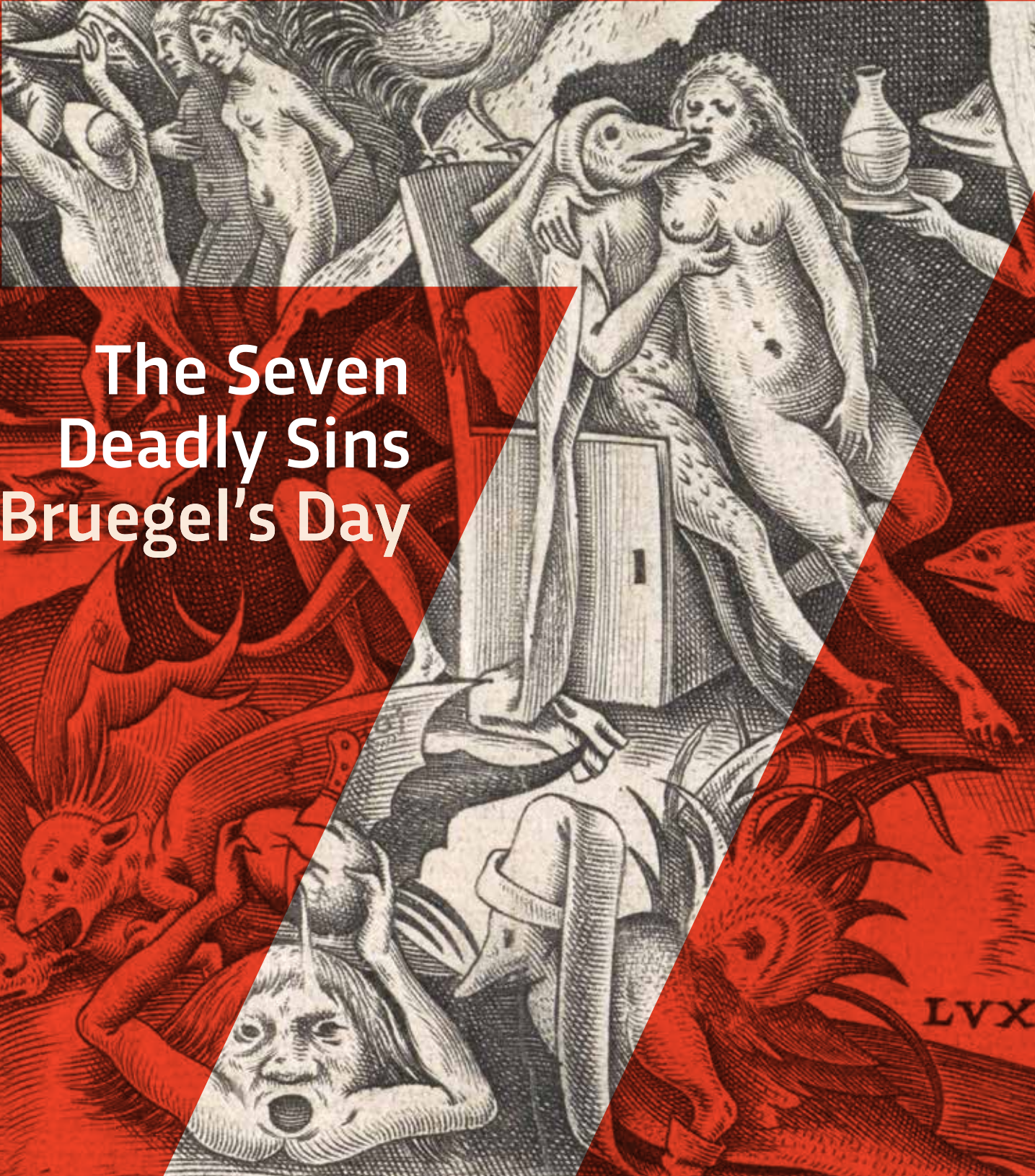


The Seven Deadly Sins in Bruegel's Day





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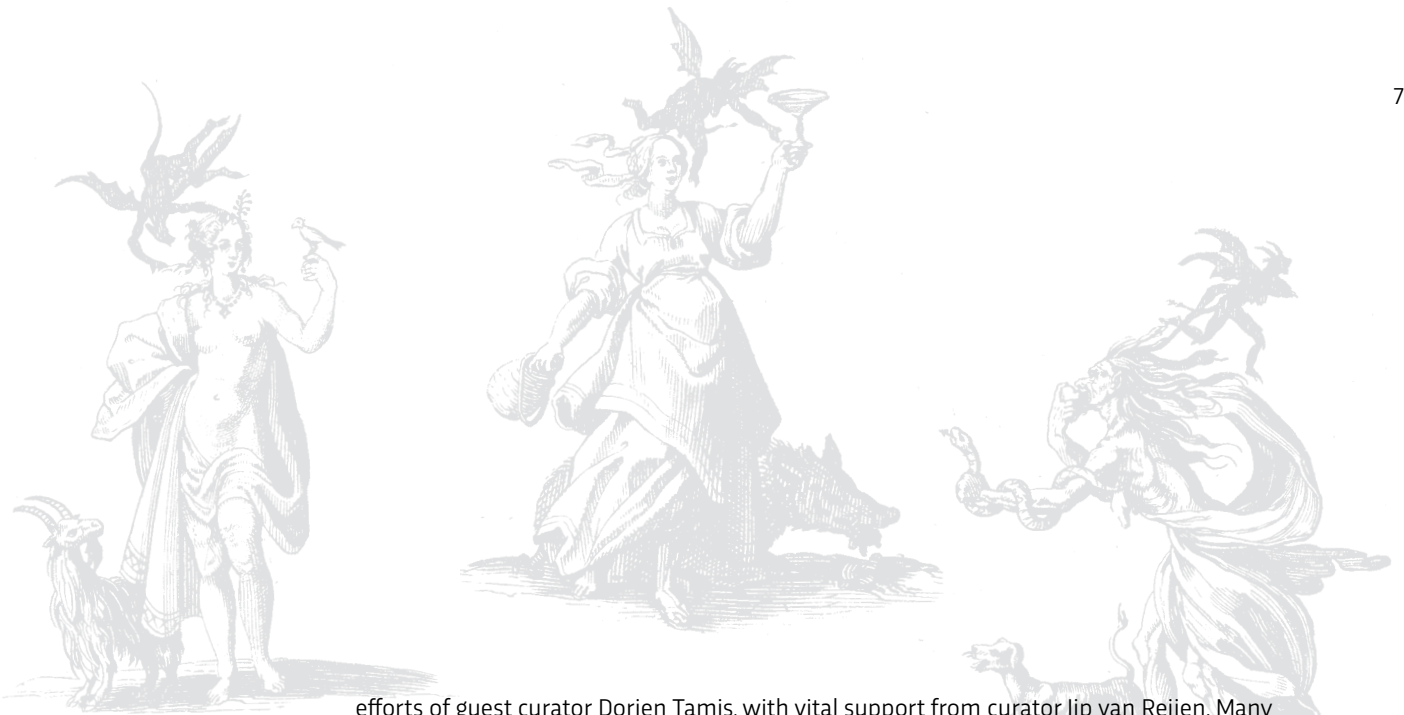


Foreword

A mad little demon contorting itself in order to sniff at its own anus; a bleak eternity of torment in hell; an almost life-sized half-naked casually reclining woman – just a few of the images of the seven deadly sins that Bonnefantien is presenting in this exhibition. Mad, evil or seductive – sin had many faces in the 'long sixteenth century'. With the renowned series of prints designed by Pieter Bruegel the Elder as its centrepiece, this thematic exhibition presents the seven deadly sins in all their forms, from international masterpieces – by artists like Jan Steen and Pieter Dell – to 'abridged' versions in cheap, anonymous artworks made for mass consumption. This highlights the fact that the visual formulas associated with the seven deadly sins were so familiar and ingrained that they were not only instantly recognised, but could be evoked with a minimum of artistic resources.

