

The Rubenianum Quarterly

2015 1

Book launch at Rubens's country estate 'Het Steen'

On 17 March a small company travelled from Rubens's town house to his country estate at Elewijt near Mechelen. Spring pleasantly announced itself through the chirping of birds while the morning sun poured into the landscape surrounding the impressive castle. One would almost forget that four centuries have passed since the days when Rubens and his family used to take the exact same route to escape the city buzz for some country air. The occasion for this historic ride? The book launch of no less than five Brepols/Harvey Miller publications – to some extent all connected to Rubens or landscapes or both – set at the unique location of Het Steen. Rubens acquired the estate in 1631 and transformed it into a second home to bring his young wife and children and enjoy the last years of his successful life.

Once the guests had arrived, Corina Kleinert kicked off the launch by presenting a short history of Het Steen before introducing her own book about Rubens's ideas on Nature and Art. The location for a presentation of a book on Rubens's landscapes, of course, couldn't have been more appropriate than the very spot where Rubens found inspiration for the various landscape paintings he produced at the end of his life. Hans Vlieghe then presented his and Hans Devisscher's new addition to the Corpus Rubenianum, devoted to the youth of Christ. Yours truly followed with a presentation on the conference proceedings on Ludwig Burchard – edited together with Prisca Valkeneers and Koen Bulckens – contextualizing the man who initiated the Corpus Rubenianum enterprise. Sabine van Sprang made us return to landscape painting as she introduced us to her book on the principal Flemish landscape painter at the beginning of the 17th century: Denijs van Alsloot. And Katlijne Van der Stighelen rounded off the official part of that morning with remarks on the conference proceedings she and Hannelore Magnus edited on the history of early modern emotions and art history. All five books were to be presented more elaborately later that day at the Rubenianum, but our curiosity had certainly been aroused while we sat down for an exclusive Rubenesque lunch, including *mousse au chocolat à la Hélène* accompanied by a *Châteauneuf-de-Rubens*. Near the glowing fireplace and with a romantic view from the castle's windows we could all imagine Rubens relishing his *Vin d'Ay* and watching his savoury figs and pears grow in the garden. | Lieneke Nijkamp



Photo by Kwong Gueng To

Work in progress

In terms of Rubens research, we are currently witnessing an exceptionally productive time, of which this issue of The Rubenianum Quarterly once again offers ample proof. In these pages, special attention goes to the once-in-a-lifetime family reunion established by the Rubens House in the exhibition 'Rubens in Private. The Master Portrays his Family'. Furthermore, we proudly introduce the latest volume of the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard. It was recently presented to the public, along with studies on Rubens's landscapes as well as on Ludwig Burchard himself.

While this new Corpus part brings us closer to the realization of this magnum opus, good news for its digital component has reached us just recently. Complementing the grants we gratefully received from The Samuel H. Kress Foundation, additional Flemish funding has now definitely secured the completion of the 'Digitizing the Corpus Rubenianum' project by mid-2016. This will greatly expand the online presence of the Corpus in an updated and illustrated form. Further good news is that, due to her vigorous efforts, cataloguer Karen De Meyst is still entirely on schedule.

But in a global perspective a great deal more is going on. For just over a year, print scholars Simon Turner and Jaco Rutgers have been compiling the long-awaited and much-needed volumes on prints after Rubens in the 'New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts' series. Both Rubens's personal engagement with the print production after his works, as well as the countless reproduction prints in the centuries after Rubens, make theirs an enormous undertaking, on which a report will follow in our Quarterly's summer issue.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, Dr Anne-Marie Logan indefatigably continues working on her complete catalogue of Rubens's drawings, that is to appear as a part of the highly regarded Brepols 'Pictura Nova' series.

This striking coincidence of ambitious and encompassing standard works on Rubens's oeuvre goes on to demonstrate the need to map and analyse his vast and influential artistic legacy. Obviously, all publication projects mentioned here will benefit from their respective advancements, as well as from the ever-reliable study collections at the Rubenianum.

