

The Rubenianum Quarterly

2013
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'The Golden Cabinet'. The Royal Museum at the Rockox House

Imbued with an eternal metropolitan sense, the City of Antwerp twice constructed a brand-new arts temple to accommodate its unique Rubens collection in the course of the nineteenth century. The purpose of the monumental programmatic painting by Nicaise de Keyser that adorns the staircase of the museum is immediately apparent: it celebrates the Antwerp school of painting, whose very finest pieces await the unsuspecting and invariably overwhelmed visitors who are about to enter the galleries.

One of the exquisite products of the Antwerp school is the so-called *Kunstkammer* or 'art cabinet', a rather unique genre that is reminiscent of the city's Golden Age, when Antwerp was an important centre of production of and trade in luxury goods. Wealthy local citizens would devote themselves to building inspired collections of art to show off to and share with their peers. Some of these cabinets were internationally renowned in humanist circles and considered an essential ingredient of cultural and intellectual life. Arguably the most iconic example is the picture gallery of Cornelis van der Geest (Rubenshuis), whose motto *Vive l'esprit* rather fittingly epitomizes the spirit of the time, but there were many others. Van der Geest's contemporary and fellow burgher Nicolaes Rockox, a patron and friend of Rubens, compiled an equally impressive cabinet. This observation, combined with the fact that the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) needed to temporarily relocate for renovation, provided the premise for an exceptional experiment.

'The Golden Cabinet' is an exhibition at the Rockox House that immerses the visitor in the universe of a wealthy seventeenth-century burgher. We know what the home of patrician and burgomaster Rockox looked like from his inventory and from a painting representing his art cabinet by Frans Francken II (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Over a hundred showpieces from the KMSKA and highlights from the collection of the Rockox House Museum will transform Rockox's residence into an opulent art cabinet from Antwerp's Golden Age. The paintings on display include work by Van Eyck, Van der Weyden, Memling, Rubens and Van Dyck. The exhibition occupies five rooms in the historical city mansion. The first two are devoted to late medieval painting, in a manner that assigns focus and space to the works of art. For the decoration of the remaining rooms or *saletten*, the curators have drawn inspiration from typical Baroque art cabinets, with their characteristic gold leather wall covering bedecked with paintings. Mantelpieces reveal the original purpose of each of the rooms: the kitchen, the reception room, and the study. | *Dr Paul Huvenne, General Director KMSKA*

Frans Francken II, *Kunstkammer*, 1619. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp



An expat in London

Born and bred in Antwerp yet living and working in London taking care of works of art from the Low Countries, I find it most gratifying to reconnect to my home country through my job. As a curator of Dutch and Flemish drawings and prints at the British Museum, I couldn't be luckier: thanks to the enthusiasm of many British collectors, the Department of Prints and Drawings boasts one of the foremost collections of works on paper by Dutch and Flemish artists.

Among the almost seven thousand Dutch and Flemish sheets kept at the British Museum, all major artists are represented. The strong collection of Flemish masters from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century includes Peter Paul Rubens's fascinating 'Costume Book' and Anthony van Dyck's invaluable 'Italian Sketchbook'. My personal favourite is (maybe unsurprisingly) the intimate portrait of Isabella Brant drawn by Rubens 'aux trois crayons' a few years before his first wife's death and later supplemented on the verso with a drawing of himself and his second wife, Helena Fourment.

Almost one hundred years have passed since the Dutch and Flemish drawings were systematically described in five catalogues, and even though all drawings can be found on the museum's online database (www.britishmuseum.org/research), additional research is necessary. I have decided to tackle this major task in a chronological order, starting with the in-depth study of our superb collection of fifteenth-century drawings, a dozen of which are currently being scientifically analysed in preparation for a forthcoming exhibition on silverpoint drawings. After completing the study of early Netherlandish drawings, I will concentrate on our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Flemish works and I look forward to the no doubt frequent research visits to the Rubenianum this will require. Thanks to my Antwerp colleagues my past visits here have always been special. I cannot wait to come 'home' again while delving into our rich holdings of Flemish drawings!

