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Prado pulls two works from landmark Bosch exhibition

Dutch doubts over attribution led to tough action against retrospective in the artist's birthplace

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The Cure of Folly (Prado)

Nearly five centuries after the Netherlands went to war against Spain over independence, hostilities have broken out over a painter whom both sides have long admired and collected—Hieronymus Bosch. After a row over attributions, the Museo del Prado has taken the unusual step of cancelling two loans for the artist's greatest retrospective, which opened at the weekend at the Noordbrabants Museum in 's-Hertogenbosch.

The Bosch show represents an extraordinary achievement—in terms of its comprehensive research, success in reassembling so much of the oeuvre



and its elegant presentation. The London Guardian's critic, Jonathan Jones, describes it as "one of the most important exhibitions of our century".

Although the Noordbrabants Museum has no Bosch paintings of its own, it has brought back 17 of the 24 surviving works to the city

where the artist lived. These include the fully-attributed Haywain, from the Prado, which is the star of the show (the Dutch researchers date it to 1510-16). The very success of the Noordbrabants exhibition makes the attributional dispute with the Prado over other works particularly unfortunate.

The Cure of Folly had been promised by the Prado and is in the catalogue, but it was finally withdrawn a matter of days before the opening because the Madrid museum was unhappy about its deattribution and a television film about the Dutch research. Curators at the Prado are convinced it was painted by Bosch between 1500 and 1510, whereas the Netherlands-based Bosch Research and Conservation Project concluded that it was from the workshop or a follower, dating it to 1510-20. A Prado spokeswoman says that The Cure of Folly represents "a very important" part of its permanent collection and a loan to the Noordbrabants exhibition would not be justified.



The Temptation of St Anthony (Prado)

The Prado also cancelled the loan of *The Temptation of St Anthony*, regarded as autograph by the Madrid museum and dated to around 1490. The Dutch researchers believe it is by a later follower and done in 1530-40. The Dutch team also rejected the Bosch attribution of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, saying it is by the workshop or a follower (1510-20). It was not requested for the show.

Charles de Mooij, the director of the Noordbrabants Museum, told *The Art Newspaper* that he "regrets" the withdrawal of the two Prado works, since "we would have liked to have had them in Den Bosch". A Prado statement criticises the Dutch researchers for basing their attributional decisions on "extremely subjective stylistic aspects".

Bringing Bosch to Brabant

The Noordbrabants exhibition is the most expensive show ever mounted in the Netherlands, making it an extremely ambitious project for a regional institution. Although such figures are rarely revealed, De Mooij, the director, told *The Art Newspaper* that the show will cost €7m and the research €3m. With 250,000 visitors expected, this represents €40 a head (a standard ticket is €22, so the balance is mainly made up by sponsorship, primarily from the municipal, provincial and national governments). With 90,000 tickets sold before the opening, it will almost certainly be a sell-out.

The Bosch Research and Conservation Project, run by Jos Koldeweij and Matthijs IJssink, was a nine-year venture which conducted a meticulous study of the artist's surviving paintings and drawings, using the same equipment and specialists for each work, in order to get comparable results. Only two of the 25 collections refused to cooperate, the Prado (over two works) and Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts (one work), although London's National Gallery did not allow the visiting specialists to use the team's photographic equipment. Along with the exhibition catalogue, the project has just published a 608-page catalogue raisonné of the artist's oeuvre and a 460-page technical volume, both in English (published by Mercatorfonds, €125 and €120 respectively).



The Temptation of St. Anthony (Nelson-Atkins)

The research, particularly the infra-red images and high-resolution photography, along with the conservation work on nine pictures, led to attributional changes. Three of the Prado's paintings were demoted. The Last Judgment from the Groeningemuseum in Bruges was upgraded from workshop to the master, and dated to 1495-1505. The biggest surprise was the acceptance of a fragment of The Temptation of St Anthony at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, which is now dated to 1500-10.

Much more was revealed about Bosch's pictures. Traces of a beard were discovered on the face of the crucified female saint Wilgefortis in a triptych at Venice's Gallerie dell'Accademia, dated by the Dutch team to 1495-1505 (the saint miraculously grew a beard to make her unattractive to a pagan king who wanted to marry her). Conservation revealed another owl in Ghent's St Jerome at Prayer (1485-95, Museum of Fine Arts). The researchers may even have discovered an image of Bosch himself in a figure in St John on Patmos (1490-

95, Berlin Museums). A face of a bizarre monster assembled from parts of a number of creatures could well be a self-portrait. The figure, with a learned and serious-looking face, peers out from spectacles perched on the end of his nose.

The Noordbrabants show also unites dismembered works. These include The Ship of Fools (Louvre, Paris) and the Allegory of Gluttony and Lust (Yale University Art Gallery) of 1500-10, which were probably sawn in two in the early 19th century. For the first time they are being displayed together, unframed and truly reunited.

Among the omissions at the Noordbrabants exhibition is National Gallery London's The Crowning with Thorns (dated by Dutch team to 1490-1500, by National Gallery to 1510). The Dutch researchers state that "adhesion of both paint and ground is very good", but a National Gallery spokeswoman told The Art Newspaper that "for conservation reasons it is not able to travel very often". Perhaps surprisingly, the London gallery decided to lend it to the Prado later this year, rejecting the Noordbrabants request.

Initially the Noordbrabants Museum proposed to the Prado that they should collaborate on a joint exhibition, but the Madrid museum rejected this offer and is now organising its own show in May. Fortunately there has been at least limited cooperation, so the Madrid show will follow three weeks after the closure of the Noordbrabants exhibition and transport between the two venues will be coordinated.