THE BRUEGEL SUCCESS STORY

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Contents

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Fig. 6.1 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, c. 1562–3, oil on oak panel, 116.1 × 162 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado (inv. P001393)

Fig. 6.2 Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *The Triumph of Death*, 1608, oil on panel, 123.3 × 166.5 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel (inv. G1995.29)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Triumph of Death* and Versions by his Sons: The Creative Process and the Art of Copying

Christina Currie and Dominique Allart

ABSTRACT: The *Triumph of Death* is one of only two known cases of Bruegel's sons copying the same large-format composition after their father. In this case, examination reveals that the copyists were not able to study the original painting *de visu*. New high-resolution scientific imagery of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's original version in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Pieter Brueghel the Younger's version in the Kunstmuseum Basel, and Jan Brueghel the Elder's version in the Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz, elucidates not only the *modus operandi* of the copyists, but also the hidden working processes of the creator, Bruegel the Elder. The study also highlights the respective underdrawing and painting styles of father and sons, as well as Jan Brueghel's ingenious updating of the composition.

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Introduction

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Triumph of Death* (Museo Nacional del Prado, fig. 6.1)[1] is one of only two large-format compositions that was tackled by both Pieter Brueghel the Younger and his younger brother Jan Brueghel the Elder. Brueghel the Younger's version of the *Triumph of Death* in the Kunstmuseum Basel (fig. 6.2)[2] and Jan Brueghel's version in the Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz (fig. 6.3)[3] were documented and studied by the KIK-IRPA in 2013. Pieter Bruegel the Elder's original version was documented with scientific imagery by the Prado in 2017–18 during its recent

conservation treatment. Seen together, this technical material reveals the nature of the relationship between the prototype and the sons' copies, bringing to light both Bruegel the Elder's creative process in the making of the original and the *modus operandi* in the making of the copies.

The only other large-format composition treated by both Bruegel sons is the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, which was discussed in a recent article by the present authors.[4] In that case, it was shown that the sons must have examined Bruegel's original version with their own eyes and reproduced it directly. Jan Brueghel, even more than Pieter the Younger, went to great lengths to imitate every colour and nuance of brushwork of the original. Why they did not follow the same protocol for their respective copies of the *Triumph of Death* will be explored in this contribution.

The Original Version and the Copies: Technical Aspects

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's prototype is not signed or dated, which is unusual in Bruegel's work. According to José de la Fuente Martínez, who carried out the restoration of the panel support, the lowermost plank, where we would expect to find the signature, is the widest of the four and does not appear to have been cut down.[5] The general consensus is that

Fig. 6.3 Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, signed and dated 1597, oil on canvas transferred from panel, 119.3 × 164.5 cm, Graz, Landesmuseum Joanneum, Alte Galerie (inv. 58)

the painting dates from 1562–3, the years in which Bruegel executed the *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (signed and dated 1562) and the *Dulle Griet* (signed and dated 1563). The panel support is oak panel (116.1 × 162 cm), made up of four planks bridged by wooden dowels, four to a join.[6] Peter Klein analysed the panel by dendrochronology,[7] and his results were revised by Maite Jover de Celis.[8] These were then compared with dendrochronological data on other paintings by Bruegel provided by Pascale Fraiture.[9] The four planks are top-quality radial cuts, with the exception of the top board, which is semi-radial. All the planks are from different trees from the surroundings of the Eastern Baltic area. The most recent tree-ring is a heartwood ring of Baltic origin from 1540, which gives

a *terminus post quem* for felling of 1546. No affiliation was noted between the planks making up the *Triumph of Death* and those in other works by Bruegel or any other Flemish painting in the KIK-IRPA database.

The unpainted edges to left and right and remains of rebates on the reverse indicate that the painting was originally fitted with channel edge supports, which would have been removed just before framing.[10] Infrared reflectography reveals an outline underdrawing of the main figures and landscape background, which will be discussed in detail below. The recent cleaning unveiled a wide range of vivid colours, sharply contrasting with the violence of the scene. The effect recalls the *Massacre of the Innocents* in the Royal Collection Trust,

where at first glance the brightly coloured and patterned costumes seduce the viewer and draw him in, only then to confront him with the true horror of the spectacle.

Pieter Brueghel the Younger's *Triumph of Death* in the Kunstmuseum Basel is not signed but there is a date – 1608 – painted on several of the funerary banners, which is probably the date of execution (fig. 6.4).[11] Despite the lack of a signature, the Basel painting is one of the most stylistically accomplished works of Brueghel the Younger examined by the authors, matching perfectly with the style of the authors' core group of paintings given to the master's own hand.[12] The work is painted on oak panel (123.3 × 166.5 cm) and is made up of five planks. Like the original, it was also originally fitted with a channel edge support on the left side, as there are unpainted edges and corresponding right-angled rebates on the reverse. On the right, this is less clear, as the ground, underdrawing and paint layer run right up to the edge. On the corresponding reverse edge, there are narrow traces of rabbeting on the top and bottom planks, but not in the middle, suggesting either that the panel has lost a centimetre or so at the right or that there never was a channel edge support on this side. The painting has a comprehensive underdrawing, which will be compared to that in the original and the Graz version below.

There is a second large-format version by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, formerly in the collection of the Mildred Andrews Fund, Cleveland, OH (oil on canvas, 116.8 × 167 cm).[13] The signature and date – 'P BREVGHEL 1626' – were revealed in the lower left corner during conservation treatment by Robert Shepherd in 1991.[14] Infrared reflectography, carried out by Molly Faries the previous year, detected an underdrawing typical of the artist's production.[15] There is also a smaller undated version of the composition (oil on panel, 51 × 87.5 cm), attributed by Klaus Ertz to Brueghel the Younger, which was in the Mallo collection in 1980.[16] This painting is only known through a black and white image.

