



Fig. 25.1 The painted room of the Palacio de los Villafaña-Miramontes in Segovia



Fig. 25.2 Anonymous, *Hercules defeating the Lion of Nemea and The Sleeping Pedlar robbed by Monkeys*, c. 1563–80, mural painting, 118 × 45 cm and 118 × 157 cm, Segovia, Palacio de los Villafaña-Miramontes (Centro de Estudios Hispánicos de Segovia)

## Bruegel across Modes and Materials: Notes on a Painted Palace in Sixteenth-Century Segovia

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ABSTRACT: A residential dwelling in the Castilian city of Segovia is home to a little-studied cycle of grisaille murals that contrast glorious heroes from classical antiquity to contemporary paupers and vagrants. These late sixteenth-century paintings stem in large part from Netherlandish prints (or paintings based on prints) and among their surprising sources are engravings after Pieter Bruegel the Elder. The pictorial programme appears incongruous at first sight but is argued to follow a binary logic of ethical oppositions. The murals, in essence, cultivate a moral code of self-control, temperance and fortitude. This unusual case sheds new light on how Bruegel's prints were adapted and understood beyond the confines of the Low Countries. It also offers a unique glimpse into the original display and viewing conditions of his imagery in a domestic space of the sixteenth century.

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Much has been written about Pieter Bruegel the Elder's designs for etchings and engravings, but only few scholars have addressed the artistic translations of his prints to other media. Fragmented studies have shown how these widely disseminated images were adapted in often unexpected ways and places. Among the examples of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, one can point to French book illustrations,<sup>1</sup> German broadsheets,<sup>2</sup> Spanish calligraphy,<sup>3</sup> Brussels tapestries,<sup>4</sup> Elizabethan portraiture,<sup>5</sup> and even to a massive English

chimneypiece in alabaster.<sup>6</sup> Art historians, for obvious reasons, tend to discard such derivations in favour of the autographs produced by Bruegel and his progeny.<sup>7</sup> As a result, most of these cross-craft copies remain essentially unknown to scholarship today, even though they too helped to construct and perpetuate the image and fame of the painter in early modern Europe. They also testify that Bruegel's imagery already circulated far beyond the Low Countries during his own lifetime. By the turn of the sixteenth century, in fact, prints after Bruegel were found as far afield as Southeast Asia, when a Dutch trading company brought several thousand Netherlandish prints to the multicultural marketplace of Patani on the Malay Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> These examples are little addressed in Bruegel historiography, precisely because they cut across media and narratives of cultural geography that are usually kept separate.

This essay explores one particular instance of cross-media adaptation from late sixteenth-century Spain, a territory that has received only scant attention in terms of Bruegel's early reception. While the intersections between distinctive media form the basic principle of this case study, the contribution truly is about an original, site-specific context in which Bruegel's imagery was displayed and viewed. The iconography of the



**Fig. 25.7** Anonymous, *The Thin Kitchen*, c. 1563–80, mural painting, 134 × 180 cm, Segovia, Palacio de los Villafañe-Miramontes (Centro de Estudios Hispánicos de Segovia)



**Fig. 25.8** Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Thin Kitchen*, 1563, engraving, 221 × 293 mm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. RP-P-1885-A-9290