# The Green Feather



A Bird's-Eye View of the Groeninge Museum

An activity book for primary schools and families

In the museum there are **sculptures** in the rooms and **paintings** hanging on the walls. We have selected a few for you.

In this booklet you will find **explanations** of these works of art and a series of tasks to do.

You do **not** have to look at **all the works of art** in the booklet. **Choose** the works of art you would like to know more about and **look for them** in the museum.

Remember! Always keep **one metre away** from the works of art. You don't have to poke your nose into a painting to see it properly! **Have fun!** You are bound to make some exciting discoveries!

And yes, there's also a **green parrot** flying around. He escaped from a **painting by Jan van Eyck.** He thinks he knows everything better... but in fact he means well!

Pardon me, but I'm not a parrot: I'm a ring-necked parakeet!

When you arrive you receive a **green feather** from this parro... er... parakeet.

Which work of art in this booklet do you think deserves this feather?

Look round carefully in the museum during your visit and choose the most beautiful, the funniest, the best work of art!

Before you go home again, you can hang the feather on the board in the entrance hall next to the work of art you chose! Has your work of art already received lots of feathers from other children? Or are you its only admirer?





This painting tells the ancient Persian story of **Sisamnes the judge.**He let himself be **bribed** into pronouncing an **unjust verdict.**For this crime, King Cambyses imposed a **horrible punishment** on Sisamnes!

Can you see what it was?

Look for

detail comes

the painting this

Oh no, it's really too awful! I can hardly bear to look...

Why did Gerard David do such a scary painting?

This painting used to hang in Bruges' **town hall.** It was meant to remind the **aldermen**, who in the Middle Ages were also **judges**, to be **just** in their judgements.

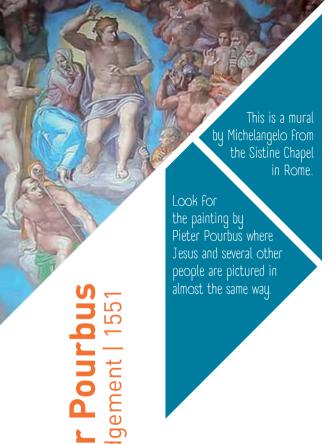
The painting is composed a bit like a **strip cartoon**.

A painting often shows more than one point in a story, but here you see the whole story in a single work.



Look for the following parts of the story in the painting:

- 1. Sisamnes receiving a purse of money in front of his house.
- 2. Sisamnes being accused of several crimes. King Cambyses counting them on his fingers.
- 3. Sisamnes being skinned alive.
- 4. Otanes, Sisamnes' son, succeeding his father as a judge. He has to sit on a seat upholstered with his father's skin!



Like many of the pictures in the first four rooms of the museum, this work of art tells a **Bible story**: the **Last Judgement.** 

In this story **Jesus passes judgement on the dead.**People who have led a **good life** can go to **heaven.**He sends the **sinners** (= bad people) to **hell.** 

At the bottom of the painting you see **people rising up out of their graves.** 

Can you see who is dragging the bad people down into hell? Who is raising the good people up to heaven?



I think Jesus will let me go to heaven!

Next to Jesus you can see other Bible figures such as the **Apostles** (= Jesus' 12 best friends) and a whole lot of **saints.** 

Which character in this painting do you think is portrayed best? Tell us why.

Can you see the instrument that's pictured here in the painting too? What instrument is it?

The man holding it is **King David.**The instrument is his **attribute.**An attribute is an **object or animal** by which you can **recognise** a saint and which **tells us something about their life.** 





Maybe there's even a comical parakeet there?

This work was painted by a close assistant to the master-painter Jheronimus Bosch.

It is a very **special** painting. Even at the time it was done it was very unusual.

## The artist depicted heaven, earth and hell.

In which panel can you see heaven? And where is hell? Where did the artist paint most of the people?

The artist painted **the earth** as he imagined it on the middle panel. Does this earth look more like heaven or hell?

The people are behaving so badly that it already seems like hell!