Fig. 6.4 Funerary banners with date (1608) in Pieter Brueghel the Younger's Basel version

Jan Brueghel the Elder's version of the *Triumph of Death* in the Landesmuseum Joanneum in Graz (oil on canvas transferred from panel, 119.3 × 164.5 cm) is signed and dated 'BRVEGEL F.' 1597' (fig. 6.5). Although this inscription appears to be authentic, there has been some strengthening in all the letters and digits. The bottom part of the '9', for instance, would appear to be partially painted over a loss. The 'F' for 'Fecit' and the date are painted a neater script than the name, which raises the possibility that they were applied at two different stages. The last two letters of the name are retouched, rendering it possible that the inscription originally read 'BRVEG**H**EL'; indeed, it is not Jan's usual practice to omit the 'H'. The 1597 dating, if genuine, would make it the earliest known copy of the composition.[17] The work is now
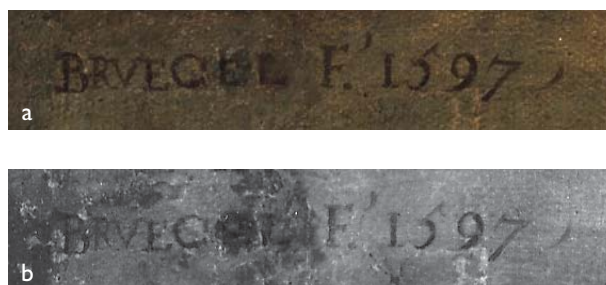

Fig. 6.5 Signature in Jan Brueghel's Graz version; normal light (a) and IRR (b)

on canvas, but it may originally have been painted on panel. There are a series of cracks in the paint surface that would appear to correspond to positions of former joins and cracks. The notable absence of cusping at the edges of the canvas supports this hypothesis. Unfortunately, the conservation history can only be traced back to 1947–8, and there is no mention during this period of a transfer from wood to canvas.[18] The canvas is now lined onto a secondary canvas support. Infrared reflectography also detected a detailed underdrawing, which will be compared to the original and Pieter Brueghel the Younger's Basel version. The painting is darker in tonality than it would have been originally, due to abrasion damage that reveals the canvas fibres.

There is an unsigned and undated version of Jan Brueghel's Graz composition, closely repeating its motifs and colour scheme (oil on canvas, 119 × 162 cm), in the Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein in Vienna. It is attributed to Jan Brueghel the Elder by Georges Marlier, Jacqueline Folie and Françoise Van Hauwaert-Thomaes, but given to a follower, probably Jan Brueghel the Younger, by Klaus Ertz.[19] Although following the same colour scheme, this painting has a much brighter overall appearance than the Graz version, probably reflecting the latter's original tonal values. This version was not examined and therefore will not be included in the present discussion.

The Prototype by Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Development of the Composition

Bruegel the Elder's original painting conceals a functional black outline underdrawing, revealed in infrared reflectography (see below, fig. 6.13). The drawing has been applied with a light, rapid touch but is minimal in its purpose, with no hatching strokes for indicating tone. It displays none of the exuberant flourish that is seen, for example, in Bruegel's underdrawings in his *Wedding Dance* (Detroit Institute of Arts), *Return of the Herd* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) and *Tower of Babel* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).[20] The

drawing lines in the *Triumph of Death* have the appearance of black chalk, sharpened to a point. Background motifs, where discernible, are depicted sparingly. There are no attempts to develop motifs during the underdrawing stage; the landscape and all its figures seem to have been carefully planned in advance and any adjustments are carried out during painting. The precise nature of this underdrawing suggests that the artist carefully transferred his design from a separate detailed preparatory drawing.

The apparent absence of underdrawing in several of the foreground figures was explained by close inspection of the painting after cleaning. In figures such as the emperor, the cardinal and the man with blue breeches trapped under the cart, Bruegel used diluted red-brown paint for underdrawing, applied with a fine brush (fig. 6.6). This paint, no doubt based on earth pigments, is completely transparent in infrared. The reddish-brown outlines are as detailed as the black ones and would seem to have been applied as part of the same drawing stage. However, the red-brown underdrawing does not simply reinforce the black lines or vice versa. It seems they were applied in parallel stages. The figure of the cardinal is the only one to show both kinds of underdrawing, and even here the parts outlined in black do not overlap those outlined in red. The mitten-like outline of the cardinal's hand, the robe and the drapery folds are underdrawn in red-brown paint, while his left arm is underdrawn in black. In one drapery fold, the paint layer lying directly above the red underdrawing has suffered drying cracks, perhaps due to Bruegel leaving insufficient drying time for the red-brown paint. The peculiar combination of dry black and liquid red underdrawing in a single painting has not been noted previously in Bruegel's paintings, although he did on one occasion use red and black underdrawing in the same composition. The small-format *Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery*, signed and dated 1565 (London, Courtauld Gallery) shows an early-stage red underdrawing in a dry medium, with the main underdraw-

applied afterwards in a dry black material, as observed by Aviva Burnstock.[21]

Bruegel largely adhered to his preliminary design during painting, although he made minor improvements, dropping or adjusting certain motifs and adding others. Several skeletons have undergone modifications: for example, the skeleton wielding a scythe in the centre foreground, whose winding cloth was not initially foreseen in its entirety. The skeleton riding at the front of a cart in the lower left acquired a blue hat during painting, while the skeleton holding a net at the left gained a strange funnel on the top of his skull. Bruegel's painterly reserves for these motifs do not take account of these features, suggesting that they were later additions. A more significant transformation during painting is seen in the skeleton collecting up gold coins near the emperor. He is dressed in chain mail and armour, but the infrared and X-radiograph images reveal that Bruegel first drew and started to paint him with bare bones (fig. 6.7). Further modifications to Bruegel's original design during painting can be spotted in relation to the copies and will be discussed below.

The Copies by Pieter Brueghel the Younger and Jan Brueghel the Elder: Differences in Colour and Motif in Relation to the Original Version

As observed by Jacqueline Folie and Françoise Van Hauwaert-Thomaes in 1995, the copies of the *Triumph of Death* display many differences in colour and motif in relation to the original version, prompting them to suggest that the sons did not actually see their father's original painting.[22]

The overall atmosphere in the copies is strikingly different from that in Bruegel the Elder's painting and varies even among themselves. The original version features receding swathes of pale brown, green and purple, with red flames lighting up the upper left sky. Pieter the Younger's Basel (fig. 6.2) and Cleveland versions' backgrounds tend towards browner hues, while Jan Brueghel's Graz version (fig. 6.3) displays intense deep blue

tonalities in the far background and sky, as in so many of his own compositions. The Graz version was most likely much brighter in appearance at the outset in the background, as in the Vienna replica (see above), which would have made it even more different from Bruegel the Elder's prototype. In all the paintings, there is a wide range of bright clothing, but these vary in colour from artist to artist. For example, the figure fleeing the table in the lower right is green in Bruegel the Elder, pink in Brueghel the Younger and blue in Jan Brueghel; and in the slashed clothing of the lansquenet soldier, the father opts for white, the elder son for yellow-brown and the younger son for an intense turquoise (fig. 6.8). In the figure of the jester, the bold red and white harlequin pattern of the original version is ignored by Pieter the Younger and painted in gold and white by Jan.