An Van Camp, Curator of Dutch and Flemish Drawings and Prints, The British Museum

The 2013 meeting of the Corpus Rubenianum authors

The second CRLB authors' meeting took place in Antwerp at the Rubenianum on 1 and 2 February 2013. The first meeting in 2010 had been a success and, once again, the majority of Corpus authors (some twenty altogether) attended the meeting.

Arnout Balis, chairman of the Centrum Rubenianum, the foundation responsible for the publication of the CRLB, opened the meeting on 1 February: 'In those days, there were plans to finish the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* by 1977.' This plan proved to be little more than quixotic. Over the years, experience has taught us that there are strengths and weaknesses to the whole enterprise. With the creation of the Rubenianum Fund in 2010 the Centrum took on the commitment to have the entire series on the shelves by 2020. This might sound like yet another quixotic scheme, but thanks to the Fund, three editorial assistants came to reinforce the team, ensuring that manuscripts, once submitted, could smoothly be seen through the publication process. A major weakness, however, remains the very demanding academic and/or museum commitments of the many volunteer authors, which hinders the prompt submission of their manuscripts. The year 2012 demonstrated this weakness rather painfully, since not a single manuscript was ready for submission. In future this situation will have to be avoided if the master plan is to be accomplished. Our goal is to revert to a balanced publication scheme and to intensify communication with the authors.

Véronique Van de Kerckhof then commented on the present activities of the Rubenianum, the City of Antwerp's art-historical documentation centre, for which she, as its curator, is responsible. A recent phenomenon is the increasing diversity of organizations and people working under its roof: apart from the Rubenianum and Centrum Rubenianum these include the Rubenshuis staff, the Rubens researchers from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, as well as visiting scholars and Corpus authors, interns and volunteers. Regular meetings between these partners, including the Rubenianum Fund, enhance internal collaboration and common projects. An important innovation is the collaboration with the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD) in The Hague that will enable online access to the Rubenianum's rich collections. Also, many efforts go to unlocking the personal scholars' archives. Making available Ludwig Burchard's Rubens archives is another priority to the Rubenianum. As soon as the necessary funds are found, digitized catalogue entries of already published Corpus volumes will be made available as PDF files (albeit with a 'moving wall' of fifteen years).

In the next, more 'hands-on' session, Bert Schepers and Prisca Valkeneers introduced the authors to less well-known records and files. The recent moving of the Burchard cabinet and the freshly installed office for the authors in residence was the occasion for giving the authors a tour around the premises.

'No art object is by definition authentic or inauthentic. Authenticity is a relative notion and depends on more than a solemn attribution to the artist.' Professor Bert Demarsin instructed the authors on the legal aspects of providing opinions on works of art, providing the audience with information from different lawsuits in the recent past to support his argument. Dr Demarsin's legal advice can be summarized as follows: 'Stricto sensu, the opinion of the art historian is free. However, if you give commercial expertise, you may be held liable.'

After these lectures and discussions, the first day of the meeting ended with the group being invited to take part in the opening of the 'Gulden Cabinet' exhibition at the Rockox House.

The next day started with Thomas Leysen, chairman of the Rubenianum Fund, addressing the Corpus authors. 'The creation of the Fund and the cooperation with the King Baudouin Foundation is now three years old and we need to think of new strategies for fund-raising.' The *Rubenianum Quarterly*, the Sunday lectures and the annual sponsors' trip facilitate communication with the public, art lovers, dealers, corporate and anonymous sponsors. The year 2020 has been put forward to achieve this magnificent enterprise, the completion of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*. The 2012 interruption can only be temporary, for it is clear that we have to resume the rhythm of publication!