Véronique Van de Kerckhof
Director of the Rubenianum

Corpus Rubenianum

Hans Devisscher & Hans Vlieghe: *The Life of Christ before the Passion. 1. The Youth of Christ*

(Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, Part V/I), London: Harvey Miller, 2014

The paintings that Rubens devoted to scenes from Christ's youth are among the most impressive and influential examples of art expressing Roman Catholic spirituality as reasserted by the Council of Trent. The vast majority of these works are Rubens's numerous images of the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi. The oldest sources for these and other scenes from Christ's early years are of course the accounts in the Gospels of St Luke and St Matthew. However, these are extremely brief and do not give artists sufficient material on which to base their paintings. From the earliest times, artists therefore drew on other sources: passages from the Apocrypha, prefigurations in the Old Testament, descriptions in legends and pious tales, and details from the Mystery Plays. In his interpretations of the themes of the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi, Rubens built to a large extent on the artistic tradition that had developed in the Low Countries and Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Rubens's images of the Adoration of the Shepherds are always set in a stable, suggested by the presence of a hay loft, a hay rack, an impressive beam structure or miscellaneous farming implements. These scenes can be divided into two distinct

compositional types: one in which the shepherds or shepherdesses stand or kneel around the manger, and a second type in which the shepherds are depicted as a single close-knit group that approaches the manger from the left or the right. Rubens did not introduce either of these two compositional schemes; in both cases he built on existing artistic traditions. For works in which shepherds and shepherdesses are sitting or kneeling around the manger, their attention totally absorbed by the Child being shown to them by the Virgin Mary, are very common in Netherlandish art of the sixteenth century, as we see in works by Frans Floris and Maarten de Vos. The second type, with the group of shepherds rushing to the scene, appears rather to be Italian in origin. It can certainly be encountered, in any case, in works by Titian and Jacopo Bassano.

The images of the Adoration of the Magi can also be divided into two distinct types. Unlike those depicting the Adoration of the Shepherds, these types are largely distinguished by their compositional format – either horizontal or vertical. The horizontal scenes focus heavily on the kings' retinue, which takes the form of a magnificent procession. In the scenes with a vertical format, the foreground is generally occupied by the Holy Family, the kings and

some of their youthful servants, while the background is reserved for the royal retinue. To make the members of the retinue visible to the viewer, and to enable them to watch the Adoration scene, they are frequently placed on a flight of steps. This idea of using a flight of steps to fill the composition plane with figures to the top was a new and typically Rubensian device. For the horizontally elaborated type with the broadly conceived procession of the royal retinue, Rubens again drew on the existing tradition, as crystallized in works by Veronese, Bassano and Maarten de Vos.

Both the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi are subjects that are wholly attuned to the iconographical views of the Counter-Reformation. Essentially, all these scenes revolve around the glorification of Christ by angels, shepherds and kings, together symbolizing the community of Christian believers. In line with the views of the Counter-Reformation, the compositions are never complex: they exude simplicity and clarity. As far as possible, the protagonists are placed in the foreground. With their direct appeal, these lucid compositions forge a psychological connection: the viewer feels directly involved in the event, and even has the sense of participating in it. The believer is thus invited to join the angels, shepherds and kings in glorifying the Christ Child. These Adoration scenes therefore encapsulate the concept that the salvation of humankind is made possible by faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, and by its commemoration in the Eucharist. The emphasis on the Eucharist and on Mary's role, it should be added, is entirely consistent with the views of the Counter-Reformation. By emphasizing this emphatically Catholic idea, the Roman Catholic Church sought to affirm its own principles as opposed to those of Reformed Protestants.

Although Rubens's scenes from the earliest days of Christ, before or after his birth, constitute a far smaller proportion of his religious oeuvre than the Adoration scenes described above, they are equally illustrative of the approach dictated by Counter-Reformation theorists. These scenes too, of course, are based partly on the Gospel and partly on Apocryphal texts and pious legends added over the years. Rubens could also build on a pictorial tradition that had developed over the centuries, in which the medieval views and patterns originating from Northern Europe had merged with those of the Italian Renaissance. | *Hans Vlieghe*



Rubens in Private. The Master Portrays his Family*

Ben van Beneden

From 28 March until 28 June the Rubens House is focusing on a distinct category within the work of Peter Paul Rubens – the portraits he made of himself and the members of his family. This comprehensive exhibition, the first ever dedicated to the private work of the most public painter of the seventeenth century, takes a fresh look at Rubens's family portraits, re-examining their functions and meanings, and reconsidering the works in the context of Rubens's life, and his social and artistic concerns.

As an artist, Rubens did not immediately develop a particular fondness for the genre of portraiture. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that his most remarkable achievements in this genre are portraits of family members and loved ones. Because these works were never intended for public display, they are freer and often more daring than the likenesses of his official clientele. Nothing about these private portraits seems idealized. They are uncommonly honest works that testify to profound commitment and deep affection. According to the time-honoured Tuscan proverb 'every painter paints himself' ('ogni dipintore dipinge sè') – found in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci – Rubens no doubt incorporated some measure of his own personality in his family portraits.