Look for **Jesus** in this painting. Can you see the **objects to the left and right** of him? They refer to **heaven and hell.** We call them **symbols.** 

What object symbolises hell? Here's a hint; Jesus is pointing the object downwards, in the direction of hell! Can you also see which object is pointing to heaven?





Do you know who these people are? The title of the painting contains another word for Mary and her child. What is it? Can you find the painter's name on the title panel too?

Jan van Eyck was the first artist who could paint marvellously well with **oil paint.** 

He painted on **wooden panels.** They are made of several planks glued together and then sanded smooth.

By applying **lots of coats of paint on top of each other**, Jan van Eyck was able to depict everything **very precisely.** People seem to be made of flesh and blood, gold glitters and the fabrics are so splendid that you want to touch them. But of course you mustn't! But it doesn't matter, as you can 'feel' this painting with your eyes!

Which material feels cold?
Which bit appears very soft?
Can your eyes 'feel' the difference between Mary's hair and her dress?

This is **St George**. He killed the dragon! St George is a **soldier saint**.

How can you tell this is true?

The title of the painting also includes this man's name. He **ordered this work of art** from the painter. He was an important man in the Church and had the **same first name** as the **saint** standing behind him.

Do you have a name saint? Or do your mum or dad? If so, do you know which one?

This is **St Donatian.** He **protected the Bruges church** for which this painting was intended. Someone like this is called a **patron saint.** Unfortunately he was not able to protect his church very well, because it was demolished in around 1800...

He is **Willem Moreel**, an important Bruges politician. He commissioned this **triptych** from the painter Hans Memling. Behind Willem is his **name saint**, William of Maleval.

This painting is **one of the first family portraits** painted in the Southern Netherlands. In the right-hand panel you can see **Willem's wife Barbara**, her **name saint** and their **daughters**. Two more daughters were born after this panel was painted.

Can you find their sons in the painting too? How many children are there in this family? And what about in your family?

Large families were very common at that time!



Can you find the painting this man

appears in?

## In the **middle panel** you can see **St Christophe**r, who has crossed the river with the baby Jesus on his shoulders. The **flowering staff** is his **attribute**.

People **recognised the saints** by the attribute they carried with them. On the left you can see **St Maurus** with a **curved staff** and an **open book**, on the right **St Giles** with a **deer** and an **arrow in his arm.** These saints are a reference to the **family names** of the painter's client: Moreel and Van Hertsvelde (Moreel is believed to be derived from Maurus and hert is Dutch for deer).

Attributes tell us something about a saint's life. Which attribute would you like to be portrayed with if you were a saint? Why?

Saint Ring-Necked Parakeet... Wouldn't that be a good name for me?

Have a look at the **back of the side panels** of this painting too. They are also very **finely finished!** It was these outer panels that the faithful got to **see the most.** The triptych installed in St James' Church in Bruges was **only opened on Sundays and holidays.** 



This is **St Luke**, the **patron** saint of drawers and painters.

This work of art is a **copy** of a **painting** by the famous artist Rogier van der Weyden. Lots of painters learnt their skills from master Rogier or made copies of his paintings. At that time it was **quite normal** to copy the paintings of great masters.

## **Don't forget:**

there were no photocopiers or cameras in those days. This copy really was painted!



Turn this card over and compare the St Luke in the previous painting with the one in the painting you are standing in front of now.

Which details make it clear that the painter, Lancelot Blondeel, had taken Rogier van der Weyden's work as an example?

But there are also **differences** between the two works of art! In the painting by Rogier van der Weyden, St Luke is drawing the portrait of the Virgin and Child with a **silver stylus**.

How is he doing the portrait in this painting?

Can you see the boy at the back on the right? What is he doing?

He is an **apprentice** who is grinding the **paint** to a fine paste. At that time you couldn't buy paint in a pot or tube, you had to **make it yourself**. For oil paint, for example, **pigment was ground very finely** and **mixed with oil**. Famous painters like Rogier van der Weyden did not of course do this themselves, but had their pupils do it – and many other things.





