

The Rubenianum Quarterly

2015
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A fine gesture from one of our donors intensifies the bond between scholars and patrons

From April to November 2015 Elise Boutsen is strengthening the Rubenianum ranks as a project associate. Thanks to a generous gift from Mr Eric Le Jeune, she is immersing herself in the world of the wooded landscape, sifting through the Rubenianum's paper documentation on the Frankenthal school and creating some 500 online records in the RKD*Images* database to which the Rubenianum has been contributing since 2012. Elise improves and adds to our on-site documentation and markedly expands the online presence of these Protestant landscape artists, who fled Antwerp for Frankenthal after the city's fall in 1585. Her research will also result in the publication of an article on the subject.

Mr Le Jeune is passionate about Flemish painting. On arrival at the Rubenianum he enthusiastically reports on a recent visit to the St Petersburg State Hermitage Museum. That this love of paintings is matched by a vivid interest in the lives of the artists who produced them – and in the political, social and cultural climate that shaped those lives – is evident from the fact that just the day before this interview took place, he rendered homage to Jacques Jordaens and Adriaen van Stalbempt in Putte, the town just across the current border with the Netherlands, where both Protestant artists are buried and where their gravestones have been assembled into a monument.

Mr Le Jeune is a familiar face in our reading room. His relationship with the Rubenianum started years ago. Over the years he has been a faithful visitor to the exhibitions held at the Rubens House, but his interest took a more active turn when in 2009 a picture that used to belong to his great-great-grandfather came up for sale at Bonhams in London. He then discovered the extensive resources held at the Rubenianum and dug in. Photographs and books annotated by Burchard piqued his curiosity. As a lover of mysteries and detective stories, he found researching the painter and subject of the picture most exciting. Eventually he was outbid, but he kept a fascination for connoisseurship and matters of attribution. Since then, he has attended conferences and lectures held at the Rubenianum, and has grown rather fond of the institute.

Continued on the next page, where Bert Watteeuw explores the ambition and drive of our two enthusiastic protagonists. It is our hope that their spirit of enterprise will motivate other committed patrons to follow suit.

'Wow! What a show'

These four words, uttered by the highly esteemed director of a leading British museum, perfectly capture the tone of the praise garnered by the recent exhibition at the Rubenshuis: 'Rubens in Private. The Master Portrays his Family' (28 March–28 June). The show – the first to be dedicated to the more private side of Rubens's genius, featuring a selection of self-portraits and portraits of family members and friends – attracted more than 100,000 visitors. Similarly, the catalogue ('beautifully produced and much anticipated' – HNA Review of Books, August 2015) sold out before the exhibition closed.

The public was surprised, above all, by the warm, devoted intimacy of the portraits and drawings that appear to have made Rubens human again, for – before this show – many were those who could hardly imagine this erudite and self-assured pioneer of the Flemish Baroque actually having a life of his own, a life that included love and loss. If it is true that Rubens is urgently in need of being saved from a 'clichéd response' (Financial Times, 24 January 2015) – and I'm afraid this is, in fact, the case – then it is to be hoped that 'Rubens in Private' furthered this noble mission. Rubens 'seldom succeeded at painting with empathy,' a Dutch art critic recently wrote. 'He aroused emotion, but portrayed it poorly' (NRC, 16 October 2014). How blind and biased can a viewer be? I sincerely hope that this journalist saw 'Rubens in Private' last summer.

Ben van Beneden
Director of the Rubenshuis



Peter Paul Rubens,
Isabella Brant, c. 1621 (detail)
The British Museum, London

'Seeing the wood for the trees': introducing project associate Elise Boutsen and patron Eric Le Jeune

Elise, what was your introduction to the Rubenianum?

As an art history student at Ghent University, I participated in a 2013 Master Seminar by Prof. Koenraad Jonckheere and Prof. Max Martens, which took place here. My fellow students and I studied drawings from private collections and researched them in the reading room. Our work eventually resulted in an exhibition on Renaissance drawings held at the Museum Mayer van den Bergh.

How and when did you develop an interest in Flemish painting?

ERIC LE JEUNE: I was lucky to have parents who had a fine appreciation of art. We spent holidays in Italy, and a great-aunt of mine even owned a Giorgione. But it's a colour illustration of Pieter

and relevant. When an inspiring seminar resulted in a master thesis on Hendrick van Cleve, I discovered that I much enjoyed the detective work of searching, comparing and really looking closely at works of art. I also discovered that there is no lack of dynamism or relevance in old master painting and its study.