In terms of motif, many figures are subtly different in the copies and the original version. For example, a naked woman in Bruegel the Elder is transformed into a man in the copies (fig. 6.9). Heads seen from behind in the original are seen from the front in the copies and vice versa. The skeleton horseman sits on a dark saddle blanket in Bruegel the Elder but rides bareback in the copies, although the outlines of the blanket do appear in Jan's underdrawing.

Given the many differences between the original and the copies, Folie and Van Hauwaert-Thomaes suggested that the sons must have based their versions on a missing link, such as a 'complete drawing of the original work which remained with members of the family and which was developed at will by the two sons'.[23] Hélène Verougstraete and Roger Van Schoute proposed that the model was a print.[24] Our comparison of the original version's underdrawing and early paint layers with those of the copies suggests a different but entirely logical source, which we will now investigate.

Early Provenance of the Original Version

Who might have ordered the *Triumph of Death* from Pieter Bruegel the Elder is unknown. The work was

Fig. 6.6 Diagram showing zones in Bruegel the Elder's original version (fig. 6.1) with liquid red-brown underdrawing (a)
Detail, cardinal (b), with red-brown underdrawing for hand (c)
Detail, man trapped under cart, with red-brown underdrawing for breeches, invisible in infrared; normal light (d) and IRR (e)

most likely part of the collection of Vespasiano Gonzaga (1531–1591) in the late sixteenth century, although there is no source attesting to its actual acquisition. Vespasiano, a nobleman close to the Habsburg family, had built up an important art collection in the small city of Sabbioneta in Lombardy.[25] He seems to have been a Netherlandish painting lover. In 1589 he asked Alessandro Farnese, Governor of the Low Countries, to find him paintings by Bosch, or, if that were not possible, for good paintings by Bosch followers. Bruegel's *Triumph of Death* was cited in the post-mortem inventory of his daughter Isabella, his only heir, which was drawn up in Naples in 1637. The painting can be traced from that year until its entry in the Spanish Collections.[26]

Jan Brueghel could perhaps have seen his father's *Triumph of Death* during his long sojourn in Italy (1588/9–96) and retained some memories of it. But could these memories have led to the precise variants in colour and motif that we see in the sons'

copies? The evidence of Bruegel the Elder's underdrawing suggests otherwise.

The Source for the Sons' Copies

As mentioned above, Bruegel the Elder dropped or modified certain motifs during painting. But what is most revealing for our investigation is that these very same underdrawn motifs often crop up in the copies. The most telling example is a pair of running figures in a background field. Bruegel foresaw these in his underdrawing, but later decided against including them (fig. 6.10).[27] In Pieter the Younger's and Jan's versions, we see these running figures in both the underdrawing and painting stages.

This evidence, together with the differences in colour and motif, favours the scenario of an inherited preparatory drawing by Bruegel the Elder as the source for the sons' copies rather than the painting itself, a record drawing or an engraving after the painting.[28]
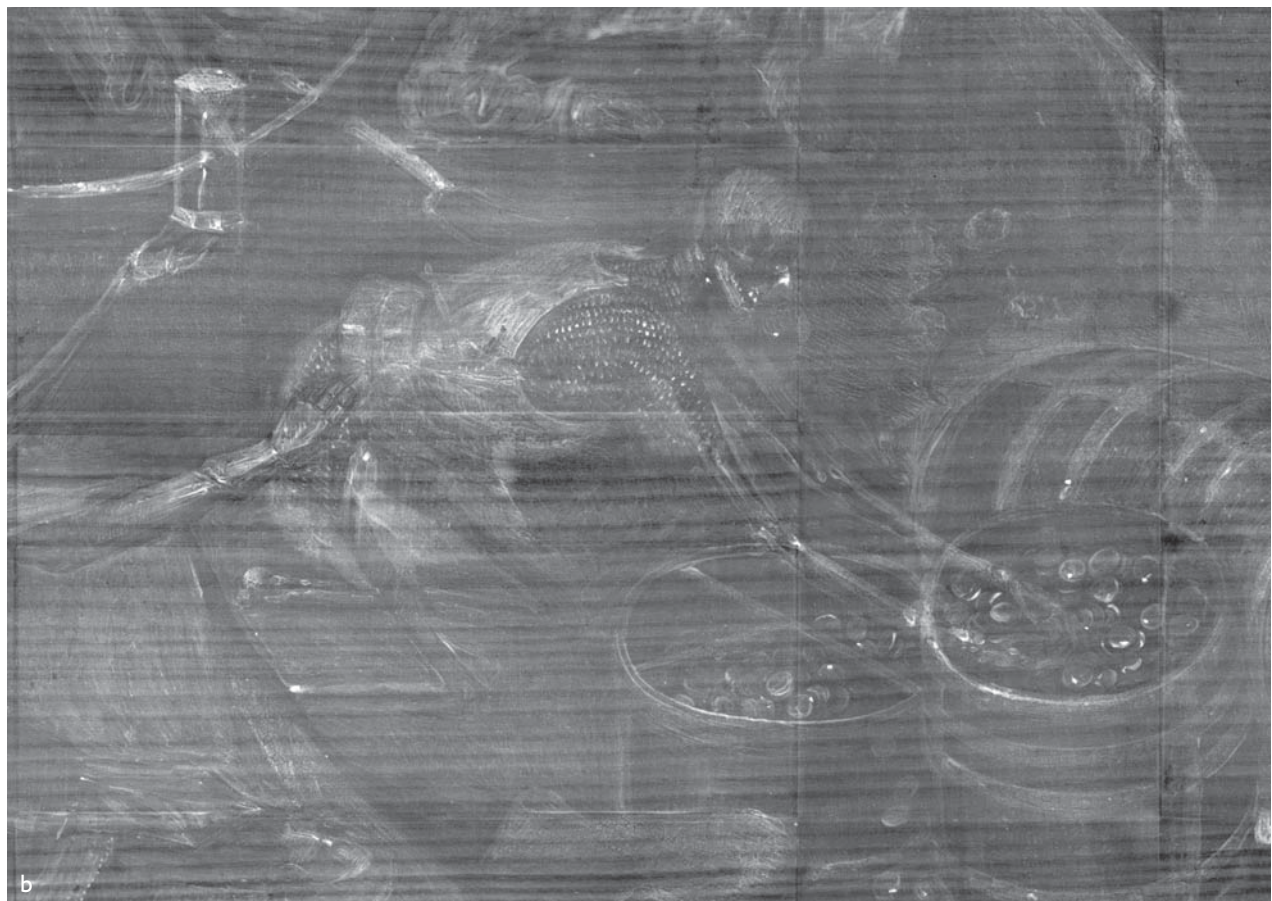
Fig. 6.7 Skeleton in Bruegel the Elder's original version (fig. 6.1), originally intended to be bare-boned as in the copies; normal light (a) and XR (b)
Brueghel the Younger (c)
Jan Brueghel (d)