The next speaker, Carl Van de Velde, started by reflecting on the past of the Corpus enterprise. In the yearly report on the activities of the Centrum Rubenianum (called the Nationaal Centrum voor de Plastische Kunsten van de 16de en de 17de eeuw at the time) for 1963, fifty years ago, the then secretary, Frans Baudouin, wrote: 'According to our estimate, the catalogue raisonné of Rubens's oeuvre will consist of approximately ten volumes. It is a huge work, which will take years. It is clear that this task cannot be accomplished with the aid of only one scientific assistant [CVDV]. At least three assistants are needed – a strict minimum!' Little did he know that this dream would not come true until half a century later. With this



introduction Carl Van de Velde familiarized the public with the financial aspects of the endeavour. It is clear today that the authors have evolved into an impressive group, and the Centrum Rubenianum maintains its commitment to organizing their work in an efficient and pleasant way. This also implies some financial arrangements. In general, there is no money to pay substantial fees to the authors but we have organized a system of reimbursement for expenses, so that at least the authors will not have to spend their own money. Bert Schepers and Prisca Valkeneers reported on their tasks as editorial assistants. Prisca focused on the different editorial aspects and the assistance the authors can expect from the 'Task Force'. The editorial team is there to make the life of the authors as easy as possible. Bert gave an impressive overview of the electronic resources for art-historical research, tailored to the Corpus, on which the authors can now rely.

After a nice standing lunch, the authors' meeting concluded with Rubenshuis curator and Corpus author Ben van Beneden showing us the museum's latest acquisitions.

During this fruitful gathering a platform was created for exchanging ideas and enhancing cooperation. Some of the authors took full advantage of the opportunity to come a few days in advance or to stay on a bit longer to study the Burchard files and make use of the rich library at hand. The get-together of so many Rubens specialists generated interesting discussions at the office of authors in residence as well as at the coffee-machine – the origin of many great ideas. We can speak of a real Corpus-buzz! | Prisca Valkeneers

A Noble Mission

Interview with Dominique Allard, Director of the King Baudouin Foundation

TRQ: The Rubenianum Fund was set up within the framework of the King Baudouin Foundation. Could you tell us about this Belgian foundation?

DA: The King Baudouin Foundation is an independent public utility foundation, created in 1975 with the vocation of working in all fields of public interest. Heritage is one such area. It also sets out to provide a resource for philanthropists who wish to create, alone or with others, a sustainable philanthropic initiative with a specific objective, which they select, and which can also benefit from the King Baudouin Foundation's own networks of expertise and services. The Rubenianum Fund makes use of both facilities: it uses the Foundation's support services, notably to facilitate fundraising efforts in Belgium and abroad, and it shares the Foundation's desire to protect and promote the country's heritage. There are over four hundred individual funds within the Foundation, each in a particular field.

As part of the Foundation, our Centre for Philanthropy has the mission of facilitating the work of those who wish to devote their energy to changing something in the world or conserving something at all costs. This might be saving a work of art, a monument, a collection or a nature site, so that it may be handed down to future generations in good condition, or the philanthropist might wish to secure greater social justice for disinherited people or contribute to progress in medical research. We do that by putting philanthropists in touch with adequate resources and people, supporting them so that they can make a real impact and ensuring continuity for their objectives and efforts. An awesome mission!

Does the Foundation itself also get involved in heritage activities?

Oh yes, and how! Each year, it liberates important sums of its own to ensure the preservation of endangered works of art or historic documents. It is thanks to these efforts, supported for over twenty-five years, that numerous important works can now be admired in our loveliest museums. Some of the works were saved *in extremis* when they risked being dispersed, as was the case for the collection of drawings and modelli assembled by the Antwerp antique dealer Charles Van Herck. If you are in Maastricht, you may care to take a look at these very beautiful sculptures, which are temporarily on display (until 2015) at the Bonnefantenmuseum. Another example is the archives of the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who worked extensively for King Leopold II. It is difficult to imagine that all of his archives, thousands of letters, manuscripts and the first photos of Central Africa, are now cared for in Belgium, providing a mine of information for today's historians.

