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The Bosch research and conservation project (2010–2016)

In this talk a new international research project on the art Jheronimus Bosch (ca. 1450-1516) will be introduced to you.

In the summer of 2016, on 8th August to be precise, it will be 500 years since a mass was held in the chapel of the Brotherhood of Our Lady in St. John's cathedral in 's-Hertogenbosch 'ter lester exequi van Jeronimus van Aken' (for the funeral of Jheronimus van Aken). Jheronimus Bosch must have died, probably from the plague, in the first week of August 1516.

Bosch's artistic heritage consists of about 45 objects (paintings and drawings) and today, preserved and administered, cherished and guarded, it is spread across two continents, ten countries, sixteen cities and eighteen collections. In the lead to 2016, when the 500th anniversary of the painter's death will be commemorated by an exhibition in the Noordbrabants Museum in 's-Hertogenbosch, the Bosch Research & Conservation Project (BRCP) is studying this heritage anew with the use of modern methods.

In recent decades the historical context and anthropological and iconological approaches have played the major roles in the research into Bosch. The search for the symbolism in Jheronimus Bosch's paintings and the meaning of this symbolism continues undiminished. In addition technological material research has taken off. With regard to Bosch, this type of research began during the preparations for the 1967 exhibition in 's-Hertogenbosch. In the forty years and more since then technology has made enormous strides. Now there is the chance to use this technology and to return to the original source – the paintings and drawings themselves. The material aspect of the object is central to the BRCP research, and following on from this the technical data will be translated into an historical narrative and an exhibition for a wide public.

In a major undertaking, in collaboration with the owners of Bosch's works, the painter's work will be documented by means of high-resolution macro photography (visible light and IR). New IRR's will be made as well as radiographies where necessary. A team of researchers (art historians, conservators and photographers) will travel to the Bosch paintings to discuss and analyse them. In November 2010 the first data were gathered at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent (Belgium), concerning Bosch's *Carrying of the Cross* and his *Saint Jerome*.

In negotiation with the museums concerned past research results will be brought together and digitalised via a website and a Bosch-database. The combination of new and existing data, which for the first time will be available for comparison on a large scale, will put us in a position to re-evaluate the work of Bosch, and to do so with greater authority. The collection and exchange of knowledge by means of a network of Bosch museums and scholars will realise an enhanced view of Bosch for everyone.

The Bosch Research and Conservation Project is an initiative of the Foundation Jheronimus Bosch 500. The project is a collaboration between the municipality of 's-Hertogenbosch, The

Noordbrabants Museum, Radboud University Nijmegen, Queen's University Kingston (ON), and Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL).

Author Biography

Matthijs Ilsink is the coordinator of the Bosch Research and Conservation Project. This research project aims at examining and documenting all paintings by Bosch in the years leading to 2016, when it will be commemorated that Bosch died 500 years ago. This will also be the moment when, with an exhibition in the Noordbrabants Museum 's-Hertogenbosch the results of the research project will be presented and tested.

Ilsink studied art history at Nijmegen University (The Netherlands), where he also took his Ph.d. (2009, cum laude). Published as *Bosch en Bruegel als Bosch. Kunst over kunst bij Pieter Bruegel (ca. 1528-1569) en Jheronimus Bosch (ca. 1450-1516)*, his dissertation deals with the relation between Bruegel and Bosch, making a case for the awareness of the autoreferentiality of Bruegel's (and Bosch's) art. It is argued that the imitation of Bosch is means for Bruegel to establish this selfreferentiality.

As an assistant-curator Ilsink worked at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, for the exhibitions on *Pieter Bruegel, Master Draftsman* and *Jheronimus Bosch* (both 2001).