c

d

Fig. 6.8 Details of lansquenet soldier
Bruegel the Elder (a)
Brueghel the Younger (b)
Jan Brueghel (c)
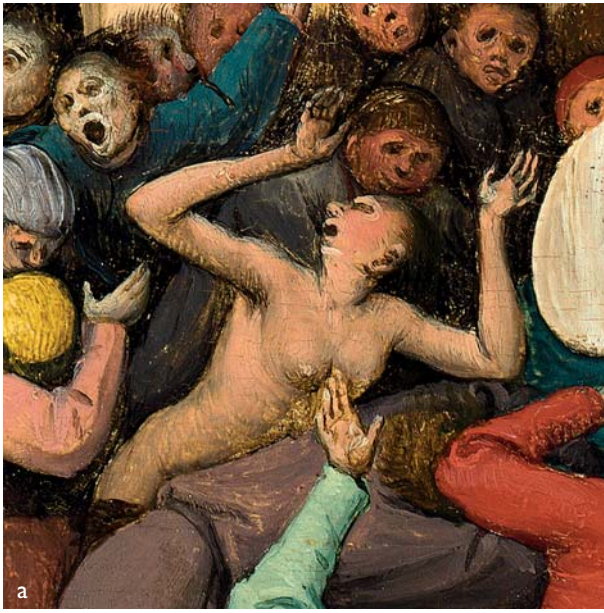
Fig. 6.9 Naked woman in Bruegel the Elder (a)
Man in dark coat in Brueghel the Younger (b)
Man in red coat in Jan Brueghel (c)
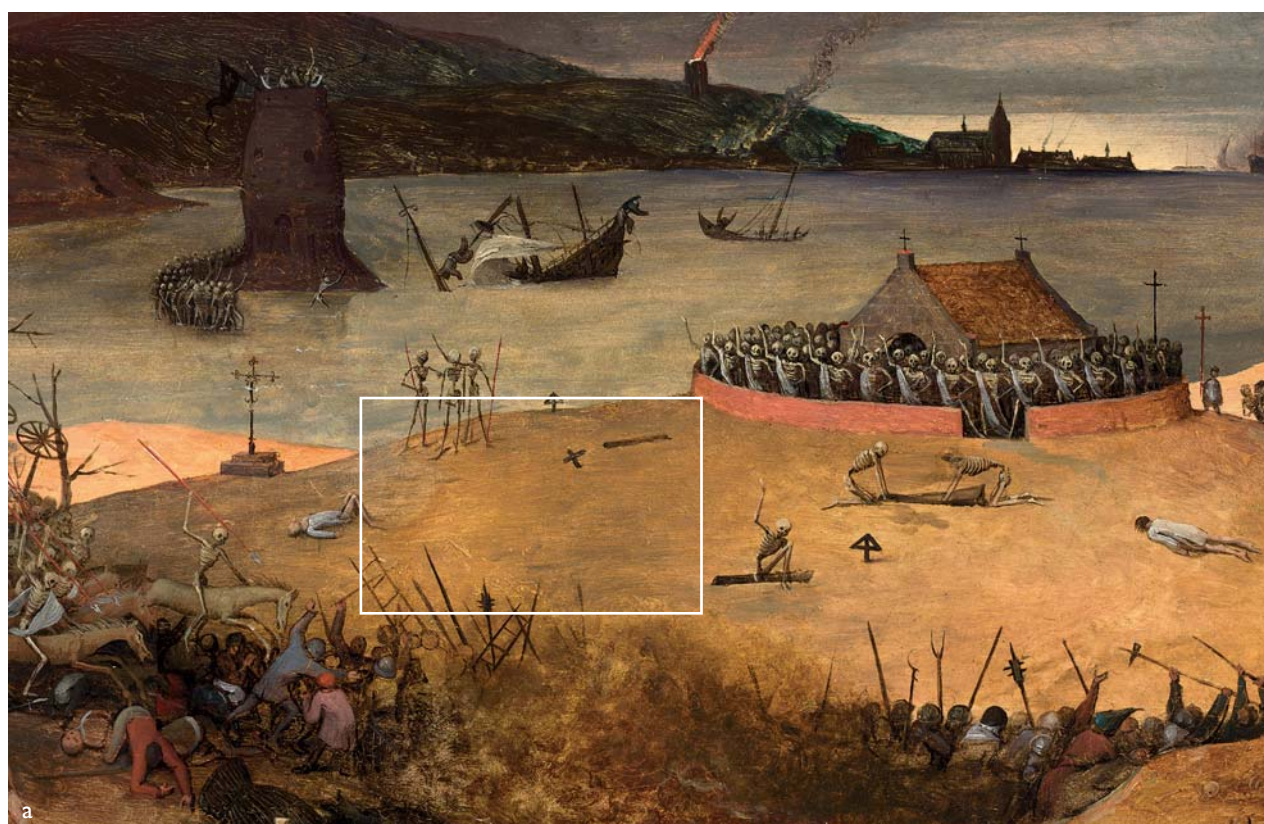
Fig. 6.10 Detail of background in Bruegel the Elder's original version (a) with IRR detail showing underdrawn figures, never painted, which reappear in the copies (b and c)
Brueghel the Younger (d)
Jan Brueghel (e)

The Copies as Witnesses to Bruegel the Elder's Original Design

Having established that the copies were based on a preparatory drawing of the *Triumph of Death*, it stands to reason that they might logically embody some of Pieter Bruegel's initial ideas for the composition that he later dropped or improved upon. Indeed, in the grisly scene of torture in the upper right, Bruegel dropped one of the breaking wheels, simplifying the space somewhat; its faint outline is still seen in the underdrawing (fig. 6.11). This wheel, plus its unfortunate victim, reappears in the copies. To the right of the skeleton executioner, Bruegel leaves an empty space, giving more impact to the macabre scene, whereas in the copies, there is either a gallows, as in the Basel[29] and Graz versions, or a cross, as in the Cleveland version. The sons would not have known of Bruegel's improve-

ments during painting, and therefore reproduced his more cluttered initial design (fig. 6.12).

