

The Rubenianum Quarterly

2012
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Field trip to Vienna

The Rubenianum Fund's third annual field trip led us from 8 to 10 September to Vienna and the Liechtenstein territories in Moravia.

The three-day event kicked off with a visit to the Dorotheum Palace, which was followed by lunch in its boardroom, offered by Mr Böhm, Managing Director of the Dorotheum and one of the Rubenianum Fund corporate benefactors.

This was followed in the early afternoon by a visit to the galleries of the Akademie with its oil sketches by Rubens and important paintings by Bouts, Bosch, Van Dyck and Jordaens. Dr Gerlinde Gruber, Curator of Flemish Paintings and Deputy Director of the Gemäldegalerie at the Kunsthistorisches Museum (KHM) guided us first through the armour and music collections, which display important paintings by Jan van den Hoecke, prior to tackling the sublime paintings galleries, specially opened for our group in the early evening. Prof. Balis, Chairman of the Centrum Rubenianum, took us on a tour of the fantastic Rubens collection. He and Dr Gruber also discussed paintings with more complex attributions and the lively debate between scholars and participants ensured good footage for the professional film crew that filmed our group as part of a documentary on a year of KHM activity.

Dinner at the Belgian Embassy, presided by His Excellency Mr Frank Recker, formed a perfect ending to an unforgettable day.

Sunday took us to Moravia, where we visited the Unesco World Heritage protected cultural landscape and castles of Valtice and Lednice. A picnic in the landscaped grounds of the romantic castle of Lednice and a dinner in its fine dining hall will be fondly remembered by all.

The third and last day proved to be the absolute highlight of this trip, with a visit to both Viennese palaces still belonging to the Prince of Liechtenstein under the guidance of the director, Dr Kräftner. The Summer Palace, with its breathtaking collections of paintings, sculpture and furniture amidst which Peter Paul Rubens takes pride of place, finds no equal. The Winter Palace, with its awesome eighteenth- and nineteenth-century decoration, is still being restored and is to open officially in April 2013. HSH Prince Hans-Adam II von und zu Liechtenstein, Patron of the *Corpus Rubenianum*, kindly welcomed us to a reception at the close of the day, expressly thanking Mr Thomas Leysen and all the benefactors and donors of the Rubenianum Fund for their active support of the *Corpus*. | Michel Ceuterick

Up to a digital era

At first sight one would expect the Rubenianum and the RKD to be rivals in the field of art-historical documentation. And a look at the history of Burchard's documentation seems to confirm that suspicion. When in the 1930s the life and work of Jewish art historians were threatened by the Nazis the then director of the RKD, Dr Hans Schneider, founded a special fund to give financial support to Max J. Friedländer and Ludwig Burchard in case they would decide to settle in The Hague and to become associates of the institute. In 1939 Friedländer came to Holland, where he lived until his death in 1958, but Burchard decided to emigrate to London. During the 1950s and after his death in 1960 the RKD tried in vain to persuade Burchard and later his heirs that The Hague would be the ideal place for his documentation. But as we all know, the City of Antwerp was more successful and acquired his complete archives.

Fortunately the earlier competition between Antwerp and The Hague has never been an obstacle for a good contact. Both institutes continued their partly overlapping activities in the field of art-historical documentation. In the 1990s the RKD and the Courtauld Institute in London tried to realize international digital collaboration between art-historical institutes. Many institutes in Europe and the United States were interested, but unfortunately none of them, including the Rubenianum, had reached the point to start a large-scale digitization of their collections. In spite of this failure, we continued our activities, building up RKDimages. And it is very satisfying that the Rubenianum will start a new digital period in close collaboration with our institute. Together we can achieve the best possible results for our knowledge of Flemish art of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Rudi Ekkart
Director of the RKD, The Hague



A remarkable new collaboration: Rubenianum and RKD joining forces



The RKD study room

After a year of preparation, we are ready to launch what the Rubenianum can call a historic collaboration. Our chosen partner is our sister-institution in The Hague: the world-famous RKD (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie / Netherlands Institute for Art History). In its fifty years of existence the Rubenianum has always rejoiced in an ongoing dialogue with its large Dutch counterpart, yet only now are we embarking on an important, long-term collaboration that involves nothing less than the core task of both our institutions: the documentation of works of art. Now that preparations for this new partnership are entering their final phase, we want to take this opportunity to outline the scope of this project.

Those acquainted with both institutions know that we have many things in common but also some obvious differences. One such difference is the RKD's lead in the computerized processing and accessing of art-historical information. Their rich online resources – *RKDartists* and *RKDimages* and the brand-new Rembrandt Database, to mention but a few – are so well known and so frequently consulted that they need no introduction here.

