Netherlandish Culture of the Sixteenth Century

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Netherlandish Culture of the Sixteenth Century

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Marisa Anne Bass
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Among the fantastical frozen creations that populated Brussels during the city's 1511 winter festival were two ice sculptures of Adam and Eve.[1] The poet Jan Smeken, who immortalized the festival's monumental snowmen in verse, emphasizes that the first father and mother were portrayed 'nacht ende dach naect' ('naked both night and day').[2] Nor was the couple alone in appearing scantily clad and on public view. The mischievous god Cupid, a muscular Hercules, and a bathing Bathsheba spied upon by King David were all in the vicinity, crafted artfully out of the material that the Low Countries possessed most in abundance: water.[3]

The Brussels snowmen, born from the frozen Netherlandish landscape, are testament to a strong visual engagement with the nude body that was decidedly local.[4] It is striking that Smeken does not dwell on Adam and Eve's corporeal shame — an interpretation too often ascribed to the northern nude — but instead playfully remarks on their nakedness; in the poet's words, the two lovers are not sinful but 'suver ende reyn, als suster ende broedere' ('chaste and pure, like brother and sister').[5] Uncivilized yet noble, their bodies represent a time when mankind was not yet encumbered with the burden of social consciousness.

By contrast, the spectators of the winter festival knowingly encountered the figures of Adam and Eve in the postlapsarian present. The momentary collapse of time between the audience, the first couple, and the other Old Testament characters and classical deities on display was the source of the festival's entertainment value, but it was also more than that. The commingling of biblical and ancient narratives was foundational to the larger

1 I am most grateful to Matt Kavaler and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene for the invitation to participate in the 'Netherlandish Culture of the Sixteenth Century' conference in October 2012. I thank them and the volume's anonymous readers for their helpful comments on this essay. All translations are my own.

2 Jan Smeken, *D'wonder dat in die stat van Bruesel ghemaect was van claren ijse en snee, die wel gheraect was*, in Herman Pleij, *De sneeuwpoppen van 1511. Literatuur en stadscultuur tussen middeleeuwen en moderne tijd* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1988), p. 358, lines 37–40: 'Aen der Cappellen stonden twee ghelieven, | Suver ende reyn, als suster ende broedere, | Nacht ende dach naect, als Adam met Ieven, | Ons eerste vadere ende eerste moedere'.

3 Smeken, *D'wonder*, pp. 258, lines 49–52 (Cupid), 259–60, lines 85–94 (David and Bathsheba), 361, lines 125–36 (Hercules).

4 Pleij, *De sneeuwpoppen*, pp. 88–109, 259–73.

5 The canonical statement on the disturbing corporeality of northern nudes is Kenneth Clark's chapter 'The Alternative Convention', in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956; repr. 1990), pp. 308–47. See also Eric Jan Sluijter, 'The Nude, the Artist, and the Model: The Case of Rembrandt', in *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. by Karolien de Clippel, Katharina van Cauteren, and Katlijne van der Stighelen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 11–34 (esp. pp. 16–18); and Marisa Bass, '*The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries*, Karolien de Clippel et al.', in *CAA Reviews* (October 2012) http://dx.doi.org/10.3202/caa.reviews.2012.115 [accessed 6 November, 2016].

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sixteenth-century imagining of the past. From noble genealogies to city legends, history in the early modern Netherlands was invariably interwoven with myth and tailored to complement the venerable lineages to which its individuals and communities aspired.[6] Michel de Certeau has called this approach to constructing the past 'the writing of history', but the experience of the Brussels winter festival — with its many incongruous figures interacting on a shared urban stage — would have constituted something very different from the reading of Smeken's verses.[7] The viewer standing amongst the monumental bodies of these snowmen not only engaged simultaneously with characters from disparate narratives but was also faced with the fragility of historical images themselves. Soon Adam and Eve would melt back into the past, regressing from solid to liquid form in a demonstration of their material and corporeal ephemerality.

This essay explores a phenomenon that might best be described as 'the imaging of history' and that applies well to the snowmen of the Brussels festival. In using this term, I draw on Henri van de Waal's magisterial study of historical works that were produced in the Low Countries from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries.[8] Van der Waal employs this notion, which he calls *geschied-uitbeelding*, to account for images that interweave different strands of history, iconography, knowledge, time, and place within a dense visual field. The construction and potential resonances of such images, he argues, matter even more than their explicit subject.

One example that Van de Waal discusses at length is a woodcut from the title-page of Gerard Geldenhouwer's 1530 *History of Batavia* that depicts Adam, Eve, and their children in a lush forest setting (Figure 1).[9] Gerard Geldenhouwer (1482–1542) was a Netherlandish humanist who contributed, along with Erasmus and other local scholars in the early sixteenth century, to a burgeoning interest in the Batavians; as the ancient inhabitants of the Low Countries, the Batavians were renowned — according to Tacitus and other Roman authors — for their strength and martial bravery.[10] Geldenhouwer was the first to

6 For a useful overview on issues of identity formation in the early modern Netherlands, see Robert Stein, 'Introduction', in *Networks, Regions, and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300–1650*, ed. by Stein and Judith Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 1–18.

7 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

8 Henri van de Waal, *Drie eeuwen vaderlandsche geschied-uitbeelding, 1400–1800: Een iconologische studie*, 2 vols (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952).

9 Gerard Geldenhouwer, *Historia Batavica* (Argentorati: Christian Egenolff, 1530), fol. 1[r]. On the use of this print for Geldenhouwer's title-page, see Van de Waal, *Drie eeuwen*, I, pp. 157–63; Peter van der Coelen, 'De Bataven in de beeldende kunst', in *De Bataven: Verhalen van een verdwenen volk* (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 2004), pp. 144–87, 323–26 (esp. pp. 145–46 for Geldenhouwer's *History of Batavia*); Aart Noordzij, *Gelre: Dynastie, land en identiteit in de late middeleeuwen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), p. 299, Figure 22; and Bass, *Jan Gossart and the Invention of Netherlandish Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 97–98.

10 For Erasmus's 1508 adage on the 'Batavian ear', one of the first texts to foment interest in the Batavians, see Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmi Roterodami adagiorum chiliades tres, ac centuriae fere totidem* (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1508), fols 249[r–v]; Erasumus, *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, 9 vols (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1993–), II.VIII, no. 3535; and for an English translation see Erasmus, *Adages*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. by John N. Grant and Betty I. Knott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–), XXXVI, pp. 235–37, IV.VI 35. For further background, see M. E. H. N. Mout, '"Het Bataafse oor": De lotgevallen van Erasmus' adagium "Auris Batava" in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving', *Mededelingen der Koninklijk Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* 56 (1993), 77–102; E. O. G. Haitsma Mulier, 'De Bataafse mythe opnieuw bekeken', *Bijdragen en mededelingen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 3 (1996), 344–67; and I. Schöffer, 'The Batavian Myth during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *Britain and the Netherlands: Volume V, Some Political Mythologies: Papers Delivered to the Fifth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference*, ed. by J. S. Bromley and E. H. Kossmann (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 78–101.