The sixteenth century was a period of climate extremes, religious and political polarisation and epidemics. The sins were a way for artists and the public to respond to the social problems of the day, which were surprisingly similar to our own. These sixteenth-century depictions of the seven deadly sins therefore provide an ideal mirror for reflecting on our own times. What form would the sins take today? Does the list of seven still suffice? In an audiotour, seven people – artists, activists and academics – explore the world of the seven deadly sins in today's world, from #metoo to the climate crisis, from Christian tradition to the Buddhist belief that 'looking the other way' is a grave sin. In these reflections, visitors themselves will be invited to nail their colours to the mast, confess their own sins, and define what they regard as deadly sins. In this connection, I should like to extend a special word of thanks to the Turing Foundation, which gave us a great deal of inspiration as we developed these contemporary reflections.

For those who wish to explore the sinful world of the sixteenth century in more depth, this publication contains four accessibly written academic essays plus a literary take on Bruegel's world. The exhibition and publication would never have come about without the unflagging



efforts of guest curator Dorien Tamis, with vital support from curator Jip van Reijen. Many thanks, therefore, to both of them. It is good to see that the ongoing professionalisation of the old masters department at Bonnefanten, moving towards a greater focus on diversity and inclusion, is now bearing fruit in the form of this appealing, richly layered and expressively designed exhibition.

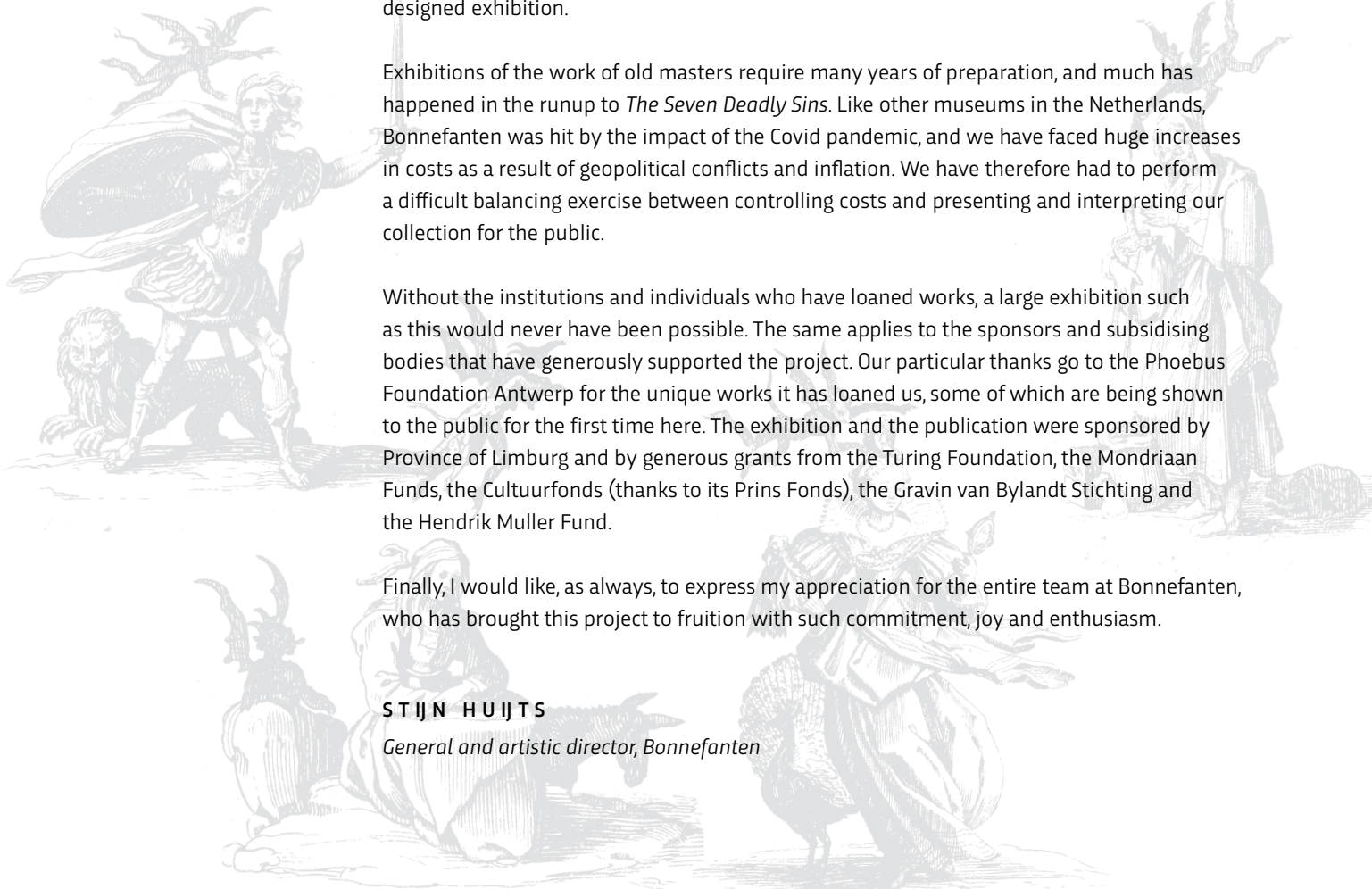
Exhibitions of the work of old masters require many years of preparation, and much has happened in the runup to *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Like other museums in the Netherlands, Bonnefanten was hit by the impact of the Covid pandemic, and we have faced huge increases in costs as a result of geopolitical conflicts and inflation. We have therefore had to perform a difficult balancing exercise between controlling costs and presenting and interpreting our collection for the public.