But the Foundation can also finance the restoration of works of art, works which are exhibited in Belgian collections of course, but even in European public collections. The Jonckheere Fund for example aims at safeguarding movable cultural heritage, paying particular attention to the conservation or restoration of works of art that highlight Brussels' European dimension. In that way, it could for example help finance the treatment of the *Triumph of Charity*, a tapestry of the Allegories set of St John's co-cathedral in Malta. This set was woven after designs by Rubens.

Nevertheless, I suppose that your financial means are somewhat limited?

Of course, and that explains why any intervention by the Foundation's Heritage

Fund, presided over by Thomas Leysen, must be highly selective. Only works estimated to represent a capital part of Belgium's cultural creation through the centuries benefit from our support and this, of course, within the available resources. Sometimes it is extremely painful to see an important work leave the country without our being able to summon the necessary means to keep it here or return it to Belgium.

Yes, but I guess you are not always alone! No, that's true, although the Foundation does not participate in collective appeals with other institutions or the public authorities. Even if, to use a metaphor, 'we try to sing from the same hymn sheet', we believe that it is total ownership that guarantees the perpetuity of a work. So any decision to save a work must meet our own requirements for its appropriate conservation.

On the other hand, the Foundation's work attracts so much goodwill that private individuals are pleased to work with us. This was the case, for instance, with the marvellous ceremonial silver that once belonged to Rubens and had remained in his family for generations until it was put up for auction in Monaco, where it was acquired by Pierre and Colette Bauchau and immediately offered to the Foundation. Today, this set is one of the works of reference in the Rubens House in Antwerp [fig. 1], having been returned after four centuries to the very place where it used to gleam under its illustrious owner's eyes.

Are there any other special examples?

Well, staying with the Rubens House, there is the famous de Ganay Manuscript acquired by the Foundation last year and Jordaens's *Bagpiper*, acquired by our Léon Courtin – Marcelle Bouché Fund. It is collaboration such as this that has built up our collection of over eight thousand works during the last twenty-five years.

Other funds have been set up around a particular collection that has been patiently assembled by a philanthropist who wishes to hand it down to the greatest possible number of people. The Foundation does everything possible to facilitate such noble gestures, so as to prolong the life of a passion and endow the collection with the same quality and respect. The Thomas Neiryck Fund is a good example, created around a collection of works by the CoBrA artists. Even more moving is the Christian Dotremont Fund, donated by his brother Guy and dedicated to the memory of this important twentieth-century poet and



Fig. 1 Theodoor Rogiers the Elder, Silver basin and jug (1635–36) from Rubens's collection. Donated by Pierre and Collette Bauchau. Collection King Baudouin Foundation, on permanent loan to the Rubens House. © Hugues Dubois

artist. Or we could speak about Michel Wittcock's internationally renowned collection around the history of the book and bookbinding.

The fact that a single team, led by Anne De Breuck, develops the activities of the Foundation's Heritage Fund and simultaneously manages the secretariat and the monitoring of funds which, like the Rubenianum Fund, work on behalf of our heritage, guarantees greater cohesion of the activities as well as resulting in even more effective leverage. Whether dealing with individual funds or the Foundation's own Heritage Fund, the collection is managed with the same care and rigour.

So many works, but where is the Foundation's Museum?

Well actually, our only museum is our website www.patrimoine-frb.be! It is true that most European foundations would be happy to invite the general public to discover their collection in their museum, but at the King Baudouin Foundation, our point of departure was somewhat different. To make our acquisitions, the Foundation uses resources provided by the public: in return, our collection is made permanently accessible to the public via more than twenty-five museums all over Belgium. Our works are in fact exhibited in or near the locations for which they were created, or with which they have a special link: Horta's furniture is in the Horta Museum in Brussels, the little silver owl of Antwerp is in the Sterckshof Silver Museum in Antwerp and the oldest civil Liège silverware is in Liège. So there is always one of the King Baudouin Foundation's works near you.