Mr Le Jeune, when the Rubenianum Fund was launched in 2010, you came aboard as an early donor. Why do you feel this is important?

I was much impressed by Thomas Leysen's drive and initiative. My daughter co-organized the launch dinner, which is how I heard about it and got an invitation. As I had been doing research at the Rubenianum in 2009, the institute already meant something to me, and I strongly felt that it should be nurtured and kept well alive.

Brussels artists, a group of emigrant painters from Antwerp and Mechelen who settled in Frankenthal has not attracted the attention it deserves. By identifying these artists, who pioneered the closed wooded landscape without panoramas or vistas, and by adding their secure oeuvres to a database, I am attempting to see the wood for the trees. Besides the challenge of defining individual oeuvres, the group of artists, led by Gillis van Coninxloo, also poses interesting questions of individual and collective biography. Fleeing religious persecution in their home country, these artists successfully settled in a new environment. One of them, Hendrik Gijssmans, even became mayor in Frankenthal. Gijssmans and his colleagues overcame serious challenges, some of which may even be reflected in the nature and subject-matter of their work, as I hope to explore in a publication.

This project has a strong digital component. Do you keep up and encourage the transition to a digital world?

ERIC LE JEUNE: It is inescapable and I do try to navigate my way online. Between the RKD, the Getty, museum websites and Google, there is so much to discover. Elise has introduced me to new resources such as the Wiki on Jan Brueghel set up by Elizabeth Honig (janbrueghel.net). I'm interested in paintings, but I'm more interested in the people who made them and in their personal circumstances and social and cultural environment. I recently climbed the spire of Antwerp's cathedral, negotiating the same steps Albrecht Dürer walked on. You cannot replicate that sort of experience online.

Mr Le Jeune, we are hoping to repeat this effort for other artists or subgenres in the near future. What would you say to prospective donors who are considering supporting us?

I would say join the fold, get involved! It's exhilarating to be part of this project and to give young people an opportunity to learn, which in turn allows you to learn a great deal from them. I was chuffed to hear that the city has matched my gift. It is so important for Antwerp to create, maintain and develop expertise and knowledge and to try to improve appreciation of the city's artistic heritage. Helping to do just that makes me feel that I belong.

As I extract myself from the conversation, which has meanwhile turned to Elise's fascination with the motif of the tree stump, the last thing I hear as I leave the room is Mr Le Jeune asking her, 'Are you happy?' Judging from the look on Elise's face, lit up by a computer screen showing a dense woodland, the question is rhetorical.



Bruegel's *Fall of Icarus* given to me as a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy that made an indelible impression on me. Incidentally, much later my office used to be in the very house – possibly even the very room – in which Jan Brueghel the Elder died. The original roof beams above my desk were the ones under which the artist had lived. Such proximity is a great incentive to discover an artist's oeuvre, spread out over collections in Munich, Budapest, London and New York, to name but a few. I'm an avid traveller, but not much of a collector. I went to a lot of sales, but I feel that I started too late to catch the bug. I have more memories of missed sales than of actual purchases. I've already mentioned the picture at Bonhams that got away. I'm not a successful bidder, perhaps fortunately.

ELISE: I must confess that I was initially drawn to contemporary art, thinking it more dynamic

Why did you choose to extend your support beyond the ambition to complete the CRLB by 2020?

2020 is a long way away and I wanted to have something immediate and somewhat outside of Rubens's shadow. As Elise has confessed to a love of contemporary art, I feel safe enough admitting that Rubens is not my favourite artist. The Brueghel family has been with me from an early age, and I also have a soft spot for Van Dyck. Rubens can be an overpowering figure, and many of his lesser-known colleagues deserve our attention, so I'm very pleased that Elise will be working on artists like Gillis van Coninxloo, Kerstiaen de Keuninck, David Vinckboons, Anton Mirou, Adriaen van Stalbempt, Abraham Govaerts and others.

Elise, how was the scope of the project defined? While recent research has focused on

The New Hollstein Rubens: Towards a new catalogue raisonné of prints after Peter Paul Rubens

Jaco Rutgers and Simon Turner

A seemingly infinite number of prints after Peter Paul Rubens's inventions appeared during the seventeenth century: a myriad of engravings, and to a lesser extent etchings and woodcuts. It can safely be said that in the early modern period no artist was reproduced as often as Rubens.

