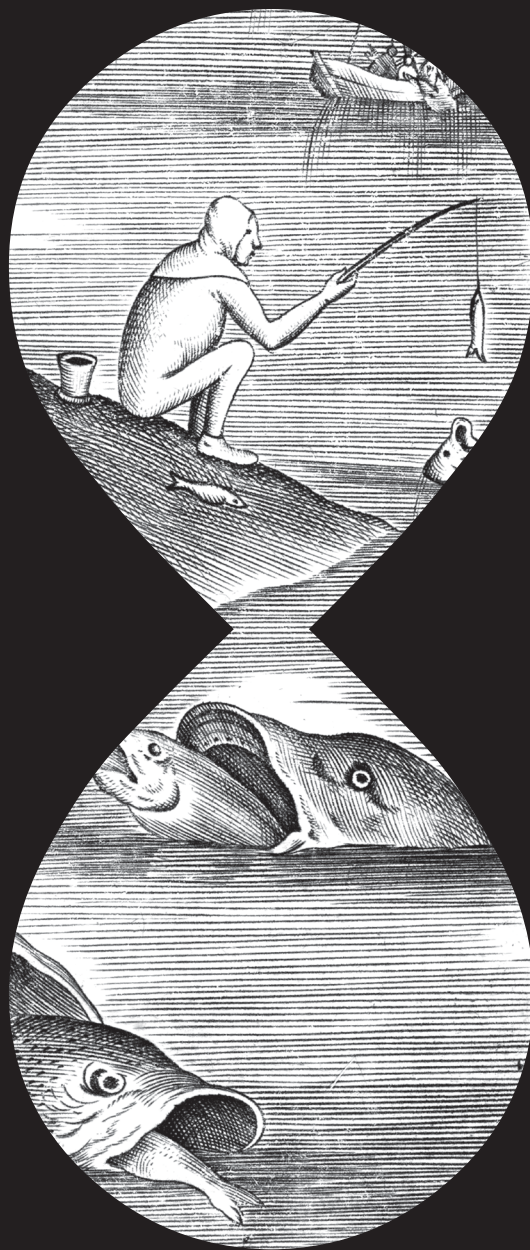


Bruegel is not who you think he is.



Press dossier

The World of Bruegel in Black and White
15.10.19 > 16.02.20

Introduction

Everyone knows Bruegel to be a world-famous painter. But did you know that, at the time, it was his prints that brought him widespread fame? As a pioneer in the rediscovery of Bruegel's lesser-known masterpieces, KBR possesses a complete collection of prints and is exhibiting them during the special Bruegel year. 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White' will transport you back to the imaginary world of this Flemish master. It is a unique opportunity to enjoy a really close look at his prints.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1526-1569)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder was born about 1526. Around 1551, he became a free master in the Guild of Saint Luke of Antwerp. Shortly afterwards, he travelled to Italy which was the common way of completing your art education back in the 16th century. After returning from Italy he teamed up with the publisher Hieronymus Cock (1518-1570). During his life, he emerged as one of the greatest painters in the Flemish school, but Bruegel actually acquired his fame thanks to the prints he made together with Cock.

'The World of Bruegel in Black and White' exhibition

The exhibition takes you back to the turbulent 16th century. About 450 years ago, Flanders was the centre of print production and trading. Bruegel and his publisher, Hieronymus Cock, played an important part in this period. Their **expert craftsmanship and entrepreneurship** are highlighted in the exhibition.

Considerable work was involved in a print before it could be marketed and distributed worldwide. In the exhibition, **you will discover the process involved, from drawing to print**. Besides some original preparatory drawings by Bruegel, you can also admire his Italian landscapes and the Seven Deadly Sins and virtues, to name but a few.

The exhibition is set in the entirely renovated exhibition spaces at KBR. You will also enter the quarters of the stylish 18th-century **Palace of Charles of Lorraine**. The palace was the Brussels residence of Charles of Lorraine, who was Governor-General of the Austrian Netherlands between 1744 and 1780. This lies on the Museum square in the upper part of the city, close to Place Royale. Its construction began in 1757, on the site of the former Nassau Palace. The palace has five halls whose design is reminiscent of the Austrian Netherlands and the principality of Liege in the 18th century.