By contrast, until just a few years ago the Rubenianum was still processing documentation in a completely analogue way – on paper. In our search for a suitable digital system, there were plenty of obvious reasons for us to look to the north for an example to follow. One concrete reason is that the information and documentation in our field, the art of the Southern Netherlands from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, has traditionally been collected

by the RKD as well, which means that large numbers of objects are already included in the *RKDimages* database. In terms of organization the RKD has a clear edge in several respects: a custom-designed version of Adlib's 'server-based documentation solution', a well-oiled working environment for digital data processing, and several in-house thesauri that are among the most authoritative in the field.

Collaborating on the database level thus seemed like an obvious road to take, but of course this was easier said than done. I would like to mention the architects involved in this project from the very beginning, who succeeded in devising a workable structure. At the Rubenianum, Lieneke Nijkamp took the lead, with input from Ute Staes and Bert Watteeuw. Our contacts at the RKD were Rieke van Leeuwen, Head of Digital Collections, Reinier van 't Zelfde, Head of ICT and Information Management and Retrieval, and Jan Kosten, Curator of Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings. The indisputable value of this plan to both parties soon became apparent, and it subsequently grew into a basic cooperation agreement that provides for several test phases and regular consultation.

What exactly does this collaboration entail? From now on, whenever the Rubenianum wants to register information about works of art, it will do so via a virtual private network (VPN) directly in the *RKDimages* database. In other words, we will collaborate in amassing a treasure trove of existing data, thus using our expertise and collection profile to enrich the knowledge of the visual arts of the Southern Netherlands. The records added or completed by the

Rubenianum will be recognizable as such on the RKD interface. In addition, our own Rubenianum interface, which will be developed in 2013, will make it possible to search all the Southern Netherlandish records of *RKDimages*, which will include the combined images of the RKD and the Rubenianum. An important bonus is that this Rubenianum interface will allow us to offer more in-depth information. In the short term this will include references to our own library catalogue in Anet, but in the long term we plan to add digitized catalogue notes, relevant archival documents, extra visual material and so on.

The pilot studies carried out thus far – at the time of publication of this issue of TRQ – have been successful and evaluated positively. Several batches of Jordaens records have been entered into the database – from Antwerp, and according to the RKD's detailed rules for inputting data – and are now available online. We also carried out trial excerpting sessions, in which we took sale catalogues, journals and recently published books and, with the help of colleagues from the Centrum Rubenianum, screened them for interesting artworks. This was essential to the delineation of our new working procedures, which will be attuned to the internal practices of the RKD. This is in itself a fruitful exercise, which provides insight into each other's documentation criteria and the possibility of working in tandem. The most important result of this collaboration, however, is of course the opportunity thus created to catapult a vital task of the Rubenianum into the twenty-first century.

And so we will soon embark on a long-term and enduring partnership with *RKDimages* and its future pendant in Antwerp. We view our impending collaboration as a prime example of efficiency that will work to the benefit of both institutions and our users as well. It is possible, moreover, that our common sphere of activity will quickly widen: investigations in the coming months will determine how the Rubenianum's web-interface-in-the-making can best be attuned to that of the RKD. More news on this front will follow ...

The Rubenianum and the RKD were brought together by the realization that collaboration is essential for art-historical centres of excellence such as ours, since they are to a large degree network centres. It is a privilege for the Rubenianum to model one of its core tasks after the strong tradition of the RKD. That the development of this undertaking could proceed in such a distinctly positive and open way is due in large measure to the commitment and clear vision of Rudi Ekkart, Director of the RKD, who created the supportive and inspired atmosphere of synergy in which the Rubenianum will collaborate in the coming years with the RKD team and their new director, Chris Stolwijk. We look forward to it immensely.

Véronique Van de Kerckhof
Curator of the Rubenianum

A Clash of Titans

The Rubens and Rembrandt Corpuses compared

Koen Bulckens

The *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* (CRLB) is often compared with the *Rembrandt Research Project* (RRP). This is hardly surprising given the many similarities between these two projects. They both seek to compile critical catalogues of prolific seventeenth-century masters: Peter Paul Rubens on the one hand and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn on the other. Because of the magnitude of the task at hand, both projects rely on joint effort to complete their catalogue. Both projects were founded in the 1960s and have long exceeded their original deadlines. This is due to the fact that the oeuvres of Rubens and Rembrandt were researched with meticulous care. In the process, both projects have become the benchmarks in their respective fields of study.

These similarities aside, there are notable differences in the approach to attribution in both publications. The aim of this article is to explore and explain some of these differences. Only the attribution of the paintings of both artists will be discussed here. It should be kept in mind that not all observations are valid for drawings and prints.

