de Momper II, *A Coastal Landscape with Fishermen with their Catch by a Ruined Tower* (Detail)

the Guild of St. Luke, and shortly after he travelled to Italy. During his career he worked extensively for Antwerp's illustrious patrons, and in 1626 was granted exemption from wine and beer taxes and from all civic duties, in acknowledgement of his years of service to the archdukes. De Momper was an important figure in the mannerist, fantastical landscapes, in the tradition of Joachim Patinir (c. 1480-1524), to the more naturalistic landscapes of the seventeenth century. In addition to Brueghel, he collaborated with a number of staffage painters and his legacy to Flemish landscape painting is considerable.

We are grateful to Dr. Klaus Ertz who has attributed the work to Jan Brueghel I and Joos de Momper II, having seen the painting in the original. Dr. Ertz dates the work to between 1610 and 1620.



Jan Brueghel II, *A Coastal Landscape with a Capriccio of the Tomb of the Scipii*, Private Collection (Figure 6)

<sup>6</sup> Woollett, Anne T. 'Two Celebrated Painters: The Collaborative Ventures of Rubens and Brueghel, ca. 1598-1625' in *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Relationship*, exh. cat. (J. Paul Getty Museum, California & the Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis, The Hague) p.17