KBR and Bruegel: a long tradition

Rediscovering the Master

Despite signing up as a painter in 1551 in Antwerp's Guild of Saint Luke, Bruegel first **acquired fame as an illustrator and print designer**. These days, he is known as one of the key protagonists in Dutch art history, but his name was gradually forgotten over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries. Ultimately, it was Bruegel's prints that put the master back on the map in the 20th century as a great name in historic art.

KBR is playing a **pioneering role** in rediscovering the lesser-known masterpieces of this artist. In fact, the Print Room in the library boasts a tradition of more than **one hundred years of research into Bruegel's work**. Hardly a stone's throw from his former home, Rue Haute, in Brussels, Bruegel was gradually rediscovered in the 20th century. Over the years, KBR has been able to gather a complete and exceptionally rich collection of Bruegel's prints and drawings.

Different curators in the Print Room are uncovering the master's work piece by piece. They are researching Bruegel's prints, and publish articles and biographies on the Flemish master. Even today, this research into Bruegel's work remains an important focus for KBR.

The Print Room at KBR and KU Leuven teamed up to found the **FINGERPRINT project** in 2016. The project uses the very latest technological developments in terms of imagery to offer new perspectives in studying Bruegel's illustrations and engravings. The aim of the research is to investigate and evaluate the phases in the creation of a

Bruegel print using advanced digital photographic techniques, statistical processing of details and laboratory analyses. In this way, Bruegel's print composition can be monitored, as it were, from the drawing board right through to the collector's album. Investigations are made into how the master made his draft drawings, how engravers knew how to convey his print designs onto the copper printing plate and how print publishers continued to make prints of the original plates long after Bruegel's death. The first results of the FINGERPRINT project have been included in the exhibition.

Content of the exhibition

The Print Business – Halls 1 to 6

For a long time, it was believed that a painter produced his own prints as a *painter-engraver*. This view has changed considerably over the last decades, thanks to research into large historic print publishers. Those looking into the graphical print of Bruegel's designs are sure to come across **Hieronimus Cock**. The print publishers founded by Cock and his wife Volcxken Diericx in 1548 in Antwerp, was christened 'Aux Quatre Vents' (The Four Winds). This name was an indication of the couple's tremendous ambitions and influence. They played a key role in Antwerp's development as one of the most important production centres for prints in 16th-century Europe. Cock and Diericx were successful on the art market with products that were highly innovative, both in technical and artistic terms.

Bruegel designed no less than sixty prints for Cock between 1554 and 1568. His designs are like scores, which are followed almost literally by the engraver. Although the print composition comes from the master's genius, it is ultimately the **skill of the engraver** that makes the difference. He is the one to ensure that the illustration is successfully transferred to the plate using a burin. Print publishers tended to call on the services of expert engravers to copy the design as accurately as possible. Once complete, the copper plate was sent to the printer. Finished prints were sold by Volcxken Diericx to private individuals or to book and art traders.

Landscapes – Hall 7

Landscapes were a popular theme in the 16th century. Bruegel's landscapes are unique in the sense that they were the **first to portray landscapes in such a grand, panoramic and impressive manner**. He gained the inspiration for his landscapes during his trip to Italy. The Alps, seen by Bruegel for the first time, are a blatant feature in his large landscapes. It is likely that Bruegel came home with bundles of sketches and drawings capturing impressions of his travels, using them later to create his popular landscape compositions.

Bruegel as a second Bosch – Hall 8

Print publisher Cock was a great admirer of Jheronimus Bosch (1450-1516) and marketed many prints featuring compositions and motifs borrowed from Bosch. He probably encouraged Bruegel to make him a number of Bosch-like designs. The prints based on these designs led to Bruegel's name and fame as a '**second Jheronimus Bosch**'. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1556) is the earliest work in which Bruegel manifests himself as a second Bosch. The print states 'Cock excudit', but does not mention Bruegel's name. At the time, this print was published, Bruegel was typically associated with landscapes, making it highly likely that the public assumed *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* in this period to be Bosch.