In this painting, does he look the way we normally see him? What is the same? What is different?

Can you see me on this card too?

The **small panels** around him show **events from his life.**On the left you can see him sharing his wealth with a poor family and handing out grain to the starving inhabitants of Myra.
On the right you can see three children being murdered by a villain. (Fortunately, St Nicholas will bring them back to life later!)

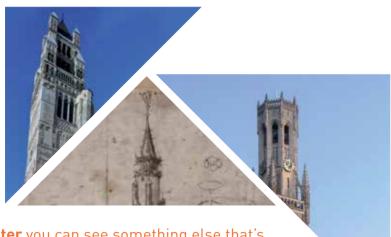
Imagine what might be shown on the missing panel!

In the background on the main panel you can see the **towers of Bruges**. If you live in Bruges yourself or know the city well you may recognise some of them.

From left to right we see the Church of Our Lady, St Saviour's Church, the Oosterlingen House (former base of the German merchants), the Belfry, the Citizen's Lodge and the

Jerusalem Church.





**In the water** you can see something else that's typical of Bruges!





The boy is looking at us and telling us about his family and everything that can be seen in the painting.

Can you point out which **figures and objects** in the painting he is talking about?

(Remember: stay at a safe distance from the work of art!)

"In 1645 my **papa**, who was 46 at the time, bought a **piece of land in Sint-Andries near Bruges.**Because papa was so proud of it, he had it painted.

He is proud of my **mama** and my **brothers and sister** too. So we all appear in the portrait. Even our ages are painted on it.



You can see my **big stepbrother and stepsister** from papa's first marriage. Their ages are painted on a **boot** and on the **cushion in the basket."** 

How old are they?\*

"My little brother is being carried by the nurse. She helps mama with the children. My little brother's age is on his bread roll."

Can you see how old he is?\*\*

"Do you find it strange that my **little brother** is wearing a **dress**? It was the fashion at the time: rich girls and boys wore dresses with lots of lace and frills – sometimes until they were seven! Because he still can't walk properly he is wearing a **'baby helmet'** to protect his head.

Look how finely everything is painted. In some places the colours are transparent and the light is very beautiful. You can see depth too. You might even miss the **gardener** who is standing there.

My age is shown on my hat."

How old am 1?\*\*\*"



This painting shows part of an **ancient Greek story.** 

The **brave Achilles** is the **son** of the **sea goddess Thetis.** 

A prophet predicted that her son Achilles would **die** in the **Trojan War.** 

To protect him, Thetis **hides** her son, **dressed as a girl,** in the **court of King Lycomedes** on the island of Scyrus.

He lived there together with the king's daughters.



**Achilles' friends** in the Greek army – Odysseus and Diomedes – are **afraid** that **without him** they will **lose** the **war** against Troy. They decided to bring him back.

They find out where Achilles is hidden and go off to Scyrus to **unmask him by trickery.** 

They take a **basket of gifts for King Lycomedes' daughters** with them. It also contains **two objects** they know **Achilles** will find **especially appealing**, but which the king's **real daughters** probably will **not**.

Have a good look at the painting. Can you see how Achilles gives himself away? Which objects has he chosen?





look for the painting

this is

This painting is by Joseph Benoît Suvée. At the end of the 18th century he was the wonder boy of Flemish art.

He won a very important competition for artists in Paris, was hugely successful in France and Italy and taught several Bruges artists who later made a name for themselves in Paris.

Suvée donated this painting to the art academy in Bruges, where he learnt to draw and paint.

**Light and shade** can make reality look completely different. At night, a handsome tree can look ghostly. In the dark you see things differently and you feel different.

What feeling does this painting give you? Make up your own story to go with it.

## The story pictured goes as follows:

**Dibutades,** the daughter of the Greek potter Butades, **drew** the **shadow** of her **beloved** on the wall of her father's workshop.

The young man left on a **long journey**. There were no photos in those days and so she wanted **the shadow to remind her of him**.