Without the institutions and individuals who have loaned works, a large exhibition such as this would never have been possible. The same applies to the sponsors and subsidising bodies that have generously supported the project. Our particular thanks go to the Phoebus Foundation Antwerp for the unique works it has loaned us, some of which are being shown to the public for the first time here. The exhibition and the publication were sponsored by Province of Limburg and by generous grants from the Turing Foundation, the Mondriaan Funds, the Cultuurfonds (thanks to its Prins Fonds), the Gravin van Bylandt Stichting and the Hendrik Muller Fund.

Finally, I would like, as always, to express my appreciation for the entire team at Bonnefanten, who has brought this project to fruition with such commitment, joy and enthusiasm.

STIJN HUIJTS

General and artistic director, Bonnefanten





The Seven Deadly Sins in Brief

The battle between good and evil is a universal theme. Everyone wrestles with their dark side, be it in the form of an internal struggle or a physical temptation. In the Western Christian tradition, the seven deadly sins divide all human vices, all wickedness and foolishness into categories, the list functioning as a general 'conceptual framework', helping believers to distinguish between good and evil. Terms like 'mortal sin', 'deadly sin', 'capital sin', 'cardinal sin' etc. are used interchangeably. Yet they mean different things. The sin of a child envying their brother's more desirable Christmas gift and that of a man who murders his rival in love fall into the same category: the deadly or cardinal sin of Invidia, or Envy. The sin of the child, however, is no more than an everyday sin, while the second is a capital or mortal sin: a sin that is so bad that there is no forgiveness.