Fig. 1: The First Family, from Gerard Geldenhouwer, Historia Batavica (Argentorati: Christian Egenolff, 1530). University of Amsterdam, O 60-348, fol. 1r.

publish a treatise exclusively devoted to this topic.[11] Van de Waal convincing shows that the *First Family* woodcut was not created for Geldenhouwer's treatise but was a pre-existing image co-opted by the publisher out of practicality. It was much easier to reuse a print than to commission a new one specifically intended to represent the ancient Batavians, whose features Roman writers had outlined only vaguely.[12]

11 Geldenhouwer, *Lucubratiuncula de Batavorum insula* (Antwerp: Michael Hillen, 1520). See also Geldenhouwer, *Gerard Geldenhouwer van Nijmegen (1482–1542): Historische werken: Lucubratiuncula de Batavorum insula, Historia Batavica, Germaniae inferioris historiae, Germanicorum historiarum illustratio*, ed. and trans. by István Bejczy and others (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), pp. 34–48.

12 Only in the later sixteenth century did Netherlandish artists begin to produce images of the Batavians based specifically on the descriptions in classical sources. See Van der Coelen, 'De Bataven', pp. 144–87, 323–26.

Yet even if the *First Family* was not produced as a depiction of the ancient tribe whom Geldenhouwer takes as his subject, the choice of this particular woodcut rests on the foundations of strong creative association. Geldenhouwer and his colleagues wishfully described their Batavian forebears as not only beautiful but also impressive for their natural vigour and affinity with the fertile lands they inhabited.[13] Adam, virile in his animal pelt, Eve, with her hair tied up prettily in classical fashion, and their throng of happy children in the wilderness comport themselves in a manner that could just as easily be equated with the simple life of the ancient Batavians as with the postlapsarian domesticity of the First Family. Without an existing repertoire of Batavian iconography from which to draw, the appropriation of Adam and Eve as representatives of a distant primitive people was a logical and evocative choice.

As I will endeavour to show, the *First Family* woodcut from Geldenhouwer's title-page is among a handful of images representing the narrative of mankind's origins that had precisely this polyvalence in the context of the early sixteenth-century Low Countries. Particularly at the Netherlandish court, where members of the nobility were cultivating a burgeoning interest both in the 'discovery' of the New World and in the newly rediscovered Batavians, artists responded by producing works that melded emerging fields of historical and ethnographic knowledge with established biblical and mythological narratives. The growing fascination with distant continents and ancient tribal ancestry lent itself to exploration in pictures. A still little-known painting entitled *Eve and Four Children* by the artist Jan Mostaert (*c.* 1474–1552/53), dating to around 1520, offers a case study — one even more complex than that of Geldenhouwer's title-page — in how the evolving conception of the Netherlandish past shaped the image of the First Family (Figure 2).[14] Mostaert's painting renders strange a familiar Old Testament story and, in doing so, performs an 'imaging of history' especially tailored to his contemporary audience.

Adam's Absence

In the eerie gloaming of the day or perhaps the first light of dawn, Mostaert's Eve sits with four children at the entrance to the darkened mouth of a cave. In the offing, beyond the gate and the canal that divides the family's makeshift home from the wilderness, the sun glows pale over a verdant field. Eve dominates the composition, her body monumental

13 Cornelius Aurelius, *De Cronycke van Hollandt, Zeelandt ende Vrieslant beghinnende van Adams tiden tot die geboerte Ons Heren Jhesum, voertgaende tot den jare M.CCCCC ende XVII* (Leiden: Jan Seversz, 1517), fols 11^{r}–18^{v}; Geldenhouwer, *Lucubratiuncula*, fols A3^{v}–A4^{r}; Geldenhouwer, *Historische werken*, pp. 42–45.

14 Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, tempera possibly with some oil on panel, 36.8 × 28.3 cm, inv. no. 1955.946. For past literature, see François-Xavier de Burtin, *Traité théorique et pratique des connoissances qui sont nécessaires à tout amateur de tableaux* (Brussels: L'Imprimerie de Weissenbruch, 1808), p. 196, no. 55 (as a work by Jan van Eyck); Kurt Steinbart, 'Jan Mostaerts "Erste Familie"', *Pantheon* 16 (1935), 378–79; Godefridus Joannes Hoogewerff, *De Noord-Nederlandsche Schilderkunst*, 5 vols (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1936–47), II (1937), pp. 461–62, Figure 227; Max. J. Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 15 vols (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1967–76), X, p. 86, no. 157; Philip R. Berk, '*Et Adam dilexit Abel*: Jan Mostaert's *First Family*', *Oud Holland* 96 (1982), 201–12; James Snyder, *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575*, rev. by Larry Silver and Henry Luttikhuizen (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 2005), pp. 418–20, Figure 17.10; John F. Moffitt, '"Een West-Indien landtschap met vreemt ghebouw": Jan Mostaert on the Architectural Primitivism Characterizing a "Golden Age" Reborn in the New World', in *Art and the Native American: Perceptions, Realities, Influences*, ed. by Mary Louise Krumrine and Susan C. Scott (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001), pp. 102–45 (pp. 103–04, Figure 3.2); and Michelle Moseley-Christian, 'From Page to Print: The Transformation of the "Wild Woman" in Early Modern Northern Engravings', *Word & Image* 27.4 (2011), 429–42 (pp. 437–38, Figure 8).

Fig. 2: Jan Mostaert, Eve and Four Children, *c.* 1520. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, inv. no. 1955.946.

compared to everything around her. She nurses her infant in a humble posture that immediately recalls the Virgin nursing the Christ Child, particularly the image of Mary resting on the flight into Egypt.[15] Mostaert may even have modelled her face and the delicate tilt of her head on the Virgins of his contemporary Bernard van Orley, to whom this Eve bears resemblance.[16] Along the same lines, the central child, wearing an animal skin and gingerly holding his younger sibling, recalls the pairing of the infant John the Baptist and Jesus playing at the Virgin's side. Yet despite these affinities, Eve's fur robe does little to conceal her soft form, and her exposed breasts and slightly parted legs clearly set her apart from the Virgin Mary. Mostaert's Eve is alluring and sensual, all the more so in the context of the strange world she inhabits.

Provocative details stand out in the otherwise sparse surrounds. An apple in the foreground immediately calls to mind Adam and Eve's fall from paradise. A pile of sticks and chopped kindling at the cave's mouth is an index of postlapsarian labour that could also provoke thought of the Cross and of mankind's redemption from sin.[17] The cave itself, with its small fire burning inside, might allude simultaneously to Mary's womb and to Christ's tomb, the bookends to the latter's mortal history. Again, however, these typological allusions do not diminish the primitive otherness of the family's remote abode: the sensual darkness of the cave; the shadow Eve casts against its rocky façade; the restive quiet of the wilderness where the potential for violence is always lurking.