The prints *Big Fish Eat Little Fish* and *Patientia* were published one year later. On the first of these prints, Cock claims Bosch as the 'inventor' as a sales technique, but in the case of *Patientia* it is actually Bruegel's name that appears on the print. Thanks to the illustration, we can be certain that it was Bruegel's design. The fact that Bruegel was mentioned as the 'inventor' on what is clearly a Bosch-inspired print says much about the relationship between the work of Bruegel and Bosch, as his predecessor. The successor's work always lies somewhere between copying and outclassing the model. Once the imitator's work is able to pass as the work of the imitated, it means that the successor has outclassed his role model. So, the print *Patientia* did not simply mark the birth of a new Bosch. Bruegel was now **much more than an imitator**.

Virtues and Sins – Hall 9

In the second half of the 16th century, Bruegel created many pieces that played an important role in developing his name as another Bosch. *The Seven Deadly Sins* stand out most of all. The prints are filled with **crazy creatures, imaginary beings, devils, demons and many anthropomorphic buildings and structures**. In the second half of

the 16th century, Bosch's world of images was synonymous with sinfulness. It is therefore no surprise at all that Bruegel took much of his inspiration for his illustrations of *The Seven Deadly Sins* on behalf of Cock from this particular master.

The prints capturing *The Seven Deadly Sins* are perfectly aligned with **the moralistic tradition** in the 16th century. Bruegel does not show the punishment awaiting sinners in hell, but instead their behaviour and how it wreaks havoc. Although the main characters in *The Seven Deadly Sins* are active participants in the events going on around them, this is not the case with *The Seven Virtues*. The series was launched by Cock several years after *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Meanwhile, Bosch's influence has almost entirely disappeared, yet the composition of the prints looks remarkably like that of *The Seven Deadly Sins*.

Life Lessons – Hall 10

A number of Bruegel's prints clearly have a **double meaning** and provide food for thought. At first glance, they appear funny and intriguing, but their main aim is to give the viewer a lesson or insight. As far as **allegorical representations** were concerned, the artist took his inspiration not only from the New Testament, but also from popular sayings.

Some stories can be read almost like a cartoon, as the scenes follow on from each other. A good example of this is the print *The Alchemist*. This print features a poorly-dressed alchemist in an untidy workplace. In one hand, he holds a crucible above the fire while, with the other, he drops his last coin into a beaker in the hope that it will turn to gold. The fact it is his last coin is made clear by his wife in the middle holding an empty purse. His children play in a bare store cupboard. One child is wearing what has become a useless cooking pot on its head. To the right, a man points in a book at the play on words 'alge mist' (meaning 'already missed' or 'all wasted'). In the background, it is clear that things end badly for the family, as we see them on their way to the poorhouse. The moralistic print can therefore be read from left to right and has thus a certain structure.

These are not the only Bruegel prints to demonstrate one of life's lessons. In *The Fat Kitchen* and *The Thin Kitchen*, Bruegel uses caricatures to challenge the stark contrast between poverty and excess. With *The Battle of the Money Bags* and *the Strong Boxes*, he demonstrates that money and possessions are the greatest driver of armed battle and in *The Ass at School*, he transfers the clear message that a donkey remains a donkey, even when it is sent to school.

City and Countryside – Hall 11

Although Bruegel appears fascinated by nature and country life, he clearly belonged to the urban middle class. His work and assignments even put him in touch with the high political and financial powers. He looks at **rural life from the perspective of a city dweller**, an outsider, and creates his work for a largely urban audience. Together with his friend Hans Franckaert (1520-1584), Bruegel headed to the countryside to observe the partying farmers and gather inspiration.

In the countryside, there was little sign of the scientific and humanistic developments that shaped life in a large 16th-century city. Most of the population living there were on the poverty line, but **festivities and fairs** brought a little enjoyment. Local festivities, such as fairs or saint celebrations, were always moments of excessive drinking. It seems that the **The Kermis at Hoboken** had quite a reputation. Although the farming village was certainly not alone in having such festivities, it is a prominent feature in one of Bruegel's prints. He designed *The Kermis at Hoboken* in 1559. The world portrayed by Bruegel in this picture is criticised with a moralistic undertone. The works in which he portrays such rural entertainment is also destined for urban dwellers who look down on the antics of these uneducated country folk. Country folk were displayed as negative examples. Although the two worlds seemed miles away they were still inseparable. This contrast was an ideal source of inspiration for artists.