A remarkably large number of Rubens's painted and drawn portraits of close friends and relatives have been preserved – a body of work that is considerably larger than the complete oeuvre of such artists as Caravaggio and Vermeer. In the light of his artistic persona, this number is striking, to say the least. Rubens was more than just a brilliant and versatile artist. He was a *pictor doctus*, a learned painter who moved with ease from the culture of antiquity to that of his own day, who immersed himself in history and sought to anchor the past in the present. His career as a painter of the European elite, as a diplomat and as an entrepreneur with a nose for profitable connections was one of the

most successful ever. Yet the portraits of his intimate friends and relatives show another Rubens: a man of flesh and blood, who was deeply attached to his first and second wives, his brother and his children. Among his most tender expressions of intimacy and paternal love are undoubtedly the handful of portrait studies of his sons from his first marriage, in which he succeeded with only a few unerring lines of the pencil in showing, in all its beauty, the utter vulnerability of a child's soul (fig. 1).

Despite the wealth of surviving family portraits, a few of the protagonists in Rubens's life are lacking a face. This is particularly true of his mother, Maria Pypelinckx. In 1561 she married Jan Rubens, an Antwerp lawyer and magistrate, but the pendant portraits they commissioned to mark their marriage have not survived; nor do we know the name of the artist who painted them. Maria Pypelinckx must have been a strong, resolute woman and an extremely devoted mother who, as a refugee in a foreign country, often had to be the head of the family. Fragmentary archival evidence makes it possible to piece together her life, a life brought very close to us by the well-known, loving letter she wrote to her husband, imprisoned in Cologne. Surely Rubens painted this exceptional woman before he left for Italy – how could it be otherwise? It would be intriguing, then, to know what she looked like through the eyes of her son.

Rubens did not leave us a portrait of himself in the midst of his complete family. The only Antwerp family portrait that is indubitably by his hand is the engaging portrait of Jan Brueghel and his family, a painting that surpasses all others of this genre by virtue of the sitters' warm interaction. Rubens and Brueghel often worked together, and were not only close friends, but also godfathers to each other's children – a welcome way to expand the family by building up a network of helpful relationships.

In comparison with his illustrious fellow artists, Rubens did remarkably little painting in front of the mirror. Only four autonomous self-portraits by his hand are known. Why so few self-portraits of Rubens were in circulation is anyone's guess. Rubens was a history painter *pur sang*, who

was probably disinclined to invest time in painting self-portraits for art lovers, even princely ones. His portraits of members of his own family testify to great spontaneity and sincerity, but the pictures he produced of himself are an entirely different matter. In his self-portraits, Rubens invariably projected his public image, the way he wished to be seen – not as an artist but as a gentleman, a *gentiluomo*.

The lack of a detailed inventory of Rubens's estate makes it impossible to determine where the family portraits were displayed in his house on the Wapper. It is highly likely that there were also portraits hanging in his country house, Het Steen, in Elewijt, though we have no precise information about this either. The fact that Antwerp interiors usually featured portraits in the most important rooms on the ground floor illustrates the importance attached to them. For example, Jan Brant, Rubens's father-in-law, owned twenty 'likenesses', including 'a piece by Mr Peter Paul Rubens with his first wife', which was displayed in 'the large room on the courtyard', together with a portrait of Rubens's 'little daughter', Clara Serena.

Many of those family pieces – in both senses of the term – were no doubt intended as keepsakes or records of the past (*memoriae*); they illustrate the need felt by Rubens and countless others to immortalize their loved ones in paint. 'The art of painting preserves the features of a man after his death', Dürer wrote in a frequently quoted passage of 1508/09. That notion can be traced via the fifteenth-century art theorist Leon Battista Alberti back to Pliny the Elder. In the seventeenth century the commemorative function of portraits was repeatedly evocatively expressed by Constantijn Huygens – poet, diplomat and connoisseur of art – and the subject is also treated in *Het gulden cabinet der edel vry schilderconst* (The golden cabinet of the noble, liberal art of painting) of 1662 by Cornelis de Bie, the erudite Southern Netherlandish painter's son and artists' biographer. The memorial function of portraits also emerges from the wording encountered in wills of that period. Jan Brant left his books and 'papers' ('pampieren') to his grandson Albert Rubens, son of the painter, who also inherited Rubens's portrait of Jan Brant – 'to honour my memory', as the sitter himself had said. The portrait of his grandfather, a learned legal adviser, undoubtedly served Albert not just as a keepsake but as a paragon and source of inspiration. In their last will and testament, Rubens and Helena Fourment stipulated