The painting's upper register exposes this latent threat and the ramifications of Adam and Eve's sin through the fatal contest between Cain and Abel. Abel offers his sacrifice atop the cliff 's ledge, praying humbly before a fire that emits only the lightest smoke. Cain's fire, by contrast, burns red and black as soot. Cain arches his back and casts his eyes towards the heavens without any gesture of prayer, a posture that echoes the form of the dead tree trunk hanging ominously over the cliff beside him. To the far left, their fraternal conflict plays out in Cain brutally clubbing Abel to death with the animal jawbone in his upraised hand.

Adam, Eve, and their children were repeatedly cast as the typological precursors to the Virgin Mary and Christ in devotional images. The couple boldly entered the history of early Netherlandish panel painting from the side wings of *The Ghent Altarpiece*, in which Cain and Abel appear in illusory sculpted lunettes above the heads of their parents, and Adam and Eve themselves face inwards toward the central triumvirate of John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and God the Father. Yet Mostaert's representation of the First Family as

15 Several paintings of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt by Mostaert's contemporary Joachim Patinir provide a close comparison. Patinir often places the Virgin and Child in the foreground of wild landscapes replete with small background figures and narrative details designed to provoke prolonged contemplation. See. in particular. Patinir's *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, *c.* 1518–20, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P 1611, as in Alejandro Vergara and others, *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), pp. 182–93, no. 5. For further discussion, see Reindert L. Falkenburg, *Landscape as an Image of the Pilgrimage of Life*, trans. by Michael Hoyle (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1988).

16 See, for example, the representation of the Virgin Mary in Bernard van Orley, *The Holy Family*, 1522, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P 2692; Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, VIII, p. 110, no. 140, Pl. 119. The comparison to Van Orley was first suggested by Steinbart, 'Jan Mostaerts', p. 379.

17 This association surfaces even more assertively in an engraving after Francesco Salviati's design (*c.* 1530–60), *Adam and Eve with the Infant Abel*, which situates the couple under a large broken tree branch that forms a cross directly above the head of Eve. A palm tree in the background of the composition further ties the scene to the narrative of the Virgin Mary and Joseph resting on the flight into Egypt. See *Francesco Salviati, 1510–1563: O, La bella maniera*, ed. by Catherine Monbeig Goguel (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998), p. 67, Figure 2; and Luisa Mortari, *Francesco Salviati* (Rome: Leonardo De Luca, 1992), p. 300, no. 25.

an independent narrative subject has no obvious precedent in panel painting from the Low Countries. Instead, the painting finds its lineage in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, a popular medieval theological text that links Old and New Testament history. In the *Speculum* tradition, Adam and Eve are depicted preoccupied with their postlapsarian labours and, quite often, accompanied by the infants Cain and Abel.[18] This iconography migrated from manuscript to print at the end of the fifteenth century: a woodcut illustration in the 1493 *Nuremberg Chronicle* and a series of engravings representing the First Family by the Italian artist Cristofano Robetta, which riff on the compositions of Albrecht Dürer's early prints, offer prominent examples.[19] Around the same time, there surfaced a handful of illuminated and printed images representing families of wild men as idyllic primitives, which borrow from the iconography of the First Family in showing a nude couple living in peaceful harmony with nature; the addition of conspicuous body hair is often all that sets these wild figures apart from Adam and Eve.[20]

As such, it is not surprising that Mostaert found inspiration for his *First Family* in an illustration from Thielman Kerver's printed *Book of Hours*, which also belongs to this visual tradition (Figure 3).[21] First published in 1519 and repeated in several subsequent editions, the woodcut looks back to the images found in the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, but is notably divided into two distinct horizontal planes comparable to those in Mostaert's composition. The lower register pictures Eve nursing and Adam weaving a basket while the young Cain and Abel cavort between them. In the upper register, as in Mostaert's painting, the two brothers are depicted in fatal combat. The popularity of Kerver's composition in the Low Countries is attested by its direct iteration in an illuminated Netherlandish Book of Hours dating to 1535 (Figure 4).[22] Yet this source also raises a very pressing question: Where in Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* is the figure of Adam?

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18 See, for instance, British Museum, London, 1485–1509, Harvey 2838, fol. 5^{r}; and Berk, '*Et Adam dilexit Abel*', pp. 204–05.

19 Mark J. Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch* (New York: Abaris Books, 1984), xxv, pp. 531–36, nos 004, 008, and 009. See also Giulia Bartrum and others, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 244, no. 196; and Stephanie Moser, *Ancestral Images: The Iconography of Human Origins* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 40–43.

20 On these positive images of wild men, see Moseley-Christian, 'From Page to Print', pp. 432–38; Lynn Frier Kaufmann, *The Noble Savage: Satyrs and Satyr Families in Renaissance Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 35–41; and Moser, *Ancestral Images*, pp. 48–59. A particularly notable example is the miniature *Wildman, or the State of Nature* by Jean Bourdichon from the series *Four Conditions of Society*, *c.* 1500 (Paris, École des Beaux-Arts, Inv. E.B.A. no. MS 90), for which see also Emmanuelle Brugerolles and David Guillet, *The Renaissance in France: Drawings from the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris* (Paris: École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1994), pp. 16–19, no. 6; and Timothy Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), pp. 128–31 no. 32.

21 For Kerver's *Book of Hours*, see *Stundenbuchdrucke der Sammlung Bibermühle, 1490–1550*, ed. by Heribert Tenschert and Ina Nettekoven, 3 vols (Bibermühle: Heribert Tenschert, 2003), iii, pp. 968–76, cat. no. 117 (use of Rome, printed in Paris by Thieleman Kerver, 5 December 1519). For subsequent editions published by Kerver in which the same *Adam and Eve* is reused, see Tenschert and Nettekoven, iii, pp. 977–1003, cat. nos 118–20; and Tenschert and Nettekoven, iii, pp. 1008–1116, cat. no. 121a. As Tenschert and Nettekoven point out (p. 965), the visual program of the Office of the Dead — the section in which the *Adam and Eve* woodcut appears (fol. K2^{v} in the 1519 edition) — is particularly elaborate in Kerver's *Book of Hours* and also includes an Expulsion from Paradise based on Albrecht Dürer's woodcut from the *Small Passion*. Perhaps this expanded visual cycle is what appealed to Mostaert, although it is notable that other early sixteenth-century northern artists, among them Hans Holbein the Younger and Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen, also seem to have drawn inspiration from printed Books of Hours. See Stephanie Buck, 'The *Images of Death* and the Triumph of Life', in *Hans Holbein the Younger: The Basel Years, 1515–1532* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2006), pp. 117–23 (pp. 120–21); and Ilja M. Veldman, 'Doen Pietersz's Editions of Woodcuts by Jacob Cornelisz van Oostsanen and Lucas van Leyden and Illustrations in French Printed Books of Hours', *Simiolus* 35 (2011), 40–60.