A notable difference in approach

For the RRP, the authenticity of the works is of prime importance. The Rembrandt researchers wanted to clear the Rembrandt canon of forgeries, copies and workshop production. They started out with high hopes for scientific research, including X-ray and infra-red photography, and analysis of paint samples and supports. These methods could, however, only falsify attributions, but never solidly confirm them. Although the RRP continued to collect scientific data, they abandoned it as a method for the verification of authorship at an early stage. In this they were forced to rely on connoisseurship. In their quest for certainty, however, the Rembrandt researchers tried to rationalize their method through the use of rational criteria and collective decision-making. It was their opinion that connoisseurship would be more valuable when both criteria and argumentation were explicitly specified. Attributing the paintings through group evaluation was seen as a means to eliminate or reduce subjectivity.

In the Rembrandt Corpus, the paintings were classified using the ABC system. Works in the A category were certainly by Rembrandt; the B category included the works of which Rembrandt's authorship could not be accepted nor rejected; while the C category consisted of copies, later

forgeries or pastiches and workshop production.

The RRP has, especially following the publication of the first three volumes (1982, 1986 and 1989), received a good deal of criticism with regard to their method and the authoritative way in which their attributions were formulated. Naturally, it was never their intention to present their attributions as universal truths. Even so, the magnitude of the project, the wealth of information that was collected, as well as the tone and tenor of the entries turned the Rembrandt Corpus into 'a book of rather firm decisions', as Josua Bruyn, the former leader of the RRP, would later describe it.

In 1993 four of the RRP's members, namely Josua Bruyn, Bob Haak, Simon Levie and Pieter van Thiel, announced their resignation in a letter to the *Burlington Magazine*. Ernst van de Wetering, the sole remaining member, was now in charge. Under his leadership, the RRP changed their approach.

First of all, Van de Wetering gave up the ABC system. The reason for this was that the certainty required for accepting a work in the A category was rarely present. Moreover, the C category formed a rather heterogeneous group, in which workshop products, later copies and works from Rembrandt's circle were discussed side by side. Second, collective decision-making was abandoned. Van de Wetering now takes sole responsibility for the attributions, which nevertheless remain the RRP's main concern. Third, Van de Wetering has stopped relying strictly on rational criteria, although he still firmly believes that argumentation is of major importance in the attributions. Lastly, connoisseurship is only used when all other arguments have been exhausted. Because of these fundamental changes, one has to differentiate between the old (1968–93) and the new (1993–2011) RRP.¹

Let us now turn to the Rubens Corpus. In the CRLB the authenticity of the paintings is only one of the issues. It is embedded in a wide scope of concerns that get profound and equal attention, such as provenance, iconography, the use of motifs and the historical context. Moreover, when it comes to attribution, the CRLB is known to be cautious. This approach has often been praised, even if in some cases it has been seen as indecisiveness. This may be explained by the fact that the CRLB contains a multitude of opinions. To begin

with, the opinion of Ludwig Burchard – the initiator of the catalogue – is mentioned in each entry. Then there is the opinion of the author of the volume, and finally there is the point of view of the editor of the *Centrum Rubenianum*. It must be said, however, that divergences of view between the three of them are exceptional.

It will be clear from the above that the attributions are of major importance in the Rembrandt Corpus. Although provenance, iconography et cetera are also discussed by the RRP, the Rembrandt Corpus's *raison d'être* is to evaluate the authenticity of the Rembrandt canon. The CRLB, on the other hand, sees attribution as one of many questions that need to be answered. Whereas the old RRP wanted to break free from conventional methods, the CRLB continued to work in a traditional fashion. These differences can for the greater part be explained by looking at the genesis of both projects, and the tradition in Rembrandt and Rubens catalogues.

The genesis of both projects

The RRP was founded in 1968, in the aftermath of the Van Meegeren affair. This 'master-forgery' had perplexed the museum world and art historians alike by revealing that an alleged Vermeer – the *Supper at Emmaus* in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam – was a forgery by his hand. Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with the contemporary Rembrandt canon had been building up in the course of the 1960s. It was said that Bode, Hofstede de Groot and Valentiner – three prominent Rembrandt scholars from the previous generation – had been too generous in adding works to the master's oeuvre, without sufficient argumentation at that. A basic consensus about Rembrandt's work, especially that of his later period, was nowhere to be found. One might say that a sense of (justified) distrust of the contemporary Rembrandt canon accounted for the radical approach of the old RRP.