The last attempt at a *catalogue raisonné* of all the Rubens prints – including eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works – was made almost 150 years ago: C.G. Voorhelm Schneevoogt's *Catalogue des estampes gravées d'après P.P. Rubens* appeared in 1873. It still is a useful research tool, albeit rather summary, and far from complete, as Max Rooses already pointed out in his five-volume *L'oeuvre de Rubens* of 1886–92. It is generally recognized that the greatest flaw of the 1873 catalogue is the lack of images; in contrast, the forthcoming volumes of the *New Hollstein Rubens* will be comprehensively illustrated. Details of the related works and preparatory material will also be cited, with references to the *Corpus Rubenianum* volumes and other recent literature. The research and publication are made possible by Sound & Vision Publishers bv and the project is a collaboration with the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam and the Rubenianum, Antwerp. The editor for all the volumes is Ger Luijten, director of the Fondation Custodia, Paris.

Rubens designed his first book illustrations before he returned from Italy to Antwerp in 1606 and continued providing professional book publishers with drawings up until his death in 1640. Around 1620 Rubens decided to set up a printmaking business himself. He was prompted to hire professional engravers – most famously Lucas Vorsterman – to make prints after his paintings and had pupils in his studio (among others the young Anthony van Dyck) make drawings especially for the purpose. By far the largest number of prints after Rubens's designs issued in the seventeenth century, however, appeared without the artist's own involvement. A considerable number of these reproduce

his paintings but the large majority are copies after other prints, mostly of religious compositions. They were published in Flanders, the Northern Netherlands, France and Germany in various sizes, often even without mentioning the *inventor*. These prints were surely issued as devotional images. For the first time, a clear overview of this phenomenon will be given in the *New Hollstein Rubens* volumes.

When the first engravings after his paintings started to appear without his involvement in the second decade of the seventeenth century, Rubens, it seems, decided to take the matter in hand. He must have realized that engravings were an ideal vehicle to spread his fame as an artist abroad. By taking control of the whole production process himself he was able to guarantee the highest-quality engravings while at the same time benefiting from their sale. His prints did not sell cheaply, as becomes apparent from a document dating from 1620 (diary of Arend van Buchel, entry of 26 July 1620). Rubens set a new standard by his close, critical involvement. Although he left most of the work to his studio, he oversaw the process at every stage. He personally retouched the preliminary drawings made by his pupils after the paintings, which served as direct models for the engravers; and he also made the necessary adjustments to proof impressions of the prints to instruct the engravers. Rubens's corrections of highlights and shadows, as well as more radical adjustments to the compositions, made the prints diverge from the original paintings. They are not precise reproductions at all. It is as if Rubens was having another go

towards perfecting his compositions, while taking into account the format and the medium.

A vivid insight into the printmaking programme is provided by some of the well-known letters written by Rubens to his friends and other associates. For example, a letter of 19 June 1622 to Pieter van Veen gives a wonderfully frank summary of proceedings. We learn that production almost ground to a halt owing to problems with the principal engraver Lucas Vorsterman: 'For some years we have done almost nothing, on account of the mental disorder of my engraver.' We are also provided with pithy summaries directly from Rubens concerning specific prints by the same Vorsterman. Hence his *St Francis Receiving the Stigmata* is 'engraved somewhat coarsely, since it is a first attempt'. Likewise the plate of *Lot with his Wife and Daughters* is described as 'a plate made when the engraver first came to work for me'. On the other hand Rubens is pleased with the plate of 'a little Madonna kissing the Child', which 'seems good to me', and the *Susanna and the Elders* 'I count among the best'. The large print of the *Fall of Lucifer* 'did not turn out badly', either. We get a vivid sense of some of the hindrances that Rubens experienced and are told that the plate of the *Battle of the Amazons* in six sheets is on the verge of being finished, 'but I cannot get it out of the hands of this fellow, although he was paid for the engraving three years ago'.