Bruegel's changes to the skeletons during painting are not reflected in the copies: for example, the addition of a piece of winding cloth to a foreground skeleton, which is not present in the sons' copies. Likewise, the copies do not reproduce the hat and funnel on two skeletons' heads, added by Bruegel during painting. The skeleton with chain mail and armour collecting gold coins appears bare-boned in Bruegel's initial design, as in the copies (see above, fig. 6.7). This skeleton nonetheless sports a crown and chains in the sons' copies,[30] features that are absent in Bruegel's version, suggesting that they were present in his preparatory drawing but were dropped before underdrawing.

On the wall to the right of the clock, Bruegel's underdrawing shows that the skeleton to the left of

Fig. 6.11 Detail of execution scene in Bruegel the Elder's version (a) with IRR detail showing underdrawn breaking wheel, never painted, which reappears in the copies (c and d)
Reconstruction of Bruegel the Elder's original plan (b)
Same zone in Jan Brueghel (e), matching Bruegel the Elder's initial design

Fig. 6.12 Tracing of composition of Brueghel the Younger's Basel version laid onto a scaled-up image of Bruegel the Elder's original version

the cross originally reached down to touch the back of a man in a blue coat trying to escape. During painting, he brought the skeleton's hands together, yet it is the initial position of his left arm that is reflected in the sons' copies.

Finally, in Bruegel's underdrawing of the backgammon board in the lower right, the corner is not overlapped by the metal flask, unlike in the paint layer. Jan Brueghel's version imitates the earlier position. The fact that Jan correctly copies such a small detail is testament to the high level of precision in his father's now-lost preparatory material.

Transfer of the Design to Panel: Father and Sons
For the *Battle between Carnival and Lent*, painted in 1559, we concluded that Bruegel the Elder must

have made preparatory pricked cartoons and a model drawing, and that these documents were reused by his son Pieter the Younger for his copies.[31] Rebecca Duckwitz also demonstrated this to be the case for Bruegel's *Flemish Proverbs* and the copies, the original version also being painted in 1559.[32] Whether this scenario also applies to the *Triumph of Death* will be explored next.

We first verified whether the sons could have based their copies of the *Triumph of Death* on the same cartoon, as we previously demonstrated for their corresponding versions of the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*.[33] In the case of the *Triumph of Death*, we made 1:1 tracings of the painted compositions of the Basel and Graz versions and superposed them. The resulting correlation is indeed too

close to consider copying by eye, even with the help of squaring-up. A common cartoon is the most likely scenario. The design was most probably spread over two or more separate sheets, as the left half fits perfectly when the tracings are aligned left, while the right side of the composition fits well when the tracings are aligned right. A seeming anomaly in the top third of the composition is explained by examining Jan's underdrawing. Here, the painted motifs in Jan's version are often smaller in scale and misaligned with those in Pieter's version. However, the infrared image shows that Jan underdrew his motifs in the same positions as his brother but then went on to adjust them slightly during painting. This is particularly noticeable in the bells in the upper left. We were not able to trace the former Cleveland version, but we were able to digitally overlay the tracings of the Graz and Basel versions onto a scanned image of the Cleveland painting. Indeed, the tracings align well left and right, as with the Graz–Basel superpositions, confirming that the same set of cartoons was likely used.

To test whether the cartoons could have been inherited directly from Bruegel the Elder, we digitally superposed the tracings of the Basel and Graz copies onto a correctly scaled image of the original painting (fig. 6.12).[34] The results are revealing: when the motifs are lined up on the left, they do not quite match up to the far right, and vice versa. The correspondence, even in the distant background, is astonishing, suggesting that the sons used the same cartoon sheets as their father.

In the original and the copies, smaller background elements were probably copied by eye after a model drawing, rather than being transferred to panel via the cartoon. This seems likely in view of the sketchy quality in the underdrawing stage of these motifs. In the original version, for example, the running figures, later abandoned during painting, are drawn very summarily, which is also the case for the corresponding figures in the copies (fig. 6.10). The same can be observed for motifs on the horizon such as the execution scene and the gallows.

Pricked Cartoon

The overall design and the main figures were most likely transferred to panel in all three cases by pouncing, the method of design transfer used in the studio of Pieter Brueghel the Younger.[35] Firm evidence of the use of this technique was previously found in two paintings by the Brueghel sons: a version of Pieter the Younger's *Battle between Carnival and Lent* (Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium),[36] and the large-format version by Jan Brueghel of the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* (Kunstmuseum Basel).[37] With this technique, the cartoon would have been pricked along the outlines of the design, placed on the prepared painting support and then rubbed over with black pigment. The resulting dots would have been joined up with a sharpened piece of black chalk or graphite. The underdrawings are thus freehand drawings following pounced guidelines. The loose pouncing dust would normally have been wiped away, which is why pouncing is so rarely spotted in infrared reflectography.

Bruegel the Elder's underdrawing is a plain outline drawing without flourish or hatching for tone. It is remarkably similar in character to Pieter the Younger's and Jan Brueghel's underdrawings in their versions of the composition (fig. 6.13). This supports the idea that they all originally followed pounced guidelines. Even the areas underdrawn in red paint in Bruegel the Elder's version could be joined pouncing.[38]

No remaining pouncing dots are seen in the copies of the *Triumph of Death*. Intriguingly, in the original version there are several areas in the foreground and middle ground that might show pouncing dots alongside the underdrawing lines. These are not without ambiguity, due to the unsharp nature of the infrared images.[39]

The Lost Original Preparatory Material

Since Bruegel the Elder's preparatory material for the *Triumph of Death* and indeed any of his other painted compositions is lost, we can only speculate as to its original extent. For the *Triumph of Death*,

Fig. 6.13 Underdrawing of lansquenet figure in Bruegel the Elder (a), Brueghel the Younger (b) and Jan Brueghel (c), IRR

the present study suggests that he had a full-scale cartoon of the design, probably split over two sheets and pricked for transfer. These sheets could have been used directly for pouncing or there could have been substitute cartoons. Bruegel probably also had a separate model drawing showing the whole composition, perhaps smaller in scale. He must also have worked out his initial ideas in the form of sketches. What ultimately happened to this trove of working documents is unknown, but much of it will have passed down to Pieter Brueghel the Younger, as part of his legitimate inheritance as elder son.