22 Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, MS 74 G 9, fol. 74^{v}.

Fig. 3: Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel, from Hore deipare virginis Marie secundum usum Romanum, use of Rome, published by Thielman Kerver, 1519. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, PML 127772, fol. K2v.

Fig. 4: Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel, from Book of Hours, use of Tournai, 1535. Royal Library The Hague, MS 74 G 9, fol. 74v.

In the only extended study ever devoted to Mostaert's painting, Philip Berk argues that the large child on the right must in fact be Adam reaching down towards his sons Cain and Abel at the composition's centre.[23] Berk contends, with reference to exegetical sources, that the reaching gesture on the part of this putative Adam symbolizes his paternal preference for Abel and his simultaneous denial of the older Cain. However, to explain Adam into the picture in this manner is simply not convincing on a visual level. All the figures in the foreground register as children, and Adam seems truly nowhere among them.

In a closely contemporary print by Dirck Vellert (1522), a wild and almost naked Eve sits in the foreground with a child (presumably Cain, given the sinful implications of his gesture towards the apple) while a diminutive Adam is relegated, almost comically, to tilling the earth in the background (Figure 5).[24] Another rather awkward Netherlandish painting from the period, recently attributed to Mostaert and now in a private collection, follows the same schema, with Adam hard at work in the middle ground and a voluptuous Eve nursing in the foreground amid an even larger throng of children (Figure 6).[25] This panel painting, which is over twice as large as Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children*, also includes background scenes of Cain and Abel and is close enough in conception to the latter that a connection between them seems plausible. Early literature on Mostaert's painting likewise identified a shadowy smudge in the background landscape as Adam ploughing the fields, but today that identification is impossible to verify.[26] Regardless, in all these works, the emphasis is really on Eve as the precursor to the Virgin Mary, while Adam's role is much less significant. To understand Mostaert's absenting of Adam from centre stage, it is necessary to delve deeper into the work's likely function and reception within the artist's milieu.

Mostaert and the Netherlandish Court

Mostaert's painting is dense in narrative for its small scale. The work compares closely in size to Netherlandish devotional diptychs, which were designed for easy portability and repeated contemplation. Mostaert did produce at least one such devotional picture representing Christ's appearance to his mother in Limbo and his liberation of Adam, Eve, and other pre-Christian figures.[27] This subject is highly unusual for the diptych genre but comparable to *Eve and Four Children* in its concern with continuity between the Old and New Testaments. However, there is no technical evidence to suggest that Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* once formed a pair, and it holds integrity and interest as an independent composition.

23 Berk, *Et Adam dilexit Abel*, pp. 201–12.

24 F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, 72 vols (Amsterdam: Roosendaal & Rotterdam, 1949–2010), XXXIII, p. 188, no. 1 (5.6 × 4.1 cm, etching and engraving, signed and dated: *1522 D*V ĀGT 19*).

25 See Jan van der Stock and others, *In Search of Utopia: Art and Science in the Era of Thomas More* (Leuven: Davidfonds, 2016), pp. 320-23, no. 57, with prior literature (with a false monogram of Albrecht Dürer, 97.2 × 68 cm).

26 Both Burtin, *Traité théorique*, p. 196 and Steinbart, 'Jan Mostaerts', p. 379 claimed to see the figure of Adam ploughing in the background. Subsequent conservation photos that I attained through the kind help of Teresa O'Toole at the Clark Institute reveal a loss to the original paint surface in that area, which in-painting has rendered obscure. The conservation was done sometime around 1957 when the painting was transferred to its present panel.

27 *Christ Appearing to his Mother in Limbo and a Kneeling Female Donor with the Redeemed from the Old Testament*, divided between the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, inv. no. 13, and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, inv. no. 1930.76, both panels 26.7 × 18.8 cm. See John Oliver Hand and others, *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 192–99, 293, 320, no. 28.

Fig. 5: Dirck Vellert, Eve and Cain, 1522, etching and engraving. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. no. RP-P-1908-3647X.

In fact, the format and pictorial strategies of Mostaert's work bear close comparison to the small mythological paintings of his artistic contemporary Jan Gossart (*c.* 1478–1532). During precisely the same years to which Mostaert's painting dates, Gossart innovated in appropriating the intimacy of the personal devotional image, with which his local patrons were already so familiar, for the creation of scenes of classical lovers entwined

Fig. 6: Jan Mostaert (?), Adam and Eve with their Family, *c.* 1525. Private collection.

Fig. 7: Jan Gossart, Hermaphrodite and Salmacis, 1521. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. no. 2451.

in titillating and evocative poses. Gossart's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* (*c.* 1517), for instance, depicts Salmacis's lustful but thwarted embrace of Hermaphroditus on a panel almost identical in size to that of Mostaert's painting (Figure 7).[28] The scale of Gossart's picture invites close study of the naked struggle in the foreground, complete with its clever figural allusion to an ancient Apollo sculpture that Gossart had drawn in Rome; no less intriguing is the background detail of the gods answering Salmacis's plea for perpetual union and transforming the pair into a single hermaphroditic body, a metamorphosis that — as the pathetic tree stump beside them suggests — leads to a loss of reproductive potency.[29] Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* shares with Gossart's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* a focus on the human body as an acting agent within the untamed landscape, which is emphasized in both pictures by the rocky scenographic backdrop. Both artists portray the natural world as an arena to which their figural subjects were inextricably connected and as a site where narratives of mortal culpability and divine intervention play out in turn.

According to Karel van Mander's effusive biography of Mostaert, first published in 1604, the artist was indeed acquainted with Gossart.[30] Van Mander writes that Gossart approached his colleague for assistance with his most famous and monumental painting — the now lost *Middelburg Altarpiece* — but that Mostaert refused because he was much too busy with courtly requests from a certain high-ranking female aristocrat.[31] The Regent of the Netherlands, Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) is likely the aristocrat to whom Van Mander refers. Margaret, who employed Gossart in various capacities and owned his *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis*, also named Mostaert *painctre aux honneurs* ('painter with honours') on 14 March 1518 and received a New Year's gift from the artist in 1521: a portrait of her deceased husband Philibert of Savoy.[32] Although the original owner of

28 Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 32.8 × 21.5 cm, inv. no. 2451. See Bass, *Jan Gossart*, p. 109; and Maryan W. Ainsworth and others, *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance: The Complete Works* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), pp. 224–26, no. 32, with prior literature. Other small mythological pictures by Gossart that survive today are the *Hercules and Deianira* (Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham, 36.8 × 26.8 cm, inv. no. 46.10), the *Venus and Cupid* (Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 32 × 24 cm, inv. no. 6611), and *Venus* (Pinacoteca dell'Accademia dei Concordi, Rovigo, 59 × 29.9 cm, inv. no. 79). See Ainsworth, *Man, Myth*, pp. 221–24, no. 31; pp. 226–29, no. 33; and pp. 229–32, no. 34. For further discussion of the function and polyvalence of Gossart's small mythological paintings, see Bass, *Jan Gossart*, pp. 75–113.