It will be an interesting challenge to distinguish between the 'real' Rubens prints, the ones that originated from his studio, and the so-called unauthorized ones. A substantial number of 57 engravings carry a triple privilege and these can be easily categorized as 'real' Rubens prints. Among them are such famous sheets as Lucas Vorsterman's *The Descent from the Cross*

Fig. 1 Christoffel Jegher, *The Garden of Love*. Woodcut, retouched by Rubens. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



Fig. 2 Paulus Pontius, *The Carrying of the Cross*, 1632. Engraving. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



of 1620, Boëtius à Bolswert's 'Coup de Lance' of 1631 and Paulus Pontius' *The Carrying of the Cross* of 1632. It was the master himself who tried to protect his work from unauthorized copying and strived to obtain privileges covering the most important centres of printmaking in Europe at the time: the Northern and Southern Netherlands and France. Around the time he got started with his printmaking enterprise he requested and got privileges from the Dutch States General, the Archdukes Albert and Isabella who governed the Southern Netherlands, and the King of France. Rubens proudly mentions the privileges granted by these three authorities on the aforementioned engravings.

Most Rubens prints do not carry such 'triple privileges', however. Does that mean that all the rest did not come out of the master's workshop? There is ample proof that some of the others actually did, including the spectacular woodcuts by Christoffel Jegher, for instance *The Garden of Love*, and the engraving by Paulus Pontius after Rubens's famous *Self-Portrait* now in the British Royal Collection. On the other hand, most prints were clearly published without Rubens's involvement. That was obviously the case with numerous posthumous ones, such as Paulus Pontius's *Massacre of the Innocents* of 1643, but also with quite a few that were made during Rubens's lifetime, for example Schelte à Bolswert's *Salome Receiving the Head of St John from the Executioner*, which must predate 1638 for it is mentioned in a document of that year. In a few instances the distinction between the 'real' Rubens prints and the unauthorized ones has proven particularly problematic. For the first time, an attempt at a well-founded division of the two categories will be presented in the *New Hollstein Rubens*.

The *New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts (1450–1700)* is a series of monographic catalogues of artists involved in prints and printmaking. It was started in the 1990s as a spin-off of the traditional 'Hollstein'. *Hollstein's Dutch & Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts ca. 1450–1700* was one of the most ambitious projects in modern art history, and was concluded with the publication of the index volumes in 2010. The 72 volumes aimed at providing a catalogue of all the prints published in the Northern and Southern Netherlands up to 1700 arranged alphabetically according to the names of the printmakers. The series has become known simply as 'Hollstein' and is the standard reference work on the subject ever since the first volume came out in 1949. Since then, the standards for such catalogues have developed drastically, however. For instance, only about a quarter of the catalogued prints were illustrated in the first fifteen volumes, running up to the letter 'P', and the impressions listed were generally those kept in the Amsterdam Rijksprentenkabinet. Hardly any other printroom was visited in the first decade. Therefore in the 1990s a second series was started with the aim of updating and perfecting the information



Fig. 3 Boëtius à Bolswert, 'Coup de Lance', 1631. Engraving. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam



Fig. 4 Lucas Vorsterman, *The Descent from the Cross*, 1620. Engraving. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

contained in the earlier volumes of the series. As the traditional *Hollstein* focused on the printmakers, the so-called *New Hollstein* series has also widened the spectrum. Volumes are now dedicated also to artists who never, or hardly ever, made a print themselves, the designers or *inventors*, and this approach has paved the way for the *New Hollstein Rubens*.

The project to catalogue all the seventeenth-century prints after Rubens effectively began in July 2013. The huge task was begun by downloading hundreds of images from the Rijksmuseum and British Museum websites and going meticulously through the Dutch and Flemish *Hollstein* index (vol. LXXII) looking at every reference to Rubens. We began to populate our online database, which can be accessed simultaneously, with information gleaned online mostly from the London and Amsterdam websites and directly from the prints at the Rijksprentenkabinet. The information was added to the database laboriously – dimensions, lettering, references etc. – one print and each state at a time, although starting with the obvious names such as Bolswert, de Jode, Pontius and Vorsterman, and proceeding alphabetically from Bailliu to Wyngaerde. As a warming-up exercise we made a trip to Bolsward to the Titus Brandsma Museum to see the Bolswert brothers exhibition 'Van Bolswert naar Antwerpen: Gouden Eeuwgravures naar Bloemaert, Rubens en Van Dyck'.