Stylistic Differences in the Three Versions
Differences in style between the various versions are quite significant, which is logical given that the sons did not have the original version in front of them while making their copies. This is unlike the situation in the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, where Jan Brueghel's version closely mimics the brushwork of the original.[40]

The miniaturist-like rendering of the Order of the Golden Fleece of the emperor, for example, reveals Jan Brueghel as a painter of still life and distinguishes his version from the others (fig. 6.14). In the dead woman in the foreground, we also see

a different approach. Bruegel the Elder models the face using thick white brushwork with black outlines and shadows, swiftly suggesting the gaunt flesh with its deathly pallor; Brueghel the Younger paints the same face more graphically, using translucent paint and delicate hatching strokes to emphasize the cheek bones; while Jan models it with smoothly blended opaque paint, boldly defining the features. In general, Jan tends to paint with thicker, more opaque and blended paint than either his father or brother, as seen, for example, in their respective renderings of a lansquenet soldier's breeches (fig. 6.8). Finally, in still-life details such as the fish behind the cross in the centre background, each artist betrays his own characteristic brushwork.

Creativity in Jan Brueghel the Elder's Version
Jan Brueghel shows a certain level of creativity in his copy of the *Triumph of Death* (fig. 6.3). Even though he had a detailed model showing his father's original design, he takes liberties, updating the image here and there. For example, he adds a personal touch to the table setting in the lower right. Although his underdrawing shows all the motifs that we see in Bruegel the Elder's version, Jan updates the arrangement during painting (fig. 6.15).

Fig. 6.14 Emperor in Bruegel the Elder (a), Brueghel the Younger (b) and Jan Brueghel (c)
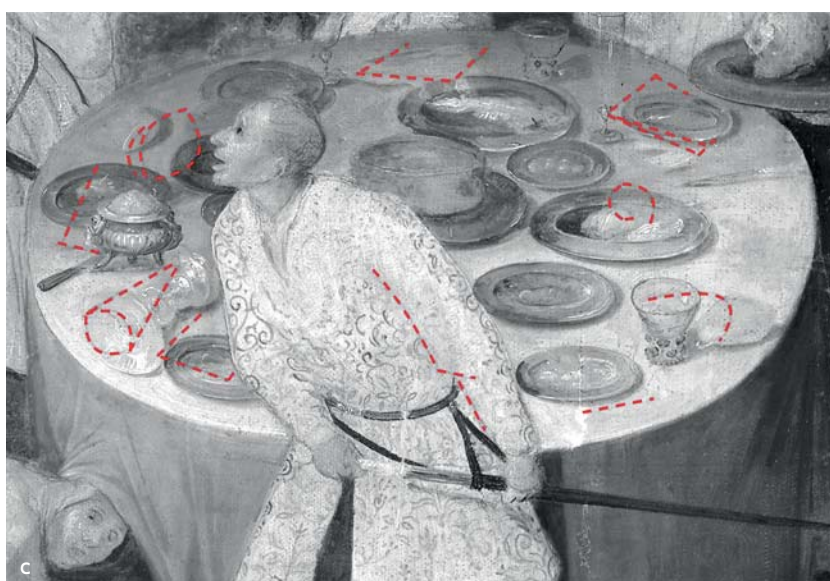
Fig. 6.15 Table setting in Bruegel the Elder (a) and Jan Brueghel (b and c, IRR). Jan followed his father's design during underdrawing (here reinforced by red dashed lines), but added more copious and luxurious tableware during painting

The feast is infinitely more opulent than in the prototype, with plates of luxury food, fashionable glass, pewter and a gilded tazza. Pieter Brueghel the Younger follows Jan's lead somewhat for this table display, particularly in the Cleveland version.[41]

The same applies to the pair of lovers in the lower right. Jan Brueghel's underdrawing reflects his father's underdrawing in this zone. However, during painting, he transforms their pose, adding a dog and updating the costumes (fig. 6.16). The lady now wears a standing lace collar known as the Medici collar, which was an alternative to the ruff and was at the leading edge of courtly fashion in the late sixteenth century, as in portraits of Marie de' Medici by Frans Pourbus the Younger. In Jan's painting, the couple might refer to real characters, possibly courtly patrons, but this remains speculative.[42]

A final example of Jan's inventiveness is the addition of several luxury vessels in the lower left foreground, no doubt intended as *vanitas* symbols. Close-up inspection and infrared reflectography shows that the overturned tazza was painted over a part of the yellow robe behind it, and therefore not planned initially. Goods such as these were collected by the type of people who would have been clients for Jan Brueghel's paintings, and he included such objects in his later allegories of Taste.

Pieter Brueghel the Younger's Version: Collaboration with an Unknown Hand
The lower right corner of Brueghel the Younger's Basel version (fig. 6.2) includes several figures painted in a discordant style. Their brushwork is thick, blended and lacks the artist's usual translucency and light graphic touch. Faces and figures are anatomically weak and somewhat caricatured. The underdrawing in this area is similarly atypical of Brueghel the Younger or his studio, being loose and approximate. Indeed, the drawing is completely disregarded during painting. The artist reworked the pose and costume of the lovers and transformed the figure standing in front of the table, exchanging his tunic for breeches and adding a foppish hat and ruff (fig. 6.17).

The probable early date of the painting – 1608 – and the fact that Brueghel the Younger produced a later version in 1626 preclude the possibility that the work was left unfinished at his death. It is more likely that in this rare case, and for reasons unknown, another independent artist completed this corner of the painting. Georges Hulin de Loo proposed David Vinckboons as a possibility.[43]

Conclusion
The technical study of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Triumph of Death* reveals that he planned the composition carefully prior to painting, but that he continued to improve his design during execution. An unprecedented discovery is his use of both black chalk and reddish-brown paint as underdrawing materials.

The analysis of the underdrawing of the original in relation to the sons' versions proves that the copies must have been based on Bruegel's preparatory material rather than the final painting, record drawing or engraving. Motifs abandoned or changed in the prototype during painting reappear in the copies. This means that the copies, to a certain extent, are witnesses to Bruegel the Elder's original design.

There is no evidence to suggest that either son saw the original painting at all; indeed, the copies' alternative colour schemes and the different appearance of certain motifs argue for them not knowing it, despite the remote possibility that Jan could have seen the painting in Vespasiano Gonzaga's collection in Sabbioneta during his stay in Italy.

