

Bruegel's iconic Tower of Babel travels from the Maas to the Amstel

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen is loaning the world-famous painting 'The Tower of Babel' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder to the Hermitage Amsterdam, a gesture of solidarity with the museum on the Amstel. The painting can be admired there from 26 July.



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The famous painting '[The Tower of Babel](#)' (c.1568) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c.1525-1569), one of the highlights of the museum's collection, is to be shown at Hermitage Amsterdam as part of the series of focus exhibitions 'Dutch Heritage Amsterdam'. The painting has been removed from the current presentation '[Highlights from the Museum Collection](#)' at Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen and will be examined by conservators in the Depot's restoration studios before being safely transported to Amsterdam in a climate-controlled case.

The presentation of 'The Tower of Babel' in Amsterdam will be officially opened on Tuesday 26 July in the presence of Annabelle Birnie, director of Hermitage Amsterdam. Throughout the summer, favourite works from the Netherlands' major museums, the Rijksmuseum, the Mauritshuis and Van Gogh Museum, have been shown in the series of collaborative exhibitions under the title '[Dutch Heritage Amsterdam](#)'. The series concludes with this exceptional loan from Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. Bruegel's masterpiece can be seen exclusively in the Hermitage for five weeks, until Sunday 28 August. It has been replaced in the current presentation in the Depot by the painting '[Isaiah](#)' (1442-45) by Barthélemy d'Eyck.

'This loan is extremely special because Rotterdam's world-famous masterpiece is never loaned to other institutions, or only in highly exceptional cases. Two nations that have been friends for centuries can no longer understand each other. The war in Ukraine has forced the Hermitage to break with Russia. The pride and confusion of tongues that underlie Bruegel's painting is an age-old story that has again become a reality. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen is honoured to contribute to this series of exhibitions with this iconic artwork, in recognition that collaboration is a commitment to continuing to build.'

— Sjarel Ex, director of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

'Thanks to the helping hand from our museum colleagues and the unique collaborations that have resulted, we are able to offer our audience a great programme. I am grateful and proud that we have been able to achieve this together in such a short time. It enables us to continue to enrich and surprise our visitors with world-class art in a unique setting. Behind the scenes, we are making plans for the future. That our doors remain open in the meantime is of vital importance to the museum.'

— Annabelle Birnie, director of Hermitage Amsterdam

Confusion of Tongues

The biblical story of the Tower of Babel is set after the flood that only Noah and his family survived. It was God's wish that Noah's descendants should spread themselves across the earth, but they did the opposite: they built a tower that would protect them from any future deluges. The first city built by the descendants of Noah was Babel in the land of Shinar. There King Nimrod had a tower constructed that reached all the way to heaven, an act of hubris that went against God's will. God punished the builders by giving each of them a different language, thus creating confusion. They could no longer understand each other and the building process floundered. From that moment on they coexisted in a 'Babel-like confusion of tongues'.

A 500-Year Odyssey

‘The Tower of Babel’ underwent an incredible journey from the moment it left Bruegel’s workshop 440 years ago until it entered the museum’s collection in 1958. Part of the painting’s journey can still be traced. Around 1600 the work was in Prague, in the collection of the Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II, together with other paintings by Bruegel. Twenty years later, it was back in Antwerp. We know from a seal on the back of the panel that a century later it was in the possession of Elisabeth Farnese, the second wife of King Philip V of Spain. The painting only resurfaced on the art market in Paris in 1935. The collector D.G. van Beuningen purchased the painting a year later for the vast sum of 120,000 guilders. ‘The Tower of Babel’ was acquired by the museum in 1958 together with the majority of his collection.

Dutch Heritage Amsterdam

The Hermitage, the museum on the Amstel, found itself in an exceptional situation after the break with Russia. Nonetheless, it quickly developed a series of exhibitions for the summer based on four separate masterpieces and partnerships with other museums, bringing world-famous artworks to the Hermitage building. The series kicked off with ‘The Milkmaid’ by Johannes Vermeer from the Rijksmuseum, followed by ‘The Yellow House (The Street)’ by Vincent van Gogh from the Van Gogh Museum. The current exhibition focuses on Rembrandt’s ‘Self-Portrait’ from the Mauritshuis in The Hague. ‘The Tower of Babel’ by Pieter Bruegel the Elder from Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen concludes the series (Tuesday 26 July to Sunday 28 August). Read more about the series at dutchheritageamsterdam.nl.

Note to editors, not for publication

Press invitation. Save the date. The press preview of the last edition of Dutch Heritage Amsterdam is on Tuesday 26 July. Entry from 9.30 a.m., programme starts at 9.55 a.m. Please register at pressoffice@hermitage.nl

ABOUT MUSEUM BOIJMANS VAN BEUNINGEN

The world-renowned art collection of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen has over the span of 170 years expanded to more than 151,000 artefacts, which includes some 63,000 paintings, photos, films, pre-industrial design and design objects, contemporary art installations and sculptures, as well as 88,000 prints and drawings.

**museum van
boijmans beuningen**

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