The history of the CRLB began with Ludwig Burchard (1886–1960), who had conceived the plan for a Rubens catalogue raisonné in the 1920s. Burchard outlined his goals in a prospectus issued in 1939 by the Amsterdam publisher Elsevier, stating that he wanted his publication to be 'the complete embodiment of our improved knowledge of Rubens's work'. The *Centrum Rubenianum* used this prospectus as a guideline.



Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait*. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



Rubens, *Self-Portrait*. Rubenshuis, Antwerp

What Burchard meant by the ‘complete embodiment’ is the multi-faceted approach we find in the CRLB today. It originated in the method adopted by Max Rooses in his monumental *L’Œuvre de P. P. Rubens* (1886–92), the great predecessor of the CRLB. Burchard (and in his spirit the Centrum) retained this publication as a framework to collect and process the new information that has come to light since. Where the RRP said that the efforts of the previous generation were built on the wrong foundations, Burchard merely thought that Rooses’s work was outdated. On top of that, Rubens’s oeuvre was already more or less correctly outlined by Rooses, and to a greater extent by Rudolf Oldenbourg in his edition of the *Klassiker der Kunst* (1921). This did not mean that the work was almost done, but there was a common ground regarding Rubens’s oeuvre and its stylistic development.

The traditional view

If a comparison of the genesis of both projects goes a long way to explaining the radical approach of the old RRP, it fails to shed light on the reason why attributions were and remain so crucial to the RRP. This question can be addressed by looking at something which has already been touched upon, namely the scholarly tradition surrounding both painters, more specifically the other Rubens and Rembrandt catalogues.

In all Rubens catalogues, workshop collaborations are also accepted.² Rembrandt catalogues, however, typically endeavour to circumscribe Rembrandt’s autograph paintings. In other words: what we define

as an authentic Rubens or an authentic Rembrandt for the purposes of a catalogue raisonné is not the same. We might define the difference in terms of the invention and the execution of the paintings. In the context of the Rubens tradition, a work was accepted if the *invention* was by Rubens. In the Rembrandt tradition, the work, in order to be accepted as a Rembrandt, had to be *executed* by the master. The reason for this lies in the assumptions about the workshop practice of both painters.

It is commonly accepted that in Rubens’s workshop, invention and execution were often separated. Rubens made all the designs. Subsequently these designs were executed either by Rubens himself, or in collaboration by the master and his studio, or else solely by the studio without Rubens’s intervention. It follows that focusing exclusively on Rubens’s strictly autograph paintings would distort our view of his artistic production. It could not adequately reflect the practice of collaboration in his workshop as it is known to us from historical sources. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that the Medici cycle would be excluded from any given Rubens catalogue merely on account of the fact that it was the fruit of collaboration between Rubens and his assistants.

With Rembrandt, it has long been presumed that invention and execution were always due to the same person. Rembrandt was believed to have painted all his designs himself, while his studio made their own variations of his work. Moreover, collaboration within one and the same painting was supposed to be extremely

rare. This hypothesis allowed Rembrandt researchers to isolate the master’s purely autograph oeuvre, without the fear of neglecting any of his artistic output.

This traditional view of Rembrandt’s studio, which has long been accepted by the majority of Rembrandt scholars, is now being challenged increasingly. Although Van de Wetering too accepts the idea of collaboration as a possibility, in his opinion, it did not occur on a large scale in Rembrandt’s workshop. This basic assumption allowed the new RRP to retain the attributions as their main goal.

In the end, the RRP and the CRLB appear to be more dissimilar than one might have expected. Yet this does not mean that a comparison between the two is of no use. In explaining the differences between both projects, we have to look back and examine how contemporary conceptions originated. We are confronted with the fact that both projects are embedded in a scholarly tradition, which determines their methodology and objectives. This may well seem self-evident. However, if it is one thing to be aware of the fact that tradition plays a decisive role, it is quite another to use tradition critically to evaluate the present state of affairs.

¹ In 2011 Van de Wetering announced the end of the Rembrandt Research Project. He and his team are presently working on the last volume of the Rembrandt Corpus.

² Julius Held’s catalogue of Rubens’s oil sketches (1980) is an exception.



Anthony van Dyck, *William II, Prince of Orange*

New blood. Recent acquisitions of the Rubenshuis

This autumn the collection of the Rubenshuis was again enriched with several remarkable, long-term loans from private collectors, who proved willing to part with their precious artworks for a specified length of time. The expansion and supplementation of its collection are vital to the functioning of an active and dynamic museum. The new arrivals include various discoveries, such as two portraits, presumed lost, by Anthony van Dyck and a previously unknown still life by Frans Snijders.