Fig. 1 Peter Paul Rubens, *Nicolaas Rubens with Necklace*, c. 1619. Albertina, Vienna



Fig. 2 Peter Paul Rubens, *Isabella Brant*, c. 1620–25 (detail).
The Cleveland Museum of Art. Mr and Mrs William H. Marlatt Fund

Fig. 3 Peter Paul Rubens, *Clara Serena Rubens*, c. 1616 (detail).
Sammlungen des Fürsten von und zu Liechtenstein, Vaduz-Vienna

that the portraits of Rubens and his two wives go to their respective children, whereas ‘the painting called “Het Pelsken”’ was intended for ‘his current wife’.

Rubens’s family portraits seem to possess an immanent quality that gives the viewer the illusion, if only for a second, of the sitter’s palpable presence. Sometimes this has to do with barely perceptible facial expressions – no more than subtle indications of a psyche in motion. It is fascinating to see how Rubens achieved these magical effects: the white highlight on Isabella’s nose, for example, which causes the skin to glow and brings the nose itself to the fore, and the stray highlights in the eye and on the lower lip (fig. 2). In spite of all the studio tricks and conventions in the use of *trompe l’œil*, the fleeting, almost fortuitous nature of such effects is emphasized. It is as though Isabella is about to blink or change her expression. How could anyone doubt that she was as happy as she seems to be in her portraits?

Around 1616 Rubens made a surprising studio portrait of a girl – usually identified as his eldest daughter – who immediately captures our hearts (fig. 3). Clara Serena is portrayed from very close up, allowing us to follow perfectly the encounter between the painter and the flustered emotion of the face his hand was painting. Although it is a cliché to say so, Rubens succeeded in evoking those affections with a minimum of means: the thin line of lead white on the nose, which betrays perspiration; the lip that merges imperceptibly with flushed cheeks; the fluid secreted by the eye that takes on a white gleam – thanks to a couple of skilfully placed dots, smaller than the head of a pin – so that the whole eye seems to be filled with life. A more succinct yet compelling portrait is scarcely conceivable. The exhibition also boasts a second,

‘rediscovered’ portrait of Rubens’s eldest daughter that might well have been painted shortly after the girl’s death in 1623.

The sensitive drawings Rubens made of his two sons from his first marriage (see fig. 1) also give the impression of being spontaneous studies, lovingly drawn from life – ‘fait con amore’, as the nineteenth-century Rubens expert Max Rooses so beautifully put it. Ultimately, however, it is often the little touches that cannot easily be analysed and were almost certainly not consciously applied by the artist, which give the viewer the sensation of experiencing the picture as strongly as the artist must have experienced the image in his mind’s eye.

In 1630, more than four and a half years after the death of Isabella Brant, Rubens – meanwhile fifty-three years old – married sixteen-year-old Helena Fourment, daughter of Daniel Fourment, a wealthy silk and tapestry merchant of Antwerp. Helena allowed the artist to experience a second youth and was to remain an important source of inspiration until his death. It was a period of intense happiness and unprecedented creativity, in which the painter not only explored new subjects, such as landscape, but also challenged, from a refreshingly new perspective, the conventions of portraiture. Of the portraits he made of Helena, ‘*Het Pelsken*’ (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna) is undoubtedly the most intimate and daring. Especially for the exhibition, ‘*Het Pelsken*’ – which is far too fragile to travel – was scientifically examined. Analysis using macro X-ray fluorescence (ma-XRF) scanning – an imaging technique that enables the different layers and chemical elements of the painting to be identified – produced a series of remarkable results, which are presented in the exhibition catalogue for the first time.

In the last phase of his career, Rubens also made in rapid succession several life-size figure paintings featuring young women, such as *The Judgement of Paris* and *The Garden of Love* (*‘Conversatie à la mode’*), for which Helena seems to have posed indirectly – a detail that did not escape the notice of Rubens’s contemporaries. Even so, we should not view such veiled *portraits historiés* as portraits, for they are sooner an illustration of the saying, well known in those days, ‘Love brings forth art’ (*‘Liefde baart kunst’*), a Neoplatonic allusion to the convergence of love and creativity.

The portraits Rubens made of his immediate family and loved ones served various purposes: besides as a means of remembering (or of not being forgotten), they functioned as exempla and helped to build the image of the artist and his family. Many questions surrounding those likenesses will inevitably remain unanswered, but even though the feelings we attribute to the artist are based on only a few outpourings in his correspondence, we may safely assume that his intimate portraits are chiefly the product of genuine affection.