The close correspondence in outline between the original and the copies shows that the sons most likely based their paintings on a full-scale cartoon of the composition inherited from their father, spread over two sheets. These self-same sheets would initially have been used by Bruegel the Elder himself to transfer the original design to panel. The similarly functional, but lively, outline drawings in all the versions suggest that the design was transferred in each case by pouncing. Sporadic
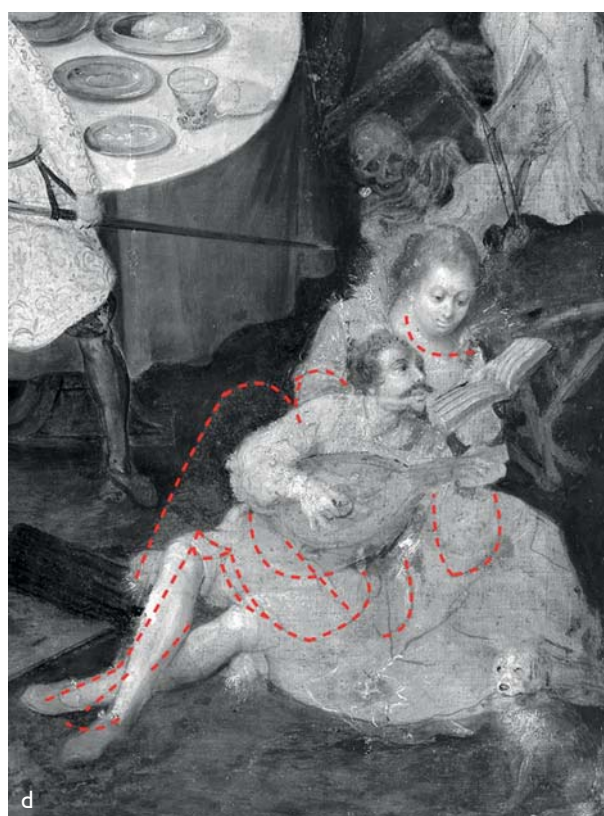
Fig. 6.16 Lovers in Bruegel the Elder (a and c, IRR) and Jan Brueghel (b and d, IRR). As in fig. 6.15, Jan's underdrawing, reinforced here with red dashed lines, follows the original's design, but he went on to adjust the pose and costume of the lovers during painting as well as adding a dog

Fig. 6.17 Detail from Brueghel the Younger's version (fig. 6.2), showing work of another, unknown hand; addition of hat and ruff during painting

pouncing dots may still be present in the original version. Smaller background motifs would have been transferred by eye, probably after a smaller model drawing.

While retaining the essentials of Bruegel the Elder's design in terms of proportion and outline, Pieter and Jan Brueghel's versions reflect their preferred colour schemes and personal painting styles. Jan even disregarded Bruegel the Elder's

design in some places and brought it up to date, adding fashionable goldsmith's work, among other things. In the Basel version, Pieter the Younger's characteristic touch is manifest in the underdrawing and painting style, with the exception of the table and figures in the lower right corner, which have been drawn and painted by an inferior unknown hand.

NOTES

For the documentation of the copies of the *Triumph of Death* by Bruegel's two sons, we warmly thank Dr Christine Rabensteiner, Curator of Collections at the Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz, and Dr Bodo Brinkmann, Curator of Old Masters at the Kunstmuseum Basel, who welcomed the KIK-IRPA team into their museums. For their practical help with the documentation process, we also thank Dr Paul-Bernhard Eipper, Head of Conservation at the Universalmuseum Joanneum and Amelie Jensen, former painting conservator at the Kunstmuseum Basel. We are most grateful to Dr Alejandro Vergara, Senior Curator of Flemish and Northern European Paintings at the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, for inviting us to examine Bruegel the Elder's *Triumph of Death* during the 2017–18 conservation-restoration and for sharing the Prado's new high-resolution photography and scientific imagery. We also thank María Antonia López de Asiaín, painting conservator, and José de la Fuente Martínez, panel conservator, for their discussions with us and insights on Bruegel's painting and its conservation treatment during our visit to the Prado on 20 March 2018. We are also grateful to Laura Alba Carcelén, conservation scientist at the Prado, for providing the infrared reflectography and radiography. We thank Molly Faries for sharing with us her infrared reflectography documentation of the version that was formerly in the Mildred Andrews Fund, Cleveland, OH. Finally, we thank the KIK-IRPA team for their dedication and hard work on the mission in Graz and Basel: Sophie De Potter (infrared reflectography), Jean-Luc Elias (photography) and Said Amrani (driver and assistant).

1   Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, oil on oak panel, 116.1 × 162 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. P001393. For provenance, see below and also <museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/artwork/the-triumph-of-death/d3d82b0b-9bf2-4082-ab04-66ed53196ccc>.

2   Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *The Triumph of Death*, oil on panel, 123.3 × 166.5 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel, inv. G1995.29 (Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, cat. E199). Provenance: before 1995 private Swiss collection; gifted to the Kunstmuseum Basel in 1995.

3   Jan Brueghel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, oil on canvas transferred from panel, 119.3 × 164.5 cm, Graz, Landesmuseum Joanneum, Alte Galerie, inv. 58. On this painting, see Biedermann et al. 1995, pp. 58–61, and Ertz and Nitze-Ertz 2008–10, vol. 3, cat. 542, pp. 1164–8. Provenance: acquired by Prince Johann Seyfried von Eggenberg in Vienna in 1674; 1713

mentioned in the princely Eggenberg inventory as 'Universalot von Prigl'; noted in Herberstein inventory in 1723; later in the collection of Count Brandis in Marburg; 1881 purchase by the State Committee (Biedermann et al. 1995, cat. 58).

4   See Currie and Allart 2017.

5   See López de Asiaín et al. 2019, for detailed observations on this panel during the conservation treatment. See also Van Schoute, Verougstraete and Garrido 1995.

6   We thank José de la Fuente Martínez, panel painting conservator at the Prado, for this information. The reverse of the painting had been planed prior to cradling for a former conservation treatment and the dowels are therefore now exposed.

7   Peter Klein (dendro ID P1393).

8   We are grateful to Maite Jover de Celis, conservation scientist at the Prado, for discussing the dendrochronology with us and allowing us to cite her unpublished results.

9   We thank Pascale Fraiture for examining Maite Jover de Celis's dendrochronological data on the *Triumph of Death* and comparing them with her data on more than 2,000 individual series from Flemish paintings, including several by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Pascale Fraiture, personal communication, 3 May 2019.

10   For more on this common late sixteenth to early seventeenth-century northern practice, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 1, pp. 246–8 (for Bruegel the Elder) and vol. 3, pp. 732–3 (for Brueghel the Younger and his contemporaries).

11   In the artist's Cleveland version (see below), the date on the funerary banners corresponds to the painted inscription in the lower left.

12   For stylistic comparisons of works from Pieter Brueghel the Younger's studio, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 3, chapter 6, 'Searching for the Hand of Pieter Brueghel the Younger', pp. 784–814; see also ibid., vol. 3, 'Appendix VI: Attribution in Pieter Brueghel the Younger's Production', pp. 1017–21.

13   Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, cat. E200; Tokyo 1995, p. 115; Marlier/Folie 1969, pp. 103 and 107. Provenance: Sotheby's, New York, 27–28 January 1999, lot 271; Mildred Andrews Fund; Peter Putnam collection, Cleveland, OH, USA (d. 1987); purchase by Peter Putnam in Switzerland in 1948; sale Galerie Le Roi, Brussels, 4–5 March 1936, lot 6 (as 'Bruegel (Pierre) dit le Vieux, Ecole de', with black and white illustration); formerly in collection of widow of Charles Kreglinger.

14   See extract from Robert Shepherd's August 1991 report in Corcoran 1995, p. 14. Hélène Verougstraete and Roger Van Schoute, who examined the painting at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1990 and studied its iconography, read the inscription on the funerary banners as '1626', which corresponds to the date in the lower left. They interpreted the date and the inscriptions in the lower centre on banner motifs as a joint commemoration of Jan Brueghel and his children's death and the centenary of Bruegel the Elder's birth (see Verougstraete and Van Schoute 1993).

15   See extracts from Molly Faries's 1988 and 1990 reports in Corcoran 1995, pp. 11–13. For comparative studies of the various versions of the *Triumph of Death*, see Folie and Van Hauwaert-Thomaes 1995, and Klaus Ertz's chapter in Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, pp. 257–74.

16   Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, cat. E201; Díaz Padrón 1980, pp. 300–03. Provenance: 1980 Mallo collection; Sotheby's, London, 10 July 1974, no. 78; before 1974 collection of Sacheverell Sitwell.

17   Klaus Ertz questions the painting's dating and places it in the second decade of the seventeenth century, based on his opinion that the still life on the table, the type of clothing of the lovers and the use of a canvas as support are all too modern to justify a 1597 dating (Antwerp 1998, p. 79; Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, p. 260; Ertz and Nitze-Ertz 2008–10, vol. 3, p. 1166).

18   We thank Paul-Bernhard Eipper, painting conservator at the Universalmuseum Joanneum, for sending us the museum's conservation notes on Jan Brueghel's *Triumph of Death*.

19   Vienna, Sammlungen des Fürsten von Liechtenstein, inv. 1134 (Marlier/Folie 1969, pp. 103 and 106; Ertz 1979, cat. 45; Folie and Van Hauwaert-Thomaes 1995; Antwerp 1998, p. 79; Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, pp. 260–61; and Ertz and Nitze-Ertz 2008–10, vol. 3, pp. 1166–8). The signature and date, 'BRVEGEL 1597', proved to be false and were removed during restoration (Antwerp 1998, p. 79). We have not examined this painting so cannot comment on its attribution.

20   For the underdrawing in the Detroit *Wedding Dance*, see You, Hanspach-Bernal and Bisulca, Chapter 9 in the present volume; for the underdrawing in the *Tower of Babel* and the *Return of the Herd*, see <insidebruegel.net>.

21   Burnstock et al. 2016, pp. 32–4 and fig. 12. On the use of red underdrawing in a painting by Bruegel, see also Haack Christensen et al., Chapter 7 in the present volume.

22 For previous comparative studies of the various versions of the *Triumph of Death*, see Folie and Van Hauwaert-Thomaes 1995 and Klaus Ertz's chapter on the composition in Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, pp. 257–74.

23 Folie and Van Hauwaert-Thomaes 1995, p. 21.

24 Verougstraete and Van Schoute 1993, p. 214.

25 Denunzio 2011.

26 Ibid., pp. 8–9 and 15. For a detailed provenance from after 1591 until the present day, see also the Prado website: <museodel-prado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-triumph-of-death/d3d82b0b-9bf2-4082-ab04-66ed53196ccc>.

27 There are no traces of these running figures in normal light or in the X-radiograph. We discussed them with María Antonia López de Asiaín, who carried out the recent conservation treatment. She does not consider that this zone has been overcleaned and thinks that these figures never featured in the paint layer.

28 Yoko Mori (personal communication) suggests that Mayken Verhulst, widow of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, may have made such record copies. As an artist herself, she would have known how important it was to keep records of her son-in-law's work for the next generation.

29 In the Basel version, abrasion damage and retouching in the sky above the execution scene negates some of the details, including the breaking wheel to the left and the man hanging on the gallows on the far right. The sketchy indication of the breaking wheel and hanging victim is clearly visible in the underdrawing.

30 In the Basel version, this chain is only present in the underdrawing. It is present in the paint layer of the former Cleveland version.

31 Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 2, pp. 344–79. See also Currie, Chapter 5 in the present volume.

32 Duckwitz 2001.

33 Currie and Allart 2017.

34 We thank María Antonia López de Asiaín for her precise measurements of the four sides of the original panel, which enabled us to carry out a correctly scaled overlay of the copies' tracings onto the photograph of the original version.

35 For a summary of the use of pricked cartoons in Brueghel the Younger, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 746–52.

36 See ibid., vol. 2, pp. 348–57.

37 On Jan Brueghel's large-format version of the *Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*, see Currie and Allart 2017.

38 Pouncing joined up by outlines in a liquid medium was common practice in the making of copies in the former Southern and Northern Netherlands: for example, in works by or after Aelbrecht Bouts (see Henderiks 2011) and by Gerard David (see Ainsworth 1993, pp. 21–3, and Ainsworth 1998, pp. 295–301). For an illustration of liquid underdrawing over pouncing in a copy after Marinus van Reymerswaele, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 3, p. 941, fig. 627. For an overview of the use of pouncing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and examples of joined pouncing in a liquid medium, see Currie and Allart 2012, vol. 3, pp. 939–47.

39 There are possible dots around a horse's eye and mouth, a figure's legs, a skull, for the two running figures and for a creature in the lower right.

40 See Currie and Allart 2017.

41 See Verougstraete and Van Schoute 1993 for discussion of the original features in Brueghel the Younger's Cleveland version (1626), which includes banners with inscriptions, and a cake with ten sprigs on the table.

42 Other authors have suggested the possibility that these two figures are portraits. Ertz, for example, proposes Rubens as the lute player, as a nod to his friendship with Jan Brueghel (Ertz 1998–2000, vol. 1, p. 1166).

43 Van Bastelaer and Hulin de Loo 1907, p. 301.