Ships – Hall 12

For most visitors, ships are probably an unexpected and unknown subject in Bruegel's work. Yet the **interest in the maritime world** is easy to understand in the context of Antwerp. In the 16th century, Antwerp had one of the largest ports in the world. Ships arrived daily from England, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany and the Baltic region. Furthermore, **Antwerp was the real hub for trade with the East**. In Bruegel's day, Antwerp was a **global city** where trading and shipping brought prosperity.

The maritime series can be placed in the context of an emergence of other products relating to intercontinental travel and discoveries, such as atlases, maps, books about other cultures and travel guides which appeared in the 16th

century. Travel and exotic destinations fired the imagination. Cock made the most of this trend when designing this series.

With there being so much interest in travel it is no surprise that there was such demand for prints portraying ships. No preparatory drawings for these ships have survived, but from the great detail in the ships we can assume that the prints were based on a very thorough drawing. The pictures of the sea vessels **respected every last detail**, but Bruegel's aim went far beyond simply providing an inventory of existing types of ships.

Bruegel Inspires – Hall 13

It is no surprise that Bruegel's influence carried on beyond the 16th century. The artist had many **fans and enjoyed much success during his lifetime**. After his death, his artistic influence lived on in different ways. On the one hand, Bruegel paved the way for new insights in the world of painting. His series with ships, with their suggested movement and their consideration of natural forces, were to play a decisive role in the development of seascape or 'marine' in Dutch paintings in the 17th century. On the other hand, the topics reflected in Bruegel's prints went on to live their own lives in various art disciplines. In this way, the artist remained an inspiration in terms of content as well as form. Indeed, **clear links to Bruegel's themes** are often found in art. **Literal copies** of his work were sometimes placed in a different context. For example, **figures and motives** from Bruegel's prints appeared in poetry albums, paintings and even on wall tiles. As before with Bosch, successors created work in Bruegel's style, which they happily passed for an original and marked with his name.

Even today, Bruegel remains an inspiration! The British street artist, Phlegm, is among Bruegel's many fans. He tends to work with spray paint, but uses traditional printing techniques too. He does engravings and, like Bruegel, adores putting strange characters from his own imagination into a narrative structure. His work ranges from mini-engravings with masterly details, to gigantic wall paintings and comic books. The many surprising details in his work and choice of black and white immediately remind us of Bruegel's prints.

Phlegm has literally catapulted 16th-century arts and crafts into the 21st century. KBR and Phlegm joined hands for the exhibition 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White'. KBR owns the original preparatory drawing as well as the print of *Luxuria* (Lust) but sadly the copperplate has been lost over the centuries. Especially for KBR, Phlegm created a contemporary interpretation of Bruegel's *Luxuria*, which he carefully engraved in a copper plate. This contemporary work of art is also on display in the exhibition 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White'.

Masterpieces in the spotlight

The curators' choice



The Alchemist, Philip Galle after Pieter Bruegel the Elder (KBR)

“To me, *The Alchemist* is Bruegel's best piece of work. Foolishness and greed cause the material decline of an alchemist and his family, who has ‘Alge mist’ (meaning 'already missed' or 'all wasted') and invested his time and money in ‘misty’ pseudoscience. The depiction of the children playing and searching for food is deeply moving. As is the reception of the ruined family in the poorhouse that we see in the background. See how Bruegel has depicted the caricatures of the alchemist, his wife and the jester, who continues spreading the dust and 'mist' with bellows. We are led to find their objectionable and preposterous behaviour appalling. The innocent children, who are the victim of their parents' behaviour, are meanwhile portrayed as very realistic and sweet. Using the contrast between humour and mockery on the one hand and, on the other, emotion and pity for the family's fate, Bruegel has a cathartic impact on his audience. *The Alchemist* is probably Bruegel's most narrative and, in a certain sense, most ‘theatrical’ print.”

