The Harvesters (1565) by the Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) is one of the first modern landscapes. This large-sized image (119 cm × 162 cm) celebrates work and nature. The masterpiece depicts a tableau—a picture that draws the viewer into the life of hardworking people harvesting wheat. The details and perspective are meticulous and astonishing at the same time.

It is summer. The tall golden wheat is ready to be harvested, and the leaves have not fallen off the trees. Breugel has painted thousands of individual stalks of wheat, even showing the heads of the plants. There are no shadows indicating that it’s high noon. It is easy to miss the details in the work. There is an ox pulling a cart laden with hay in the distance. Every backbreaking stage of harvesting is shown:
In the far distance, one can see those not working: people frolicking in a pool and children playing. To the author, the central feature of this work is rest. By the tree, people are having a meal, and one person is sprawled out, fast asleep.

Resting and sleeping after backbreaking work were celebrated not just by Breugel but by many other artists — notably Vincent van Gogh, such as his Noon: Rest from Work, after Jean-François Millet which was featured on the cover of the very first issue of Sleep Health (March 2015). The art celebrates work and the restorative power of sleep.

Disclosures

The author has declared that he has nothing to disclose.

References


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