29 For Gossart's drawing of the Apollo, see Ainsworth, *Man, Myth*, pp. 226, 378–80 no. 99.

30 Karel van Mander took a particular interest in Mostaert as one of his artistic precursors in Haarlem and was generally quite well informed about his life and works, even if he exaggerated Mostaert's noble standing. See Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, ed. and trans. by Hessel Miedema, 6 vols (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1995), I, pp. 174–77, fols 229^{r-v}. For commentary, see also Van Mander, *The Lives*, III, pp. 190–204; and Truus van Bueren, '"De beste Schilders van het gantsche Nederlandt." Karel van Mander en het Haarlemse cultuurbeleid 1603–1606', *Oud Holland* 105 (1991), 291–305. For Mostaert's biography and relevant archival documents, see Sander Pierron, *Les Mostaert: Jean Mostaert, dit le maître d'Oultremont, Gilles et Francois Mostaert, Michel Mostaert* (Brussels: G. van Oest, 1912), pp. 1–27; M. Thierry de Bye Dólleman, 'Jan Jansz. Mostaert, schilder, een beroemd Haarlemmer (*c.* 1473 –*c.* 1555)', *Jaarboek van het Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* 17 (1963), 123–36; James Snyder, 'The Early Haarlem School of Painting. Part III. The Problem of Geertgen tot Sint Jans and Jan Mostaert', *Art Bulletin* 53 (1971), 444–58 (pp. 447–51); and J. Duverger, 'Jan Mostaert, ereschilder van Margareta van Oostenrijk', *Aachner Kunstblätter* 41 (1971), 113–17.

31 Van Mander, *The Lives*, I, p. 176, fol. 229^{v}: 'Daer wort oock vertelt dat Ian Mabuse zijn hulp te hebben versocht in t'werck van d'Abdie te Middelborgh, dan Mostart sulex affloegh om dat hy was in dienst van soo grooten Vrouw oft Princes van de welcke noch by zijn geslacht is seker geschrift datse Mostart bekende haer Edelman te wesen'.

32 Although Mostaert's career seems to have been based primarily in Haarlem, no document places him in his hometown between the years 1516 and 1526. In addition to bestowing his honorary title, Margaret also presented Mostaert with a payment in thanks for his New Year's gift. See Duverger, 'Jan Mostaert', pp. 113–17. It has also been suggested that Mostaert's aforementioned diptych depicting Christ in Limbo was made for Margaret, given the likely identification of the female donor in the right panel with the Regent's mother Mary of Burgundy. See Hand and others, *Prayers and Portraits*, pp. 192–98; and Larry Silver, 'Old-Time Religion: Bernart van Orley and the Devotional Tradition', *Pantheon* 56 (1998), 75–84 (pp. 78–79). Meanwhile, Margaret employed Gossart to restore several older paintings in her collection and owned a handful of other paintings by his hand that appear in her 1523/4 inventory. See Sytske Weidema and Anna Koopstra, *Jan Gossart: The Documentary Evidence* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 30–32, nos 22–23.

Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* is unknown, it may have functioned in a manner similar to Gossart's mythological image, which Margaret of Austria kept in her personal study alongside other small and precious collectibles, including a pair of statuettes described as 'deux personnaiges de Adam et Eve nuz, de leton dorez, bien faiz' ('two figures of Adam and Eve in the nude, of gilt metal, and well crafted') listed in the inventory directly following the entry on Gossart's picture.[33] The context and reception of Gossart's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* suggests that Mostaert's closely comparable picture may too have provoked reflection not just as a devotional image but also as an object of curiosity and sensual appeal.

Gossart's exploration of mythological subjects was inflected by an interest in reviving the ancient historical foundations of the Low Countries, a pursuit in which Margaret of Austria and her fellow members of the Netherlandish nobility invested actively through relationships with humanist historiographers and engagement with local archaeological discoveries.[34] Among the most avid antiquarians in this circle was Gossart's primary patron Philip of Burgundy (1464–1524), from whom Margaret had received the *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* as a gift, complete with a faux marble frame that endowed the painting with the aura of an antique object.[35] The Batavian historian Gerard Geldenhouwer, whom Philip of Burgundy employed as secretary at his court, praised his patron's interest in all manner of ancient learning; Geldenhouwer also documents that Philip personally supervised the public display of an ancient inscription discovered on the shores of Zeeland near his palace at Souburg.[36]

Mostaert himself had connections not only to Margaret of Austria but also to the high noble Jan II van Wassenaer (*c.* 1483–1523), a courtier from Holland for whom the

33 See H. Michelant, 'Inventaire des vaisselles, joyaux, tapisseries, peintures, manuscrits, etc. de Marguerite d'Autriche, régente et gouverante des Pays-Bas, dressé en son palais de Malines, le 9 juillet 1523', *Académie Royale des Sciences des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bulletin de la Commission Royal d'Histoire* 12 (1871), 33–75, 83–136 (p. 110); and Weidema and Koopstra, *Jan Gossart*, p. 31, no. 23: 'Item, ung beau tableau auquel est painct ung homme et une femme nuz, estant les pieds en l'eaue; le premier bord de mabre, le second doré et en bas ung escripteau, donné par Monsigneur d'Utrecht'. The description of the Adam and Eve statuettes recalls the work of the sculptor Conrad Meit, whom Margaret also employed. See Renate Eikelmann and others, *Conrat Meit: Bildhauer der Renaissance* (Münich: Hirmer Verlag, 2006), pp. 68–71, no. 1; pp. 80–83, no. 4. For analysis of Margaret of Austria's collection, specifically Gossart's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* and Meit's *Adam and Eve* statuettes, see Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst, Wirken durch Kunst: Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 109–12, 196, 298–301, 305–07, 364–65, 408–09.

34 The humanist Jean Lemaire de Belges was active at Margaret's court and wrote an important treatise referencing an ancient tomb discovered outside Brussels in 1507. Lemaire records that Margaret's father Emperor Maximilian delighted in visiting the site. The illustrated manuscript of Lemaire's treatise is preserved in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, MS 3324; for a modern edition, see Jean Lemaire de Belges, *Des anciennes pompes funeralles*, ed. by Marie Madeleine Fontaine (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2001), esp. pp. 98–99. See also Bass, *Jan Gossart*, pp. 42–43, Figure 28; and Marie Madeleine Fontaine, 'Antiquaires et rites funéraires', in *Les Funérailles à la Renaissance: XII^e colloque international de la Société Française d'Étude du Seizième Siècle, Bar-le-Duc, 2–5 Décembre 1999*, ed. by Jean Balsamo (Geneva: Droz, 2002), pp. 329–55.