And yet, I've been told that an exception has recently been made to the museum principle. You're very well-informed! Yes, and in this respect I'd like to recount a fascinating story for your readers. It starts in the seventeenth

century. In 1675, Lamoral, Count of Thurn and Taxis, commissioned a funeral chapel to be built in his church on the Sablon, in the heart of Brussels. The chapel was intended to rival the most beautiful creations of the time, affirming not only the Count's elevated position but also his ambitions. It is an outstanding example of Baroque architecture. The very best sculptors of the time were commissioned to create the décor: Quellinus, Faydherbe and their respective workshops. Each sculpture is a match for Michelangelo's *Pietà* (well almost!). The chapel was a triumph, and the Count's objective was achieved.

Among the sculptures was a magnificent *Charity*, created from a single block of white marble by Jan van Delen, Faydherbe's son-in-law. In 1794, however, French revolutionaries stripped the chapel of its sculptural treasures – they had excellent taste! They left for the Dépôt Central in Paris, but two of the works, the sculptures of *Charity* and *Truth* never arrived, so they could not be returned after the fall of Napoleon. They subsequently disappeared.

Now, you will hardly believe this. The *Charity* group reappeared in 2012, in Paris, where it provided the prestigious decoration for the entrance hall of an elegant building in the 16th *arrondissement*. Given the excellent documentation that existed on the sculpture, it was easy to confirm the statue's identity. Acquired by the Foundation amid tough bidding, *Charity* was brought back to Brussels, in good condition, more than two centuries after its disappearance [fig. 2]. No other organization could have acted so swiftly or with such determination.

But you are right: *Charity* will be the only one of our works not to be kept in a museum: instead she will be put back into her niche in the chapel of the Sablon Church. You can, of course, rest assured that the work will only be reinstalled once the optimal conditions for its security and accessibility to the public



Fig. 2 Jan van Delen, *Charity*, 1673–78, white marble. Collection King Baudouin Foundation, stored at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels. © KIK-IRPA

are in place. I know that the City of Brussels and the Sablon Church Fabric are working energetically on this and I am most grateful to them. What a simply beautiful illustration of our mission!

Amazing. Tell us another story.

With pleasure, but you run the risk that I shan't be able to stop! This one relates to a medieval religious treasure, created in the south of the country during the thirteenth century, by a single workshop, that of Brother Hugo, at the Oignies Priory on the River Sambre. Some of these pieces are stunning: the silver binding plates of the Evangelary, the prior's chalice and paten, the reliquary of St Peter's rib and the dove reliquary. At the end of the Ancien Régime, the last prior entrusted the collection to a religious community, the Sœurs de Notre-Dame de Namur. The nuns guarded the treasure for almost two centuries, even ensuring that it was accessible to amateurs and the curious during the last forty years of their guardianship. Over time, however, the Sisters realized that they no longer had the necessary energy to fulfil their mission completely and set out to find the best-placed institution to which they could transmit the treasure. Their choice fell to the King Baudouin Foundation's Heritage Fund. The Foundation immediately guaranteed that the treasure would remain accessible to the public and created a strong room for it at the Musée Provincial des Arts Anciens in Namur, designed in accordance with the requirements of contemporary museography [fig. 3]. What a token of confidence in our mission, but equally what a heritage for future generations! The eight-century-long chain of men and women devoted to handing down this incomparable treasure has remained unbroken. Some tourist guides even believe that there are three things a visitor should not miss in Belgium: the Hugo d'Oignies Treasure in Namur, Van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* in Ghent and, of course, the Rubens House.



Fig. 3 The Treasure of Oignies, 13th century. Collection King Baudouin Foundation, stored at the Musée des Arts anciens du Namurois, Namur. © Hugues Dubois

Rubeniana

A Dominican at the Rubenshuis

Countless compositions by Rubens exist in a number of versions, in which it is not always easy to distinguish the master's contribution from that of his studio assistants. Often it is also hard to tell which version was made first. This is particularly true of his portraits. There was a great demand for depictions of prominent persons, and the replication of portraits was standard studio practice. The portrait of Michiel van Ophoven – 'Ophovius' in Latin – also exists in a number of versions, of which the two best ones – that in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, and the one recently acquired by the Rubenshuis – are displayed together at the Rubenshuis until September 2014.

