

KLAAS MULLER

M A A R T E N V A N C L E V E

A Robbery

After the death of Pieter Brueghel the Elder in 1569, there was enormous demand for paintings in his genre. The master produced only a limited number of paintings (around 40 to 50), and a large proportion of these were already in Vienna at that time. He was widely copied due to high demand, including by Maarten Van Cleve I and II, Pieter Balten and later his son Pieter Brueghel the Younger. Other painters such as Jacob and Abel Grimmer, Hans Bol and Frans Boels were also inspired by Brueghel's oeuvre.

However, our painting is not based on a composition by the master and the representation appears to be an original creation by the painter, as indicated by various pentimenti and the fluid style (in Brueghel's tradition). The work can be dated to around 1570-80 and is beautifully painted.

In those times, merchants returning from the market were sometimes attacked by soldiers and robbers. In the 1560s and 1570s, Spanish mercenaries were paid less and less and began to mutiny or attack innocent civilians and traders. The severe punishments imposed had little effect, and the insecurity on the roads and between villages and towns only decreased at the end of the 16th century.

This was a popular theme in 16th-century painting, depicted by Pieter Bruegel I and II and Maarten Van Cleve, among others, as a form of social criticism. The genre of "robberies" remained popular well into the 17th century, and the subject gradually became less of a reality during, for example, travel or journeys between marketplaces.

Oil on panel, 24 x 34.5 cm (9 1/2 x 13 5/8 inches)

In a Flemish wooden carved frame around 1600