35 As described in the inventory reference (see n. 33), Gossart's *Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* had two frames, the first painted to resemble marble ('le premier bord de mabre') and the second gilded ('le second doré'). Gossart was a skilled painter of imitation marble and employed it frequently in his paintings.

36 On Philip of Burgundy's interest in local antiquity and Geldenhouwer's participation in this project, see Bass, *Jan Gossart*, pp. 45–73. See also Geldenhouwer's highly effusive and rhetorical biography of his patron, which references Philip's interest both in classical architecture and in reading ancient history. Geldenhouwer, *Vita clarissimi principis, Philippi a Burgundia* (Strasbourg: apud Christianum Aegenolphum, 1529), fols A6^r, B3^r; and Geldenhouwer, *Collectanea van Gerardus Geldenhauer Noviomagus*, ed. J. Prinsen, (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1901), pp. 232, 241–42.

artist painted a portrait that survives today in multiple copies.[37] Wassenaer was championed by contemporary Netherlandish humanists for his military feats in the war against the duchy of Guelders, which bordered Holland to the east and had a long history of invading its neighbouring province.[38] Wassenaer's victories resulted in crucial reclaimed territory for Holland between 1521 and 1523, and inspired the local scholar Alardus of Amsterdam to figure the courtier as a local hero who surpassed even great ancient warriors like Hannibal, Achilles, and Hercules.[39] Wassenaer himself promoted his personal claim to ancient lineage by ordering the excavation of the ruined Roman fortress known as Brittenburg, located just off the coast of his familial lands near Leiden.[40] Regardless of whether Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* was commissioned by a noble patron, his association with courtly circles would have exposed him to this particular current of historical interest.

In the same years, knowledge of local antiquity was also becoming accessible to a broader audience through the work of the Netherlandish humanist Cornelius Aurelius (*c.* 1460–1531).[41] Like Geldenhouwer, Aurelius made a keen inquiry into Batavian history, but he did so with a more targeted agenda than his colleague. Aurelius aimed to establish a strong link between ancient Batavia and the province of Holland; in a rhetorical flourish akin to Alardus's poem, he wrote that Jan II van Wassenaer was among the Holland noblemen descended from the original leaders of the Batavian tribe.[42] Although Alardus's treatise devoted to Batavia was not printed until decades after his death, he had already published a highly popular vernacular chronicle known as the *Divisiekroniek* in 1517, which promises in its full title to encompass the beginning of human history through the present.[43] Aurelius's

37 None of the surviving versions of Mostaert's portrait of Jan II van Wassenaer can be attributed to the artist himself, but the best version after Mostaert's hand — which includes an elaborate narrative background — is in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, 47 × 33 cm, inv. no. M.I. 802. See Jacques Foucart, *Catalogue des peintres flamandes et hollandaises du musée du Louvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 47. Another copy, probably from the seventeenth century, is today in Leiden (Stedeijk Museum de Lakenhal, 76 × 53 cm, inv. no. S 131). See M. L. Wurfbain, *Catalogus van de schilderijen en tekeningen* (Leiden: Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal, 1983), p. 232; and C. C. de Glopper-Zuijderland, *8 eeuwen Wassenaar* (Wassenaar: Gemeente Wassenaar, 2004), p. 15. On both the Paris and Leiden copies, see Hoogewerff, *De Noord-Nederlandsche Schilderkunst*, II, pp. 484–87; and Friedländer, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, X, pp. 15, 71–72, nos 29–29a. A small version was also recently seen on the market in London (Sotheby's, 6–7–2000, lot no. 23, 30 × 24.1 cm), and a drawing after the portrait appears in the Recueil d'Arras, see Albert Châtelet, *Visages d'Autan: le Recueil d'Arras* (Lathuile: Éditions du Gui, 2007), p. 242, nos 15–16.

38 For a useful summary of the history of the Guelders war and Wassenaer's involvement, see James D. Tracy, *Holland under Habsburg Rule, 1506–1566* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 64–89.

39 Alardus of Amsterdam, 'Encomium Iohannis Wasserheer Herois imprimis illustris', in Erasmus and Amsterdam, *D. Erasmi Roterdami de vitando pernitioso libidinosoque; aspectu carmen bucolicum, lectu dignissimum, cum scholijs Alardi Aemstelredami, cuius studio nunc primum et repertum et aeditum est* (Leyden: Petruus Balenus excudebat, 1538), fols E4^{v}–E7^{v} (fol. E7^{v}): 'I nunc et effer splendidis mendaciis | I nunc et orna magnificis elogiis | Marios, Iugurthas, Hannibales, Asdrubales, | Magnos Alexandros, Carolos magnos, item | Pylios, Achilles, Hectores et Hercules. | Quotquot fuerunt aut duces aut principes | Si unum in locum vel conferas vel adlegas | Non comparandi sunt quidem cum Wassenaer'. For Jan II van Wassenaer's biography and his role in the war with Guelders, see H. G. A. Obreen, *Geschiedenis van het geslacht van Wassenaer* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1903), pp. 38–41; P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 10 vols (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1911–37), II (1912), pp. 1528–29; and *Heren van stand: Van Wassenaer 1200–2000: Achthonderd jaar Nederlandse adelsgeschiedneis*, ed. by J. Aalbers and others (Den Haag: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 2000), pp. 58–65. The elaborate display of arms in Jan II van Wassenaer's funeral also vested him with the honour of an ancient hero. See discussion in Henk van Nierop, *The Nobility of Holland: From Knights to Regents, 1500–1650*, trans. by Maarten Ultee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 1–5.

40 As recounted in a manuscript preserved in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, MS 131, G 31, fols 3^{v}–4^{r}. See also *Heren van Stand*, pp. 59–60.

41 See the important study of Aurelius and his writings by Karin Tilmans, *Historiography and Humanism in Holland in the Age of Erasmus: Aurelius and the Divisiekroniek of 1517* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1992).

42 Aurelius, *Batavia sive de antiquo veroque eius insulae quam Rhenus in Hollandia facit situ, descriptione et laudibus*, ed. by Bonaventura Vulcanius (Antwerp: Apud Christophorum Plantinum, 1586), p. 12: 'His modo Wassenarii heroës absolute imperant, ex Claudio Civile et Cereale trahentes originem'.

43 Aurelius, *De Cronycke van Hollandt, Zeelandt ende Vrieslant beghinnende van Adams tiden tot die geboerte Ons Heren Jhesum, voertgaende tot den jare M.CCCCC ende XVII* (Leiden: Jan Seversz, 1517).

chronicle depends largely on medieval precursors in its account of historical threads like the imagined Trojan genealogy of the Netherlandish nobility. Nonetheless, it also augments this venerable lineage with an extended discussion of the ancient Batavians in its opening chapter.