The definition of sin in the Oxford dictionary is: 'an offence against God or against a religious or moral law'. People were philosophising about sin back in antiquity, but it was Christian philosophers who categorised sin into different types. The Egyptian Desert Father Evagrius Ponticus (346 - 399) was the first to compile a system of sins, led by Gluttony. The hermit described for his followers how wicked desires tormented him; he was assailed by eight, sometimes nine vices. Evagrius was able to address these demons directly. Evagrius' deadly sins are above all psychological. They are worldly desires that confound those who wish to devote themselves to God in solitude. It was Evagrius' student John Cassian (c. 360 – c. 435) who introduced Evagrius' categorisation to the curriculum of the Benedictine monks, a monastic order that was widespread throughout Western Europe. And it was Pope Gregory I (Saint Gregory the Great, c. 540 – 604) who codified the deadly sins into the magical seven. With Pride as the most grievous of the sins, Gregory's system emphasised moral choice. In the centuries that followed, Gregory's seven deadly sins became a common feature of religious convention. The system was further refined when scholars like Hugh of Saint Victor (c. 1097 – 1144) and Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225 – 1274) made arguments for the severity of the different sins. The seven deadly sins were a starting point both for original thinkers like Dante Alighieri (1265 – 1321) and formulaic publications like the *Somme le Roy*, a thirteenth-century work of religious and moral instruction for monarchs.* Martin Luther sparked the Reformation in 1517 with his criticism of the selling of indulgences by the Catholic church – the practice of granting forgiveness of sin for money. This gave the issue of sin and salvation, and thus also the seven deadly sins, a new sense of urgency, and resulted not only in heated theological debate, but also a flood of new visual material. The abstract concepts of the seven deadly sins were visualised in various ways in the arts, in the form of figures with symbolic attributes – allegories – or of animals, or reflected in daily acts. Some of these visual motifs must have been so familiar that they almost worked like pictograms. Compared with the written word, images highlight another component of the

* Tucker 2015, passim.

deadly sins: that of stimulation, excitement and seduction. This exhibition shows how the seven deadly sins were depicted throughout the sixteenth century, with the prints of Pieter Bruegel as its central focus.

It is good to bear in mind that the system of the seven deadly sins has developed in literature and visual art over many hundreds of years – more than a thousand in fact – and that these developments have not always been synchronous or consistent. This means, for example, that the names are not always the same, and that the associated symbols like animals might have changed, or several might have been used in parallel. There are many permutations and the definition of sin has been the subject of continual debate. For example, a donkey, a goat, a cat, or a cow can be used to denote the deadly sin of *Desidia*, generally translated as *Sloth* or *Indolence*. Sometimes, however, *Sloth* is described using characteristics that we would currently regard as symptoms of depression.

The table below sets out the names of the seven deadly sins, plus the titles in Dutch as given on Bruegel's prints, Latin equivalents and some of the most common animal symbols.

							
	PRIDE	GREED	LUST	ENVY	GLUTTONY	WRATH	SLOTH
BRUEGEL nl	Hoovaardij	Gierigheid	Luxurie	Nijd	Gulzigheid	Gramschap	Traagheid
Latin	Superbia	Avaritia	Luxuria Lascivia	Invidia	Gula Crapula	Ira	Acedia Desidia
Animal	Peacock	Toad	Cockerel Bull Goat	Turkey Snake Dog	Pig Bear	Bear Lion	Goat Donkey Cow Cat

**1A**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Greed / Avaritia, 1558

Engraving, 224 x 295 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

Inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-12301

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



AVARITIA

PVDOR EST VNQVAM PROPERANTIS AVARI?
 schek Vermaen En siet die scerpande ghierichheyt niet aen

**1B**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Sloth / Desidia, 1558

Engraving, 226mm x 295 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

Inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-12302

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



DESIDIA

NE

H. Cock. excud. cum privilegio 1558.

FRANGIT, LONGA OCIA NERVOS.
 Verdoocht Die sennen dat de mensch meders tot en doocht