One of the most surprising acquisitions is *Peasants Fighting Over a Game of Cards*, a small painting made by Rubens around 1617–18 after a lost composition by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525–1569). When Rubens copied it, the original was possibly in the possession of Bruegel's son Jan Bruegel the Elder (1568–1625). The small panel is particularly special because it was once in the collection of Ludwig Burchard (1886–1960). After that its whereabouts were long unknown until its recent reappearance.

Cornelis Saftleven (1607–1681), a native of Rotterdam, is best known for his genre pieces and landscapes with animals, but he also made history paintings, allegorical representations and portraits. Rubens owned eight paintings by Saftleven. These two masters are also thought to have worked together in the 1630s. The only painting that has yet been connected with this intriguing collaboration, *Landscape with Cows*, has recently been put on display in the Rubenshuis. It possibly belonged to Rubens at one time.

The museum has also come into the temporary possession of a history painting from Rubens's Italian period (1600–08): *The Conversion of Paul* by Rubens and his

studio, a work that is filled to the brim with Italian influences. Another version of this composition is to be found in the collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein.

A picture by Rubens's friend and neighbour Alexander Adriaenssen (1587–1661), *Still Life with Fruit, Fish, Vegetables and Poultry*, dated '1640', is another new addition to the Rubenshuis. Although Adriaenssen painted a wide range of still-life subjects, he can be called a true specialist of the fish genre. He also produced a few still lifes in which he combined fish with other motifs, and our picture is a splendid example of just such a composition.

Among the most beautiful acquisitions are without doubt two portraits by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) that date from his so-called 'second Antwerp period' (1627–32), and a still life by Frans Snijders (1579–1657), which has only recently been discovered. Around 1628 Van Dyck painted the informal *Portrait of Jan van Malderen*, at that time the bishop of Antwerp. Of the known versions of this portrait, the painting now in the Rubenshuis is undoubtedly of the highest quality, possibly being the original that was presumed lost. In early 1632 Van Dyck was staying in The Hague, where he painted, among other subjects, the portrait of Prince William II (1626–1650) at the age of five or six. That same year he completed a second version for the English king Charles I, whose eldest daughter, Mary Stuart, was to marry William in 1641. The original portrait of young William is now in Dessau (Germany). The supposedly lost version made for Charles I surfaced very recently (see ill.). This lively and engaging portrait demonstrates superbly Van Dyck's pre-eminent qualities as a children's portraitist.

Still Life with a Hare, a Tazza of Grapes and a Lobster is an outstanding illustration of Snijders's virtuoso technique as a still-life painter. The hare's stiff fur, the fragile porcelain of the dish, the grapes' translucent sheen, the gleaming metal of the *tazza* – all of these qualities are rendered in a way that makes

them almost palpable. This magnificent still life, perhaps painted around 1613, surfaced only recently. It is an important addition to Snijders's oeuvre.

Finally, Jan Bruegel's *Monkeys Feasting*, a small painting on copper from the early 1620s, is also an exceptional work. It is one of the earliest known examples of the genre of *singerie*, or monkey satires. Such paintings, in which monkeys ape human behaviour, were a playful provocation to reflect on all the foolishness in the world.

Ben van Beneden
Curator of the Rubens House

The Rubenianum Lectures

After an exceptionally successful September edition, we warmly welcome you to our last Rubenianum Lecture of this year on 16 December 2012, 11 am:

JOZEF GLASSÉE

From cabinet to museum. Antwerp mayor Florent van Ertborn (1784–1840) as a fine arts collector and museum patron

At the very end of his PhD research, Jozef Glassée (KULeuven) will share with us his findings on the glorious beginnings of local patronage by collectors in nineteenth-century Antwerp. The significance of Florent van Ertborn's connoisseurship, personal collection and later donation for Antwerp's artistic heritage can hardly be underestimated. A theme that connects to the present Rubenianum Fund's spirit of patronage. Thank you for registering at rubenianum@stad.antwerpen.be.

The Rubenianum Lectures are organized with the support of the Inbev-Baillet Latour Fund.



Celebrating Arnout Balis

Work at the Centrum Rubenianum is hard and tense, sometimes tiring and now and then very demanding but not too bad altogether. Once in a while, however, after their stressful duties, the staff must unwind and decompress, and thus occasions are found for merrymaking and feasting. This time the 60th birthday of Arnout Balis, Chairman of the Centrum, was a suitable opportunity for organizing a gargantuan dinner party à la Frans Snyders, in the Rubensian surroundings of the Kolveniershof and reminiscent of Jordaens's festive meal in *The King Drinks*. Here the partygoers pose on the staircase with teamleader Arnout and his fan club, composed of his numerous colleagues and friends.

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