Aurelius not only refers to contemporary archaeological finds confirming the Batavian presence in the region but also includes in his chronicle the first printed illustration of an ancient Roman artefact excavated from Netherlandish soil: a tile inscribed 'Exercitus Germanici inf[erioris]' ('the army of Lower Germany'), as the Netherlands were known in Roman times.[44] From the subsequent citation and use of Aurelius's *Divisiekroniek* as a historical source, it is clear that the passages concerning Batavia were the most eagerly read of the chronicle's chapters, presumably because they offered the latest and most exciting historical information.[45]

Aurelius situates his chapter on the Batavians directly following his account of Adam and Eve and the Flood. This seamless progression from biblical to ancient Roman times proves salient for considering the reception of Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children*. Beginning with the chapter on Adam and Eve, it is striking how closely Mostaert's painting resonates with Aurelius's account:

> Sien aten oec niet gecocte spise, uuten welcken te mercken is dat si weinich of geen vier gehaten hebben noch te coken noch te backen noch oec hen te warmen, ende hadden peltsen cleideren vanden vellen der scapen, ende woonden in die culen ende holen der aerden [...] Adam in den XV jaer nadat hi gescapen was teelde hi an Eve zijnre huisvrou enen soen geheten Caym ende zijn suster Calmana, ende waren de eerst van vrou ende man geboren. Ende daer na inden XXX jaer, heeft hi geteelt Abel ende sijn suster Delbora. Want Eva brochte altijt ter werelt tot eenre geboorte een knechtken ende een meysken, als Josephus de Juessche meester scrivet in sine cronike. Si leefden alle haer dagen in strenger penitencie, om der sonden willen der ongehoersaemheit, ende leiden een heilich leven verwachtende barmhertichteit ende ghenade alsoe grootelick, dat Adam begavet wert mitter gaven der prophecien, ende wert een prophete. Ende propheteerde vander incarnatie ende gheboerte ons Heren Jesu Christi [...] Dese Caym vermoerde Abel sinen broeder uut hat ende nijt, ende daer om wert hi van god vermaledijt [...] Ende Adam bescreide Abel sinen soen C jaer ende hadde gheloeft bi sinen wive niet meer te slapen noch te bekennen. Dwelck hem god ofnam, ende geboet hem de geloftenisse te breken. Ende als Adam oudt was was CC jaer ende XXX soe bekende hi sine huysvrouwe ende si ghebaerde enen soen gheheten Seth. Ende van dien sijn wi alle ghecomen.[46]
>
> [Adam and Eve] ate very little cooked food, which indicates that they had little or no fire either for cooking or baking or to warm themselves. For clothing, they wore furs made from the hides of sheep and they lived in the caves and holes of the earth [...] in the fifteenth year after his creation, Adam and his wife Eve gave birth to a son named Cain and his sister Calmana, and they were the first born of woman and man. And thereafter in his thirtieth year he sired Abel and his sister Delbora. This was because Eve always brought into the world at once both a boy

44 Aurelius, *De Cronycke*, fol. 92^{r}. See also Bass, *Jan Gossart*, pp. 100–01, Figure 72, and Tilmans, *Historiography*, p. 98. The tile represents one of several that were found in the early sixteenth century at the ancient site of Roomburg near Leiden. On Roomburg, see Chrystel R. Brandenburgh and Wilfried A. M. Hessing, *Matilo - Rodenburg - Roomburg: De Roomburgerpolder van Romeins castellum tot moderne woonwijk* (Leiden: Dienst Bouwen en Wonen, 2005).

45 Tilmans, *Historiography*, pp. 306–07.

46 Aurelius, *De Cronycke*, fols 2^{v}–3^{r}. Aurelius's account is closely indebted to medieval apocryphal writings on the life of Adam and Eve, on which see Brian Murdoch, *The Apocryphal Adam and Eve in Medieval Europe: Vernacular Translations and Adaptations of the 'Vita Adae et Eve'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–41.

> and a girl, as Josephus the Jewish scholar writes in his chronicle. And they lived all their days in strict penitence for their sins and their lack of faith. They led a holy life of mercy and peace so much so that Adam was endowed with the gifts of prophecy and became a prophet, and prophesied the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ [...] but then Cain murdered Abel his brother out of hate and spite. And because of this he was cursed by God [...] and Adam mourned Abel his son for a hundred years and vowed never again to sleep with his wife or to know her. However, God compelled Adam to break this promise when he was two hundred and thirty years old and so he knew his wife once again and she bore him a son named Seth, and it is from him that we are all descended.

Mostaert's composition parallels Aurelius's representation of Adam, Eve, and their children as a pre-civilized family. They live in caves, wear furs, and have only small fires and modest meals as comfort: a simple life that accords with the Christian ideal of humble piety. In this regard, Aurelius's narrative, which pivots on the moment of Adam's grieving over the murder of Abel, may also shed light on the first father's absence from Mostaert's painting. Perhaps in omitting Adam, Mostaert meant to recall his century of mourning and penitential estrangement from Eve following the tragic death depicted in the picture's upper left. The painting does include four children that might plausibly be associated with Cain, Calmana, Abel, and Delbora, suggesting that the temporal span of Mostaert's composition ends just prior to the birth of Seth.

Yet this passage from the *Divisiekroniek* also shows that Aurelius was less interested in Adam and Eve themselves than in how the couple's history prefigured the subsequent chapters of human history recounted within his chronicle, from ancient Batavia to present-day Holland. Along comparable lines, Mostaert's insistent allusion to the Virgin Mary in *Eve and Four Children* may imply that he deemed it less important to represent Adam clumsily weaving a basket in some corner (as he does in Kerver's *Hours*) than to imply his future counterpart in Christ, whose birth — according to Aurelius — Adam himself had prophesied. In Adam's absence, Eve's fertile body is no longer tied restrictively to the Old Testament narrative. Mostaert's representation of Eve and her children could be understood by his Netherlandish audience as the point of origin for their Batavian ancestors as well as their Christian faith.

Adam and Eve in the New World

Mostaert was not alone in harnessing the figures of the First Family as a means to evoke the unfamiliar image of other 'primitive' peoples. This approach occurs elsewhere in early sixteenth-century art and even in Mostaert's own oeuvre.[47] His best-known work is identified from its description by Karel van Mander as a *West-Indies Landscape* (Figure 8).[48] The

47 For a German Renaissance example of visual association between exotic peoples and Adam and Eve, see Stephanie Leitch, *Mapping Ethnography in Early Modern Germany: New Worlds in Print Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 63–99, esp. pp. 89–91; and Stephanie Leitch, 'Burgkmair's *Peoples of Africa and India* (1508) and the Origins of Ethnography in Print', *The Art Bulletin*, 91.2 (2009), 134–59.

