

The Rubenianum Quarterly

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Looking beyond 2018: The Rubenianum participates in the Jan Breughel project

At the start of 2017, all eyes are turned to the Baroque Art Festival year that Antwerp will be staging in 2018. Its programme will be marked by a focus on Rubens, but it will equally combine old masters and contemporary, as well as visual and performing arts, featuring among others two ambitious and highly original shows at the Rubens House. Yet, simultaneously with the feverish operations for 2018, several cultural organizations in Flanders have started to prepare events for a festive Bruegel year in 2019. In that year, while celebrating in the first place the enchanting artistic heritage of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, attention will also be paid to his most famous son, Jan Breughel the Elder (1568–1625). The Rubenianum has the honour to participate in a remarkable project in this context. After reopening in 2018 its new collection presentation as well as the renovated Snyders House, the Rockox House will present an unprecedented overview of Jan Breughel's drawn oeuvre from September 2019 onwards.

The exhibition at the Rockox House is curated by Dr Teréz Gerszi and Dr Louiza Wood Ruby, with the assistance of Bernadett Tóth. Important new research is being done for this project, and will result in a catalogue raisonné. Among other insights and themes, the show will demonstrate Breughel's phenomenal and innovative influence on the landscape genre around 1600, while also illustrating the sources he drew on.

The Rubenianum was asked to become a partner in this prestigious endeavour by supporting a number of study visits to graphic collections undertaken by Dr Gerszi in preparation of the catalogue raisonné and exhibition. In addition, the Rubenianum will host a conference in 2019, organized jointly with the curators, to study in depth and contextualize the insights and remaining questions on the topic. Finally, securing the material collected during the study visits in the Rubenianum's research collections will also be part of this collaboration. We are obviously very pleased with this partnership, which contributes largely to our mission of initiating and supporting research into early modern Flemish art. | *Véronique van de Kerckhof*



Jan Breughel the Elder, *A coach on a country road*. Museum Plantin-Moretus/Printroom, Antwerp, inv. A.38.6

Dear Friends of the Rubenianum,

With a new year come new ambitions. In 2016, we published three more volumes of the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard. In 2017, we would like to add four to five more. Several authors are in the process of finishing their manuscripts. Reinhold Baumstark's and Guy Delmarcel's work on the Decius Mus series for instance, Nils Büttner's volume on Allegories and Koen Bulkens and Paul Huvenne's book on the Ministry of Christ are some examples. The manuscript on the Jesuit Church by Piet Lombaerde and Ria Fabri is ready for translation and Alexis Merle Du Bourg's Corpus volume on the Henri IV series has been translated and is currently being edited by our excellent team.

The Corpus Rubenianum has gained new momentum, to say the least. This longstanding and ambitious project has slowly overcome its challenges and is more or less on track for the 2020 deadline. Surely, there will be more obstacles. Rubens remains Rubens. He always has some intellectual surprises up his sleeve. But we learned how to cope with that, and started to understand that sometimes the enigma is part of the attraction of his work.

As you know, this major undertaking would have faded out slowly some ten years ago, if it hadn't been for Thomas Leysen and the many donors of the Rubenianum Fund stepping in to save this unprecedented work of art-historical cataloguing. I would like to firmly express our gratitude! With the deadline approaching, our team is investing every effort in supporting the authors, facilitating their work and meticulously editing the upcoming volumes. Over the years, they have become authorities in the field, and deserve to be congratulated and respected for their commitment in this important and complicated mission.

*Koenraad Jonckheere
Director of Publications*

Visiting researchers Katharine Campbell and Suzanne Duff

Introduced by Bert Watteuw, Curator of Research Collections at the Rubenianum

Surrounded by an overwhelming majority of dixseptièmistes, visiting researchers Katharine Campbell (University of Michigan) and Suzanne Duff (Brown University) are working at the Rubenianum for the current academic year, developing research projects that focus wholly or partly on the sixteenth century.

Can you summarize your research in a nutshell for our readers?

Katharine: I'm a student of Professor Celeste Brusati at the University of Michigan. My dissertation treats stylistic pluralism in Antwerp between 1520 and 1566. Pieter Coecke van Aelst's activities as a translator are central to my study, ranging from his translation of Sebastiano Serlio's architectural treatises to his efforts to conciliate classic Italian idioms with vernacular northern visual traditions.

Through the lens of this prolific polyglot and his network, I am looking at the work of several artists in painting, prints, tapestry and other types of artistic practice in Antwerp.