- Joris Van Grieken, curator ‘The World of Bruegel in Black and White’



Everyman, Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder (KBR)

“The *Everyman* print, based on Bruegel's original design from 1558, is one that manages to touch me at several levels. With his topic, compositional structure and development details, the artist really hits the nail on the head. It is not simply about the “man” in search of himself. Indeed, the old grey-haired man appears several times in a composition that is bursting with delicately-designed bagatelle. It is often a matter of details that were relevant in the 16th-century; objects whose symbolic meanings are not always entirely clear to us today. And for me, as a researcher, this also makes the print really interesting. As an art historian, you always try and add something new to the usual story. I have been able to make my own contribution to this print. Not in terms of image interpretation, but in terms of insights into the process of forming the print itself. Indeed, some examples from *Everyman* combine a print from the copper printing plate with a caption printed using a book-printing press. By identifying the fonts applied, I was able to establish that the print publisher Hieronymus Cock worked together with Antwerp's famous book publisher Christophe Plantin on these editions.”

- Maarten Bassens, curator ‘The World of Bruegel in Black and White’

Other masterpieces

***Stream with an Angler and a Water Mill*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (KBR)**

These days the illustrated works of Bruegel consist of sixty drawings. This number is only a fraction of what Bruegel once drew. Almost all of Bruegel's surviving drawings were produced in pen and brown ink. *Stream with an Angler and a Water Mill* (ca. 1554) is an example of a free, stand-alone drawing. Rather than a study of nature, it is a fantasy landscape with a gnarled tree in the foreground. The drawing was created after Bruegel's trip to Italy, where he made contact with the Italian school. It features quick strokes and was put on paper with great confidence and without preparation. It clearly exudes a pure form of self-expression and was probably done for fun. The drawing is astonishing not only from a technical perspective, but also in terms of form. Illustrations like this one were considered a finished product in the 16th century and were kept and cherished by artists.

***Luxuria (Lust)* from 'The Seven Deadly Sins', Pieter van der Heyden after Pieter Bruegel the Elder (KBR)**

Preparatory drawings of prints are clearly different to spontaneous illustrations due to their detail. They are a kind of score for the engraver, showing exactly how the illustrator imagines the final print. The illustration *Luxuria* is a perfect example of the way in which Bruegel made preparatory drawings for prints. It is clear that he carefully considers the graphic translation from drawing to print, using not colour but shadow lines to create a strong graphic composition. It is a complicated composition with extensive iconography illuminating the theme of sin and unchastity. Despite the complexity of the illustration it seems that Bruegel put the composition on paper in just one go. The FINGERPRINT study of the preparatory drawing revealed **no trace at all of a sub-drawing** on the same sheet. This is quite a puzzle to us, as it is almost impossible to put such a balanced composition on paper in one go.

***The Rabbit Hunt*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (KBR)**

The Rabbit Hunt has a special place in Bruegel's works as it is the only print that was etched by Bruegel himself. After etching, the plate was completed with a burin. The draft design and end result show many differences, which are an indication that Bruegel still adapted certain details as he etched. The rabbit-hunt scene takes place in the foreground. A huntsman with a dog aims at two rabbits or hares with his crossbow. The scene is linked to a saying that is found in Adagia by Desiderius Erasmus: 'Duos insequens lepores neutrum capit' (He who chases two hares catches neither). The unsuspecting huntsman is meanwhile being stalked by a man with a halberd. What appears a tranquil landscape at first glance turns out to be a threatening scene. The motive of huntsman as prey is linked to a Latin saying, quoted in the Adagia: 'Tute lepus es, & pulpamentum quaeris' (What! You a hare and hunting for game?). This alludes to the religious-political situation in Antwerp around the year 1560. During this time, bonuses were promised to those declaring heretics, which caused considerable unrest. Sadly, it is no longer known whether Bruegel actually intended to refer to this situation and whether this was also understood by the (some of) the audience.

Curators

The exhibition curators are Joris Van Grieken and Maarten Bassens, scientific staff from the Print room at KBR. Joris Van Grieken is researching the reception history in early Dutch art and the art of printing in the Southern Netherlands in the 16th and 17th century. Research conducted by Maarten Bassens focuses on the edition history of Bruegel's prints.

Interview requests are managed via Hanna Huysegoms, press contact at KBR: hanna.huysegoms@kbr.be or +32 (0)494 10 90 46.

Partners

KBR's most important partners in the project 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White' are Toerisme Vlaanderen, the Belgian Buildings Agency, the Baillet-Latour Fund and the National Lottery of Belgium.