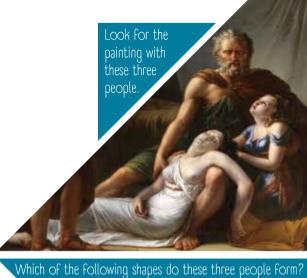
When you get home, try to create a reminder of the person/people you like, in the same way.



# Joseph Kinsoer Belisarius' Wife | ± 1817

The painter has **left out everything** that is **not necessary.** He only painted what he thought was important.

Which parts of the painting strike you immediately? How has the painter made sure your eyes are drawn to precisely those parts?









4. triangle



Like many works of art from that era, this painting depicts a **story from antiquity.** 

**Belisarius, the Roman emperor's commander**, is **accused** of conspiring in a plot to **attack** the emperor.

He is locked up in **prison**, but later it turns out that he is **innocent** and fortunately is **set free**. But as a **punishment** his **eyes** have already been **put out**!

When his **wife Antonina** sees him like this, she **dies** in the arms of her husband and **daughter Eudoxia.** She looks pleadingly at **Tiberius**, the young soldier she will later marry.

Imagine this painting was a picture from a strip cartoon. What picture would come immediately before it? And immediately after?

Act it out in a 'tableau-vivant' — that's a French word for a living painting.



The **girl** in the painting is the painter's **niece**.

What is her name? Is she rich or poor? How can you tell? What are her hobbies?

The **girl and the dog** had to **sit still** for a very long time while their portrait was being painted!
What might they have been thinking about as they sit there?

Take turns asking the girl or the dog questions. Who can think of a suitable answer?







It's obviously a **sunny day** in the picture! Emile Claus is a **master at painting sunlight.** 

How would you paint sunlight? What colours would you use?

Like many painters at the end of the 19th century, Emile Claus did not always work in his studio, but **took his easel out into the countryside.**This was possible because **paint** was by then available in **tubes** and could easily be **carried**. So Claus was able to **paint sunlight** exactly **as he saw it.** 



## The painting shows a **Belgian river.**

What rivers do you know?

Look at the title of the painting to see which river the artist has painted.

Emile Claus lived in Astene near Deinze, in a splendid villa with a large garden that overlooked the river.

Would you like to live there? Why? / Why not?

Step back as far as you can to look at the painting. Screw up your eyes.

Which forms and colours are most striking? Count how many tints of green you can find in the painting.





At the end of the 19th century, a group of artists was **no longer happy** with **painting** as it then was. They sought an **escape** in the world of **dreams**. These artists were called **symbolists**. One of them was Fernand Khnopff.

In this painting he made use of his memories of **Bruges**, the city he **lived** in **until he was 7**.

He had such **good memories** of that period that he tried **to** avoid the city as much as possible.

On the one occasion when he did return there, he wore **dark glasses** so as **to see as little of the city as possible.**He did not want his beautiful **memories to be spoilt** by the less attractive **reality.** 



Read the French title of the work.

**Secret** means the same as in English. **Reflet** means a **reflection**.

Can you see a reflection anywhere in this work?

The **building** is reflected in the **water**. It is **St John's Hospital**, now a museum not far from the Groeninge Museum. But the woman's **face** is also reflected.

Do you see that the mask is exactly like her?

She is Marguerite, the painter's sister and favourite model.

So what is the **big secret** in the title?
We shall never know.
Marguerite has **told** the **mask**, but the mask is not telling anyone.
And to make sure, Marguerite puts **her hand over** the mask's **mouth**.

Do you also have a mask full of secrets? Or a diary?





Look for the painting this detail comes from.

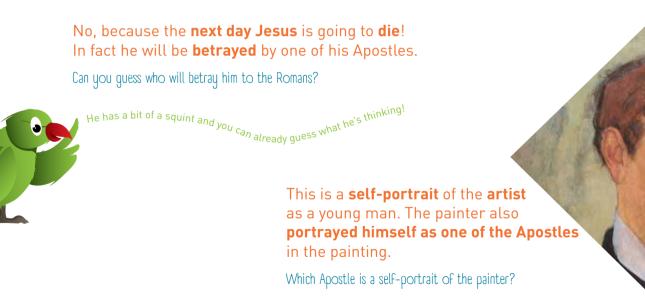
What are these men doing? What's on the table? Do you know what it symbolises?