The *New Hollstein Rubens* project is still a work in progress. Material has been gathered from printrooms in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Berlin, Braunschweig, Brussels, Dresden, Hamburg, New York, Paris, San Francisco and Wolfegg, already adding considerably to the published numbers of Rubens prints. Visits to, for instance, Coburg, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Rotterdam, Stuttgart and Vienna will undoubtedly contribute substantially to the corpus found so far. All the prints

and copies after them will be described in a scholarly catalogue and properly illustrated. It goes without saying that the catalogue will contain a lengthy introduction describing the whole process of printmaking in Rubens's studio on the basis of a new reading of all the evidence. Contemporary archival documents will be analysed and compared with the evidence provided by the prints themselves. Such diverse issues as privileges, dedications, commissions and involvement of professional publishers will be critically explained against the background of the considerable amount of existing literature on the subject. In all, the *New Hollstein Rubens* sets out to become a valuable research tool in the field of Rubens studies and among scholars of prints and printmaking in general. The first volume will be dedicated to the prints that were actually produced under the master's direct supervision. In this particular volume, not only the prints themselves but also the whole process from original painting, intermediate drawing, retouched proof impressions up to impressions of the first commercial edition of the engraving will be reproduced in full colour. Subsequent volumes will contain the remaining prints – iconographically arranged – and the titlepages.

Naturally, we cannot do this all alone. The help from colleagues in the field, most notably the staff of the Rubenianum and the curators of all the printrooms on our itinerary, has already proven to be indispensable. It has been gratifying to hear from curators who have learnt of our project through announcements on the website of Sound & Vision Publishers, Codart and through the Print Council of America. We would still gladly like to take the opportunity to call on everybody who knows of unusual printed copies after Rubens, undescribed states or anything else that might be of interest to us. Please make yourselves known to us, so that with your help we can make the *New Hollstein Rubens* as complete as possible.

'Power Flower: Floral Still Lives in the Low Countries'

Exhibition at the Rockox House, Antwerp, 28 November 2015–27 March 2016

The Rockox House and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA) are organizing a series of small-scale exhibitions as part of the 'Golden Cabinet' initiative. 'Power Flower: Floral Still Lives in the Low Countries' is the fifth in the series. Since time immemorial, art in Flanders, Brabant and Holland has been characterized by incisive observation of nature and the quest for naturalness.

Despite that, until well into the sixteenth century, plants and flowers were only to be seen adorning the margins of illustrations depicting saints in books of hours. The flourishing interest in the botanical world and the burgeoning fondness for things natural prompted early seventeenth-century artists to regard bouquets of flowers as a self-contained motif. It was a period in which artists were totally spellbound by the 'Power Flower' and for many years to come. Jan Brueghel, Jan Davidz de Heem, Osias Beert, Daniel Seghers, Rachel Ruysch are just some of the many artists on proud floral display at this most sweet-scented of exhibitions.



Osias Beert (1580–1624)
Bouquet in a niche. © KBC Rockoxhuis, Erwin Donvil



Art Evaluation Day, 10 December 2015

Learn more about style, technique, iconography or attribution of your works of art! For the third year in a row, the Rubenium is organizing an Art Evaluation Day. Owners are invited to bring their sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Flemish paintings, drawings, prints and small sculptures to the Rubenium for an expert opinion. For more information, send an email to rubenium@stad.antwerpen.be with 'Beoordelingsdag 2015' as subject line.

The Rubenium Lectures

Next lecture: Sunday, 20 Dec. 2015, 11 am.

MAARTEN BASSENS (Collectie Rosier)
Paulus van Halmale. The artists' network of an Antwerp city magistrate

It has become a tradition to devote the last Rubenium Lecture of each cycle to the history of collecting in Antwerp. Based on original archival research, Maarten Bassens will bring to life the lesser-known but important figure of Paulus van Halmale, a city magistrate and art lover with connections to Rubens and Van Dyck.

The lecture is in Dutch and will be followed by an aperitif.

Summer Course: 'The Age of Rubens in Context'

After a successful first edition on 'The Age of Van Eyck in Context', next year's 'Summer Course for the Study of the Arts in Flanders' will focus on 'The Age of Rubens in Context' (19–29 June 2016). The Rubenium, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, and a host of partnering institutes have designed a programme for eighteen promising international researchers aimed at total immersion in Rubens's fascinating world. Find us on facebook!

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