Ever since the great nineteenth-century Rubens expert Max Rooses (1839–1914), Antwerp has played a leading role in international Rubens studies. As this exhibition illustrates, research into the artist’s life and work is being pursued as vigorously as ever at the Rubenshuis and Rubenianum. The exhibition was jointly conceived with Nora De Poorter, Katlijne Van der Stighelen, Nils Büttner, Hans Vlieghe and Bert Watteeuw, all of whom are closely linked to the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*.

* This text is largely based on the Prologue in the exhibition catalogue.

International Conference 'Considering Women in the Early Modern Low Countries'

24–25 April 2015, Rubenianum

The Rubenianum is very pleased to host an International Conference organized by Dr Sarah Joan Moran, Research Fellow at the Rubenianum and University of Antwerp, and Dr Amanda Pipkin, Associate Professor of History at UNC Charlotte. This interdisciplinary event will present current academic research on the study of women and gender from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The conference features lectures on art, literature and history, and on the Southern as well as the Northern Netherlands. Programme and registration can be found at <https://classpages.uncc.edu/consideringwomen>.

New acquisition: Dr Jean-Pierre De Bruyn's Quellinus archive and documentation

The Rubenianum is glad to announce the donation of the archive and documentation of Dr Jean-Pierre De Bruyn. After finishing his doctoral thesis on the life and work of Erasmus Quellinus II (1607–1678) in 1972 (Ghent University) – which resulted in the publication of the first monographic study on the artist in 1988 – De Bruyn continued his career in art history, in which Quellinus remained a focal point of interest. His meritorious work on the artist recently culminated with the successful exhibition 'Dans le sillage de Rubens, Erasme Quellin' held at the Musée de Flandre, Cassel, in 2014. This first retrospective ever devoted to Quellinus re-established the fame of an artist who has long been overshadowed by Rubens. Though his work reveals Rubens's influence, Quellinus developed a unique and refined style anticipating classicism (see also TRQ 2014/2). With the exhibition catalogue, including an extensive bibliography and a revised list of the artist's work, De Bruyn's research on Quellinus has come full circle. His lifetime of research has also resulted in a less visible yet equally valuable product: a personal research collection including art-historical books, (auction) catalogues and neatly organized documentation containing photographs, slides, bibliographical references and notes. The Rubenianum is therefore pleased to have received such an excellent addition to its holdings, and plans to fully inventory the collection as



Erasmus Quellinus II, *The Birth of the Virgin* (detail). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

soon as possible. Afterwards, the books will be integrated into the library collection and the files will be treated as the institution's primary study collection on Quellinus. De Bruyn's gift continues the history of earlier donations and acquisitions of personal research collections on early-modern Flemish art to and by the Rubenianum. These welcome and valuable additions enable others to build on and continue the research done by established earlier generations of art historians, for which we are most grateful. | *Lieneke Nijkamp*

Save the date(s)

Please note the following two study days organized by the Rubenianum:

8 JUNE 2015 (*Erf*)*goed documenteren (Documenting Heritage)*. In conclusion of the project 'Collection Ludwig Burchard', a study day will be devoted to various issues encountered by documentation centres within the field of cultural heritage. The Rubenianum invites speakers from fellow institutes to discuss guidelines for organizing, preserving and disclosing documentary research collections. Organized with the support of the Flemish Community.

22 JUNE 2015 *Likeness and Kinship. Artistic Families from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Portrayed*.

In conjunction with the exhibition 'Rubens in Private', this study day will give special

attention to portraits of artists' families or families which played a different role in the business of art. The programme features both lectures focusing on the Southern Netherlands and case studies from a broader European context. Follow our website www.rubenianum.be for programmes and registration.

The Rubenianum Lectures

Next lecture:
Sunday,
28 June 2015, 11 am.

AARON HYMAN
University of California, Berkeley

The Afterlives of Rubens in Early Modern Mexico

Rubens's compositions, in printed form, circulated broadly through the Catholic world, leaving copies in their wake. This lecture will trace the contours of two interrelated phenomena: on the one hand, how Rubens became a lens through which New World artists understood their own artistic practices, and on the other, how Rubens was often alienated from the compositions he had helped create, compositions which took on lives of their own.

Aaron Hyman is currently BAEF Fellow at the Rubenianum. The lecture – in English – will take place at the Rubenianum.

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