Anyone who has been to a **mass** will know that the priest uses **wine and bread** as a reminder of **Jesus' Last Supper with his Apostles.** 

This Bible scene is depicted in this enormous painting.

### There is **still room** at the front of the table

Would you like to join them? Does it look enjoyable? Do the men look happy?





**Sonstant Permeke** 

Can you find all these paintings in the museum?



The museum owns **more works** than it can show.
So the museum staff sometimes **vary** them or put together an **exhibition** on a particular **theme** or there works artist.

that are not here at the moment?

Some of the works are just **kept** safely in a **reserve** or **storage place**.

Works are sometimes **lent** to other museums. The Groeninge Museum also regularly borrows works from other museums and from private collections.

The painter Constant Permeke lived in Jabbeke, a real **country village**. He often painted subjects from **life on the farm**.

What do the people in his paintings look like? Are they happy or sad? How do you feel when you look at his paintings? What are the colours like? Are they cheerful or sorrowful colours?

Most of the time Permeke depicts **farmers and their wives** who are **worn out** by their **long days of hard work**. They stare straight ahead with a **sombre** gaze. And Permeke also shows this in the **colours** he uses in his paintings.

If you could show how you felt today using colours, which colours would you choose?

Permeke also **changed some of the shapes.**He made them **bigger** and **exaggerated** them.
His aim was to make them more **forceful** and give **greater expression** to his paintings.
Which is why it is called **Expressionism**.

Can you see examples where parts of a painting are distorted? Which ones?
What do you think the painter meant by doing this?

For example, Permeke painted hands and feet larger than life to show that the farmers had to work hard with their hands and had to have their feet firmly on the ground.





What location is shown in the painting from which this detail is taken?

Can you find the painting in the museum?

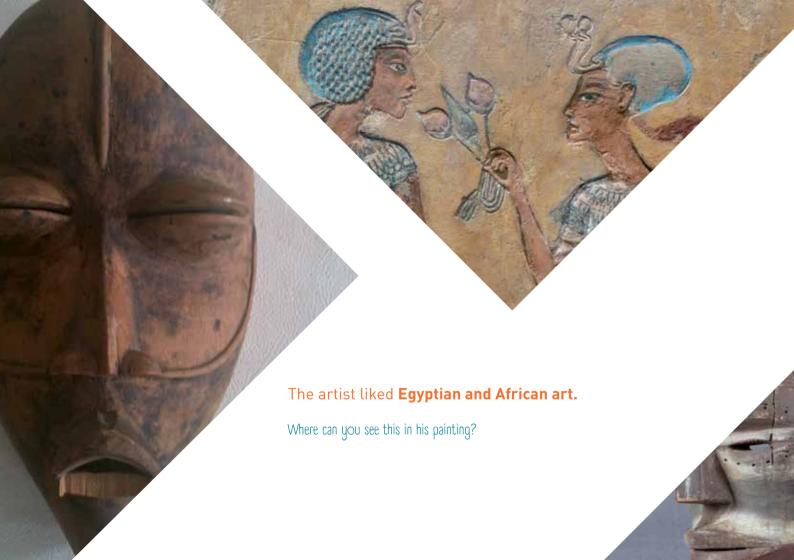
# This painter's favourite subjects were **fairs** and **village scenes** with a **man** and a **woman**.

Imagine what sounds and noises go with this painting. Are the people talking to each other? What are they saying? Try imitating them. You can sing too, if you like.

## In this case, the artist painted a **shooting gallery.**

What is your favourite fairground attraction?

What colours can you see in the painting?
Do these colours remind you of the fairground?
Are there parts that you would paint in another colour if you were the artist? Which ones?
Why? / Why not?



