
As a twenty-first-century audience, we are used to looking at Renaissance paintings in museums, neatly arranged by curators chronologically and geographically. This altered context makes us oblivious to the ways in which original viewers interacted with images, and the importance of art for shaping socio-political, religious, and even economic debates. In this talk, I will present my research on Pieter Bruegel's Tower of Babel and Pieter Aertsen's Seven Works of Mercy, and show how they visually expressed concerns about entrepreneurial ethics, charity, and poverty in sixteenth-century northern Europe. We will see that paintings were frequently discussed during dinner parties, admonished their audience to compassionate behavior, and promoted the creation of a harmonious society. Using these two examples, I will also explain what it means to do original research in the field of Renaissance art, and how it can lead us to surprising discoveries both about the past and the present.

ProfSPEAK! is a series open to all undergraduates interested in research. Join us each month to find out what your professors are working on and to learn more about how you can become involved in undergraduate research. This event is also open to graduate students, faculty, and staff. ProfSPEAK! is hosted by the Honors College.