Michiel Ophovius, a friend of Rubens, was prior of the Dominican convent of St Paul in Antwerp. Rubens depicted the priest in the habit of his order: a white woollen tunic and a long black cloak with a red-lined hood. The gesture he makes with his right hand is a sign of his eloquence as a priest.

The loose, expressive brushwork clearly marks the Mauritshuis painting as the first version, the original or the *principael* created by Rubens himself. Its execution is more spontaneous, although the work in the Rubenshuis displays a technique that is hardly inferior. We should probably assume that the Rubenshuis picture was produced primarily by an assistant and afterwards retouched by the master. | Ben van Beneden



Peter Paul Rubens (?) and studio, *Portrait of Michiel Ophovius (detail)*, c. 1615–1617

historiographic tradition of Rubens research and connoisseurship of his day. Parallels will be explored with contemporary scholars – and personal acquaintances – such as Max Friedländer and Fritz Grossmann. Apart from coming closer to Ludwig Burchard, we hope to gain better insight into the genesis of photo archives that have proved crucial for the collections and identity of study centres like the Rubenianum.

The study day will be concluded by a festive evening programme at Antwerp's City Hall. Details and invitation will follow. If you would wish to register your interest in the study day, please contact us via rubenianum@stad.antwerpen.be. | Véronique Van de Kerckhof

The Rubenianum Lectures

The Rubenianum Lectures have become an established cultural event in Antwerp. In 2013, we continue our series with four expert scholars sharing their research on seventeenth-century Flemish art.

We kindly invite you to our next lecture on 30 June 2013, 11 am, at the Rubenianum, Kolveniersstraat 20, 2000 Antwerp

BERT WATTEEUW (Rubenianum) *Dramatis Personae. On the dramatic potential of the portrait*

This lecture will focus on the portrait as a literary motif. Through a reading of seventeenth-century tragedies, comedies, novellas, folk stories, songs, satires and jokes it will reveal emotional and even passionate aspects that remain skilfully hidden from view in the sitter's composed and impassive expressions. These previously neglected sources hold dramatic potential for the study of portraiture. At the same time they eloquently illustrate the dramatic potential of the portrait itself.

The lecture is in Dutch.

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

Fifty years of Rubenianum: study day on 6 December 2013

In 2013 the Rubenianum celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, an occasion we would like to mark by looking back on the institute's origins and history. Late in 1963, after negotiations on the acquisition of Ludwig Burchard's archive and library had been concluded successfully, the collection arrived by ship in Antwerp. The collection was installed, along with new staff and study room facilities, at the Smidt van Gelder Museum. This was the actual start of the Rubenianum's ambitious mission to create a specialized library and documentation, and to commence its primary scholarly goal: the edition of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*.

On Friday 6 December we kindly invite you to join us in celebrating the Rubenianum's half centenary. The programme includes a study day devoted to the German Rubens expert Dr Ludwig Burchard, whose intellectual legacy was at the basis of the Rubenianum's collections. This workshop aims at contextualizing Burchard's person, his achievements and network within the art-



APPEAL TO OUR READERS

Over the centuries the Dukes of Arenberg have been great patrons of the arts and keen art collectors, but inevitably their once gigantic collections have been dispersed throughout the ages.

At the request of HSH the Duke of Arenberg and with an eye to an eventual publication, the undersigned started researching the whereabouts of Old Master drawings that once belonged to the Arenberg family. The oval collection mark (Lugt 567) refers to their coat of arms with three medlar flowers and shows the motto 'Ch. Protector Meus'. It is stamped on the verso of the drawing. If you have ever encountered one of these please contact me by email. Thank you for your attention.

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