Have you ever made a **collage**, by cutting photos out of magazines and newspapers and sticking them together to make a work of art? Brusselmans' painting is a little like a collage made up of **various colours**, **forms and elements**.

The first thing that **strikes** you in this painting is Marie-Léonie Frisch, the painter's **wife**.

How does he make sure one's attention is drawn immediately to her?

The **dress** she is wearing is her **favourite.** 

Try describing your favourite clothes. Are they just as striking?

The woman is definitely the most **eye-catching** part of the painting, but at the same time she seems to be a **part of the interior.** 

Why is that?









### The same objects often reappear in Brusselmans' paintings.

Does the painter think it is more important to depict the objects precisely as in real life? Or does he concentrate more on form and colour?

Go and stand in front of the painting and play 'I spy, with my little eye...' You say: 'I spy with my little eye something whose colour is ...'
The rest of your group have to guess what it is.

They can ask questions about its shape or material. 'Is it round?' 'Is it made of wood?' The one who guesses what it is takes a turn choosing an object for the others to guess.



I spy, with my little eye something that's green and really cool!



## ik Wouters

You can see details here from two works by the same artist: Rik Wouters.

This artist was both a **painter** and a **sculptor**.

What would you like to do most? Paint or make sculptures?



Rik Wouters **died quite young**, just before his 34th birthday. When he was 21 he **married Nel**, with whom he remained **very much in love** all his life.

Six years later Rik and Nel made the acquaintance of **Mr and Mrs Giroux**, who had an **art gallery** in Brussels.

They were **big fans** of Rik's work and were keen to **pay** for it.

This money even allowed him to **go to Paris** where he discovered **lively and pure colours** in the work of other artists.

And you can see that he used them in the **Portrait of Mrs Giroux.** 

What colours can you find in the painting?



The large sculpture shows Nel, Rik's wife and favourite model.

By repeatedly portraying her in his paintings, drawings and sculptures, he shows his love for her.

Here, he pictures Nel as she listens to him one evening while he tells her his plans for the future.

Take someone from your group and put them in the same serious pose. Then put your model in a comical pose.



## **Georges Vantongerloo**

photo: Christine Clinckx, © M HKA These are sketches that Georges Vantongerloo did as a study for 'Construction dans la sphere 2'.

Can you And this sculpture or any other work by this artist?

If you look carefully, you will see a **seated woman** in the preliminary sketches for 'Construction dans la sphere 2'.

Can you still see this woman in the sculpture itself?

In the sculptures he did in the **1960s**, Georges Vantongerloo was mainly concerned with **nature** and the universe. It was when space travel was beginning and in 1969 the first man even landed on the moon!

Can you see anything like the planets or the sun in one of his works?

As time went by, this artist's works became more and more abstract. Meaning that reality became less and less recognisable.



He did not use bronze, stone or wood for his works, but such **modern materials** as **metal wire, transparent plastic and cement.** 

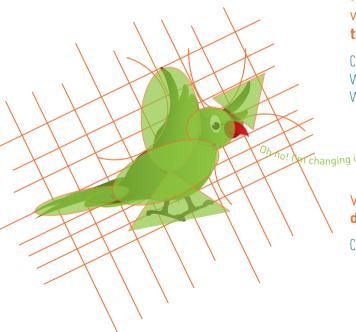
Can you see a work that makes you feel like making things with your hands? Which one?

What materials would you use?

To! An changing into an abstract work of art! HEEEEEELP!!!

Vantongerloo also gave his works of art **long and** difficult French titles.

Can you think of another, more amusing title for one of his works?





Most artists sign their **name under their work.**But Marcel Broodthaers liked playing games when signing his works of art. For example, he wrote his **name or initials one hundred times.** In this way his signature itself became a work of art!

Count how many times you can find the initials M.B. in this room.

- A. Fewer than 10 times.
- B. Between 10 and 100 times.
- C. More than 100 times.

Do you think a work of art with 100 signatures is more important than a painting signed only once?

Long ago an **artist** was someone who was able to do a **beautiful** painting, drawing, sculpture or poem in which you could recognise **everyday things.** 

**Modern artists** like Marcel Broodthaers see things **differently**. In many cases their works are not even intended to be found beautiful.