48 Van Mander, *The Lives*, I, p. 176, fol. 229^{v}: 'Daer is oock een Landtschap, wesende een West-Indien, met veel naeckt volck, met een bootsighe Clip, en vreemt ghebouw van huysen en hutten: doch is onvoldaen gelaten'. For Mostaert's *West-Indies Landscape*, dated *c.* 1535, formerly in Haarlem's Frans Hals Museum, and the collection of the heir of Jacques Goudstikker, now in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (86.5 × 152.5 cm, inv. no. SK–A–5021), see Neeltje Köhler and others, *Painting in Haarlem 1500–1850: The Collection of the Frans Hals Museum* (Ghent: Ludion, 2006), pp. 559–61, no. 335; *Mostaert: The Discovery of America* (London: Simon C. Dickinson LLC, 2013); and Matthias Ubl, 'Scène uit de verovering van Amerika: Jan Jansz Mostaert (Haarlem *c.* 1474–1552/3 Haarlem)', *Bulletin van de Vereniging Rembrandt* 23.2 (2013), 23–27.

Fig. 8: Jan Mostaert, West-Indies Landscape, c. 1535. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-5021.

painting registers both the contemporary fascination with the inhabitants of the New World and the necessity of extrapolating from still meagre knowledge of their actual appearance.[49] In the early sixteenth-century Netherlands, Mostaert could have drawn only on scant textual and material sources. There were exotic American gold and featherwork objects housed in the collections of aforementioned nobles like Margaret of Austria and Philip of Burgundy, which hinted at the otherness and artistic skill of the distant culture that produced them.[50] In the anonymous Netherlandish painting of Adam and Eve's postlapsarian family mentioned above, the fanciful feathered accents and headdresses on three of the children in the foreground may allude precisely to these coveted objects (Figure 6). Along parallel lines, utopian descriptions by contemporary authors like the Italian scholar Peter Martyr imagine life in the New World prior to the Spanish conquest as akin to the ancient Golden Age, a time when humankind cohabited in blissful harmony and persisted simply off the land.[51]

Mostaert's *West-Indies Landscape* seems to favour this positive interpretation, and to share in the impulse to blur the lines between ancient, biblical, and New World history. In his horizontal composition, a strange encounter unfolds between the local inhabitants

49 Alessandro Russo, 'Horizontlinie, Point of no Return. Die Ankunft der Spanier an der Küste Mexikos in den Illustrationen des Codex Durán', in *Das Meer, der Tausch und die Grenzen der Repräsentation*, ed. by Gerhard Wolf (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010), pp. 317–28 (pp. 317–19) suggests the very schematic title woodcut of Christopher Columbus's *De insulis in mare Indico nuper inventis* (1494) as a possible visual model for Mostaert's composition. Russo also posits that Mostaert may have drawn inspiration for his fleeing nude figures from fifteenth-century Netherlandish paintings of the Last Judgment.

50 Paul Vandenbroeck, 'Amerindian Art and Ornamental Objects in Royal Collections: Brussels, Mechelen, Duurstede, 1520–1530', in *America, Bride of the Sun: 500 Years Latin America and the Low Countries*, ed. by Paul Vandenbroeck (Ghent; Brussels: Ministry of the Flemish Community, Administration of External Relations, 1991), pp. 99–120.

51 See Peter Martyr, *P. Martyris Angli mediolanensis opera. Legatio Babylonica oceani decas, poemata, epigrammata* (Hispali: Per Jacobum Corumberger Alemanum, 1511), fol. E1^{v}: 'Compertum est apud eos (velut solem et aquam) terram esse commune; neque meum aut tuum (malorum omnius semina) cadere inter ipsos. Sunt enim adeo parvo contenti, quod in ea vasta tellure magis agri supersint quam quicquam desit. Etas est illis aurea; neque fossis, neque parietibus aut sepibus predia sepiunt. Apertis vivunt hortis, sine legibus, sine libris, sine iudicibus suapte natura rectum colunt. Malum ac scelestum eum iudicant, qui inferre cuiquam iniuriam delectatur'. See also Moffitt, 'Een West-Indien landtschap', pp. 106–10.

and an invading European army storming across the hill on the far right. Although the New World subjects have been identified variously as a representation of the Brazilian Tupinamba tribe or as native North Americans, the painting is best understood as a fanciful and generalized encounter between the innocent savage and the conquering figures of civilization. On the far left, a naked couple reminiscent of Adam and Eve emerges from a rustic hut, emblematic of the postlapsarian but pre-Christian state of these New World figures. Here Mostaert draws on motifs recognizable to his audience so as to render primitive existence more readily comprehensible, but he also resists the portrayal of his subjects as 'savages', emphasizing instead the cruelty of the conquering foreigners.

The encounter depicted in the compositional centre of the *West-Indies Landscape* links back provocatively to a detail in Mostaert's small painting of the First Family. The artist encapsulates the foreign incursion into the New World through a single contest between a naked figure fallen to the ground and an armoured European raising a sword above his head. To the left of this encounter, a woman flails her arms in flight while another retreats with her two children: reactions that again signal the brutality of the invaders. The losing battle of the hapless native man against the armed soldier is almost identical to Mostaert's depiction of the fatal struggle between Cain and Abel in *Eve and Four Children*. This repetition is hardly coincidental; Mostaert employs the grouping yet again in his large narrative painting *The Expulsion of Hagar* to represent the combat between Abraham's sons Ishmael and Isaac.[52] While artists commonly preserve compositional motifs for reuse in their workshops, these reiterations of struggle in Mostaert's landscape compositions — across narrative and geographical boundaries — suggest more than a practice of mere convenience. They attest to a complex conceptual process underlying the imaging of history, which involved the same kind of associative strategy that underlies the *First Family* woodcut on the title-page of Geldenhouwer's Batavian treatise.

In returning repeatedly to the same emblematic motif across his oeuvre, Mostaert seems to recognize a parity between the narratives of humanity found in the Old Testament, the Batavian past, and the New World. In both *Eve and Four Children* and the *West-Indies Landscape*, the artist explores the tenuous boundary between virtue and violence that underlies human civilization. Mostaert's paintings, like the snowmen of Adam and Eve in the Brussels winter festival, participated in a much larger discursive field than their ostensible subjects might at first suggest.

Yet if the naked snowmen in Brussels, savage yet free of shame, embody prelapsarian man, the figures in Mostaert's *Eve and Four Children* hover on the precipice that divides past and present. Eve's polysemous body, prominent even to the point of displacing Adam altogether, stands as the generative point of origin not only for the immediate children pictured beside her but also for every other distant ancestor or people, whether the former Batavians on Netherlandish shores or the current inhabitants of a strange newfound continent. It is the story of humankind between a primitive and civilized state, between ancient and Christian times — far more than any single narrative — that Mostaert's painting proffered for its contemporary viewers to contemplate.

52 Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 94 × 131 cm, inv. no. 294 (1930.77). Abraham gestures with his right hand from the foreground of the painting towards the background, where Isaac and Ishmael are fighting. Ishmael was born not of Abraham's wife Sarah but of their handmaiden Hagar, and it was this altercation that prompted Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael from his home. As with Cain's murder of Abel in *Eve and Four Children*, the fighting scene is pivotal to the entire narrative composition.