**1C**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Envy / Invidia, 1558

Engraving, 226 x 295 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

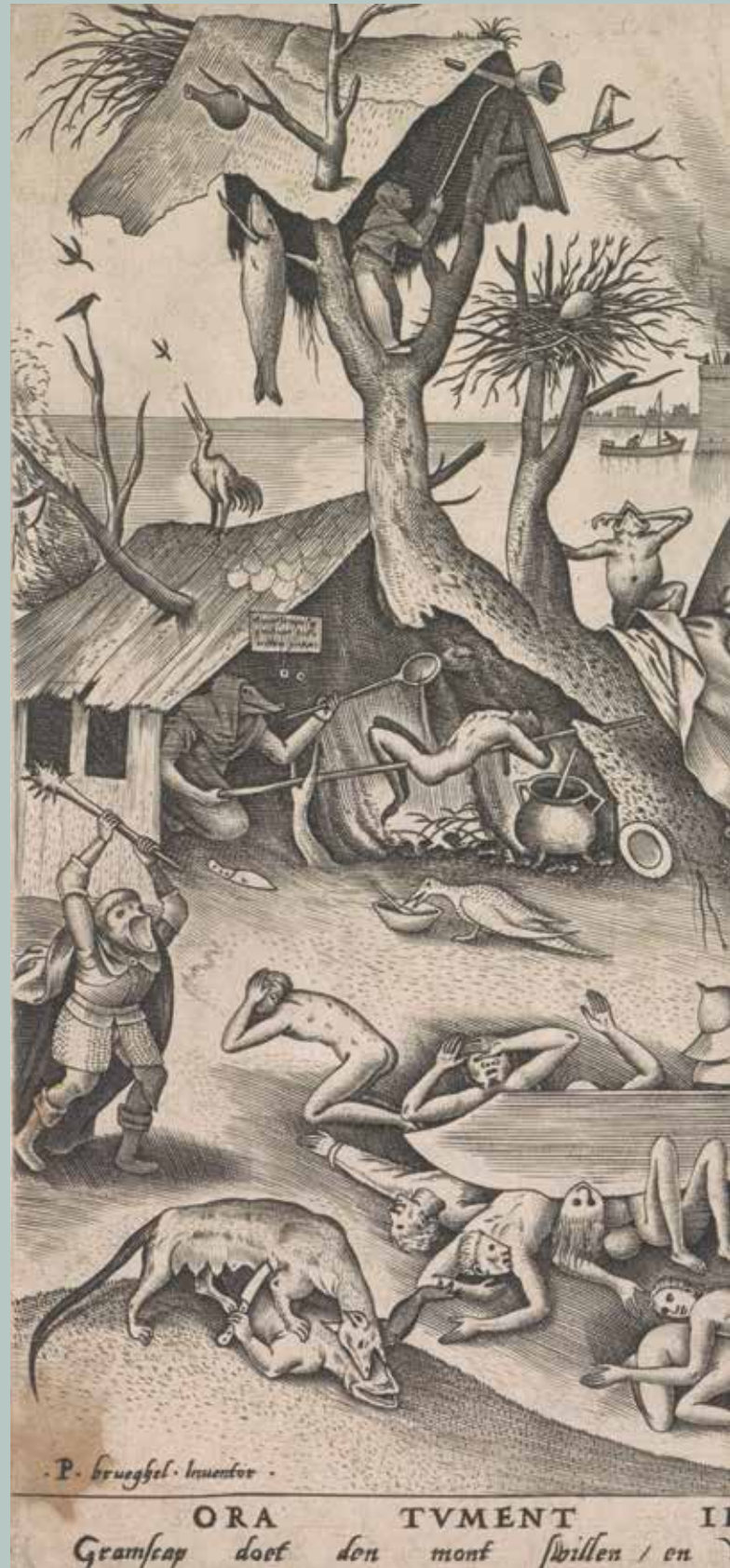
Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

Inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-12303

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



DVM
 breede peste EEN MONSTRUM, die SEVISSIMA PESTIS
 EEN beest die haer seluen eet / met valschen moleste

**1D**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Wrath / Ira, 1558

Engraving, 225 x 295 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

Inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-12304

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



IRA

H. Coek. excude. Cum gratia et privilegio. 1558.

IRA, NIGRESCVNT SANGVINE VENA.
 verbittert den moot Sy beroert den gheest / en maect swert dat bloet

**1E**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Gluttony / Gula, 1558

Engraving, 225 x 294 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

Inv. no. RP-P-1887-A-12305

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



GVLA.

.M.

H. Cock. excud. sum. gratia et privilegio. 1. 5. 3

VITANDA *eten* INGLVVISSQVE *Want* CIBORVM *overdaet doet godt en hem seluen verghoten*.

**1F**

Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel I

The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride / Superbia, 1558

Engraving, 227 x 297 mm

Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum

Gift of P.C. van Kerckhoff, The Hague

RP-P-1887-A-12306

Photo Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam