

CELEBRATING THE SENSES: JAN BRUEGHEL THE YOUNGER



Jan Brueghel the Younger, *The Five Senses: Sight*, c. 1625, Oil on panel, Paul G. Allen Family Collection



Jan Brueghel the Younger, *The Five Senses: Smell*, c. 1625, Oil on panel, Paul G. Allen Family Collection



Jan Brueghel the Younger, *The Five Senses: Hearing*, c. 1625, Oil on panel, Paul G. Allen Family Collection



Jan Brueghel the Younger, *The Five Senses: Taste*, c. 1625, Oil on panel, Paul G. Allen Family Collection



Jan Brueghel the Younger, *The Five Senses: Touch*, c. 1625, Oil on panel, Paul G. Allen Family Collection



Jan Brueghel the Younger (Flemish, 1601-1678), *Summer Flowers in a Wanli Kraak Porcelain Bowl*, c. 1630-1635, Oil on panel, The Mrs. Frederick M. Stafford Collection, EL.1977.14

Closely related to the five senses series, this panel from NOMA's collection can be seen in the first floor Dutch galleries. (See the inside back cover for detail.)

As part of *Seeing Nature*, an exhibition of masterworks from the Paul G. Allen Family Collection opening October 14 at NOMA, New Orleanians can view a magnificent series of Flemish paintings by Jan Brueghel the Younger (1601-1678) depicting allegories of the five senses.

Each allegory features Venus and Cupid in a palace setting. As the goddess of love, Venus is the paragon of female beauty and vehicle for human sensuality, and, in this series, our chaperone through the senses. Jan Brueghel the Younger's meticulous technique offers viewers a seductive banquet of details and textures.

Sight packs visual treasures into a resplendent loggia-like interior, conjuring the worlds of art, learning and religion with emblematic objects. *Smell* is a riotous festival of scents and flowers, bringing together blossoms from different seasons. *Hearing* is the quiet panel of the group. The open landscape view enhances its mood, a melodic interlude amid the teeming details of the other paintings. *Taste* offers a feast of meat, fish, exotic fruits and vegetables, with Venus enjoying free-flowing wine served by a satyr. *Touch* shows Venus affectionately kissing her son Cupid in a room full of armor and discarded weapons, a reminder that Venus also is known as the bearer of peace. In mythology, she quells Mars's

urge to fight when the god of war falls in love with her. By juxtaposing Venus and disused weaponry, the artist shows the foundations of true prosperity, a clear theme across all these scenes of abundance and opulence.

This series, especially *Sight*, continues the tradition of portraying collectors' cabinets, a speciality among Antwerp artists. During this period, Antwerp sat at the center of a burgeoning international art trade. The city boasted a staggering number of artists and studios, and delivered paintings to Spanish and English ports, French nobility, and the New World. The cosmopolitanism of this international port city is fundamental to the appeal of Brueghel's work. In its collective grouping of objects, instruments and books, the Senses series also suggests encyclopedic knowledge and study. Such paintings could be displayed in a learned "studiolo," or library, further emphasizing the refinement reflected in both subject and style.

Jan Brueghel the Younger was the youngest practitioner of the illustrious Brueghel family of painters. His grandfather was Pieter Brueghel (1525-1569), the brilliant painter of peasant life and proverbs. His father, Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625),

or "Velvet" Brueghel, specialized in lushly detailed scenes of country and court life where leafy vistas extend to the blue horizon. As a privileged son of the Brueghel dynasty, Jan the Younger studied in Rome, traveling there with childhood friend Anthony van Dyck. By age 24, Jan the Younger was a prominent figure in the Antwerp artists' guild and ran his father's successful shop with Peter Paul Rubens.

Jan the Younger painted his series just after his father's death in 1625. The panels make reference to a 1618 gift of five paintings of the senses by Jan the Elder and Rubens, which were given to the Spanish crown and are now in the Prado Museum in Madrid. Jan the Younger's series established him as the family's artistic heir. He would go on to lead a vibrant workshop for four more decades.

Seeing Nature: Landscape Masterworks from the Paul G. Allen Family Collection will be on view in the Ella West Freeman Galleries from October 14, 2016 – January 15, 2017. The exhibition is co-organized by Portland Art Museum, the Seattle Art Museum and the Paul G. Allen Family Collection.

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