Toerisme Vlaanderen promotes the sustainable development in tourism and of the tourist industry in Flanders and Brussels with a view to improving economic return, employment and social welfare. Since 2015, Toerisme Vlaanderen has been investing in so-called lever projects, whereby 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White' are part of the Bruegel Year 2019 and the 'Experience the Flemish Masters'-project. Toerisme Vlaanderen has supported KBR by adapting the reception infrastructure, the exhibition layout and improving accessibility. This allows the needs of every (inter)national person seeking cultural added value to be satisfied.

The Belgian Buildings Agency is the federal real estate authority for the federal public service and Belgium's architectural and historic patrimony. The organisation invests heavily to maintain the country's patrimony and adapt this to the evolving context. As the owner of KBR, the Belgian Buildings Agency has played a key role in the infrastructural and interior design work. Thanks to them you will enjoy more frequent opportunities in the future to admire the magnificent heritage collection in the renovated exhibition spaces.

The Baillet-Latour Fund focuses on encouraging, developing and promoting human excellence in Belgium, with a rigorous but open approach to social evolution. Their mission is to preserve Belgian heritage with the allocation of funds, prizes and grants. The fund is regularly involved in restoration projects and, in this way, contributes to managing Belgium's patrimony. The Baillet-Latour Fund thus financed the restoration of all Bruegel prints on display in 'The World of Bruegel in Black and White'.

The National Lottery supports cultural, sporting and social initiatives. Each year the organisation sponsors over 1,300 events with the brands Lotto, Win For Life, EuroMillions, Joker + and Woohoo!. For this exhibition the National Lottery funded the construction of adapted glass cabinets for use in displaying the prints. This autumn, thanks to the contribution of the National Lottery, visitors can enjoy a really close look at Bruegel's prints in hi-tech glass cabinets.

The media partners in the exhibition are De Standaard, Klara, Knack, The Brussels Times, La Libre, Le Vif, Musiq3 and La Première.

Publication

Bruegel in black and white

Edited by Maarten Bassens and Joris Van Grieken.

The magnificent catalogue, published on the occasion of this exhibition, reproduces the life-size works and gives its readers the chance to browse through Bruegel's famous prints at their own pace. In five essays, famous art historians connected to KBR and KU Leuven give an interesting insight into the fascinating world of Bruegel's graphic work.

This catalogue has been realised by KBR in partnership with Hannibal Publishing.

The book is on sale in the KBR shop for €55. Available in Dutch, French and English.

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IBSN 9789463887205

288 pages

Practical information

Location

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Opening times

15 October 2019 – 16 February 2020

Open daily between 11 am and 7 pm except for 01.11, 25.12 and 01.01.

The exhibition will exceptionally close at 5 pm on 24.12.2019 and 31.12.2019.

Tickets

Do you wish to be guaranteed a ticket at your preferred time? Then reserve your ticket online on www.kbr.be.

Admission fee

- Adults €12
- Discounted rate €9 (group of 10 and more, 65+, Davidsfonds and vtbKultuur)
- Free admission for ICOM members, children aged 18 years and under, teachers with a teacher's pass, school groups (with a reservation) and people with a handicap
- Free audio guide (NL-FR-EN-DE-ES)

Group visits

The exhibition is perfect for a group visit. A day trip with an organisation or a team building event? There is a special arrangement for every kind of group.

All group arrangements must be reserved at least three weeks in advance via www.kbr.be.

Guided visit

- Guided tour of the exhibition
- Available daily between 9 am and 11 am
- Price: €90 (guide) + admission (€9 per person)
- Max. 15 participants
- Duration: 90 minutes

Meet the Master

- Lecture followed by an unguided exhibition visit
- Available daily between 11 am and 6 pm
- Price: €90 (lecture) + admission (€9 per person)
- Max. 30 participants
- Duration: 60 minutes (lecture) + unguided visit

VIP tour

- Exclusive guided tour + reception in a unique setting
- Available daily from 7.30 pm to 10 pm
- Price on request
- Max. 15 participants

- Duration: 2.5 hours

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Press photos

A selection of images can be found on <https://kbr.prezly.com>. Other images can be issued on demand.