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The modern artist wants to challenge the viewers, to make them think, move them, or invite them to look at the world in a different way.

And sometimes the **idea** behind a work of art is even **more important** than the work itself!

Do you agree with modern artists' ideas?

Discuss the following questions with your group:

- Should a work of art be beautiful?
- Can a good idea be art?
- Is a work of art still art if you could do it yourself?



Found it? This painting is by the Belgian artist René Magritte. Look for this in the museum.

Magritte's paintings are among the **best-known** and **most puzzling** works of art of the 20th century.

Not even the greatest art experts are sure what Magritte meant by this painting.

Do you have any ideas? Why do these objects appear in a painting together? What do they have in common? What do you think the ball with the slit signifies?



Actually these objects **have nothing to do with each other**, but that's precisely what Magritte found so amusing. It makes you think a little of a **dream**.

Things and people which in real life have nothing to do with each other sometimes appear together in dreams.

Have you ever drawn anything that didn't really exist or put things in one drawing that don't actually belong together?

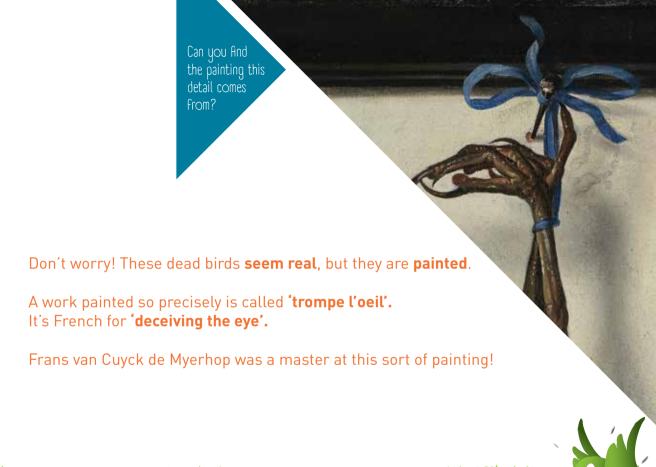
This is rather 'surrealistic', meaning that it is beyond reality. It is the style used by the Belgian artists René Magritte and Paul Delvaux.

I think The Green Feather would be a good title!

Magritte made a **game** of thinking up **amusing or unexpected titles** for his paintings. He even invited his **friends to help** him. The title of this work is L'attentat, the French word for 'the attack'.

Think up your own title for this work, one you think suits it better.





I had never thought a museum would be such a dangerous place for an innocent parakeet like me. Let me get out of here!



Don't you think that dead birds are rather an **odd subject** for a painting? That wasn't the case in the 17th century. Lots of artists painted the **creatures killed during a hunt.** Not only **birds**, but **hares**, **wild boar** and lots of others.

By depicting their **feathers and coat** very **realistically**, they **showed how well** they could paint.

What subjects do you most like drawing or painting?

This sort of work always has a **message**. They are meant to **remind people** how **short life** is and that **all of us** will one day **die**, just like the birds.

# th century

As from the 17th century, artists started specialising in painting particular subjects.

Some painted nothing but **landscapes**, others only **Bible stories** or **portraits**.

And yet others, such as the Antwerp artist Alexander Adriaenssen, were very good at painting **still-lifes**.

These are pictures of **things** – often **food** and **household objects** – that are **arranged** in a particular way and in which everything is **still** and **immobile**.

Everything that **nature** produces was depicted **very precisely** in a still-life: flowers, fruit, wild animals and so on.

Are you crazy about fish too? Look for this painting in the museum!



Does this painting make you feel like eating a tasty bit of fish? You're not the only one! There's a thief lurking in the background!

Do you recognise her?

As long as she hasn't got her eyes on me! Just to make sure I'll flutter off to another room!

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René Magritte















 $\mathcal{D}_{o}$  You already know which painting you are going  $t_{o}$  give my green feather to? Have a good think!