Suzanne: I'm a student of Professor Jeffrey Muller at Brown University. My dissertation is on the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke, its impact on artistic production, its material legacy, and its influence on the status of artists in the city between 1555 and 1665. The guild archives and ledgers kept at the Antwerp Academy, the guild's successor, and the guild archives held at the FelixArchief are crucial for my research.

How did you come to study Antwerp art?

Suzanne: It was a gradual process. I was drawn to learning about artistic exchange across Europe, and increasingly found myself focusing on the Southern Netherlands. I really secured my interest in Flemish art and Antwerp in particular during my master's thesis under Christine Göttler on Frans Floris and his Seven Liberal Arts series. I found Floris's attempts to elevate the status of his profession compelling and through this I also became interested in the Antwerp Saint Luke guild. Its regulation of the marketplace and system of apprenticeship seemed to give the institution a lot of power in this major centre for art production, and yet artists like Floris, with his large workshop of skilled assistants, never served as dean and seemed to have a 'flexible' relationship with the guild and its rules. I wanted to know more about what was actually happening and how guild rules and their enforcement impacted the way artists lived and worked.

Katharine: As an undergraduate student, I first began thinking about the Southern Netherlands when a course assignment required me to compare *Annunciations* by Fra Angelico and the Master of Flémalle. At that time I was interested in representations of space, and the emphasis on realism in Netherlandish art – for example, I found the



Suzanne Duff and Katharine Campbell

warts-and-all approach of Flemish artists such as Quinten Metsys intriguing and endearing. Later on, much of my master's programme with Joanna Woodall focused on the connections between art from the Low Countries – both north and south – and early modern scientific developments, as well as intellectual and religious history. That's where I started to focus on Antwerp and its status as a centre of intercultural connections in the early modern period, and I've continued that focus in my PhD programme.

And how did you learn about the Rubenianum?

Katharine: Professor Brusati advised me to apply for a Belgian American Educational Foundation fellowship, and as an art historian, the Rubenianum was an optimal research institution to work with. Navigating the dense landscape of museum collections, libraries and archives is challenging at first, but very rewarding. For me, the Rubenianum acts as the hub of this wider network: it's a home base for my work, but it also connects me to a variety of these institutions. I'm grateful to have access to so many high-quality resources available in Antwerp. It's really an ideal situation.

Suzanne: I learned about the Rubenianum through Professor Muller and Dr Sarah Moran, who previously spent an extended research period at the Rubenianum [see TRQ 2013/4]. The Rubenianum has been an invaluable resource, and I continue to uncover more materials in their collection that enrich my study. I am also spending a lot of my time in

the archives and definitely second Katharine on the value of Antwerp's research resources.

How are you coping with all the Rubens-obsessed scholars at the Rubenianum?

Suzanne: The staff and scholars here have all been very open and welcoming! Scholarly work and archival study is a solitary undertaking, so I appreciate the opportunity to connect and exchange ideas with colleagues in my field. Through introductions provided by the Rubenianum, we are also taking part in research activities beyond Antwerp, such as the interuniversity 'Palet' group in Leuven, where we will soon present our own findings.

Katharine: The intellectual community here at the Rubenianum is really special and it can't be replicated elsewhere. The staff introduced me to resources unknown to me and to scholars I only knew through their publications. The Rubenianum holdings may be unmatched for Rubens and the seventeenth century, but they are an equally indispensable resource for earlier periods. A conference on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century architectural painting held at the Rubenianum, in conjunction with an exhibition at the Museum Mayer van den Bergh, was a personal highlight and definitely helped shape my thinking on Coecke's work. I could not have experienced that anywhere else.

The Rubenianum hosted its first – solitary – visiting researcher Adam Eaker in 2011–12

[see TRQ 2012/4]. **In addition to hosting the current Rubenianum Fellow, Elizabeth Gebauer** [see TRQ 2016/3], **this year it welcomes returning and new visiting scholars, including last year's Rubenianum Fellow, Jamie Richardson** [see TRQ 2015/4]. **How has this expanded community of foreign scholars contributed to your experience in Antwerp?**

Katharine: It really is a close-knit community of foreign researchers at different stages of their careers. Many of the former fellows who have worked at the Rubenianum have made vital connections and advances here and have subsequently gone on to build exceptional careers, including Adam, who is currently assistant curator in the department of European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This is a great opportunity to connect with the Belgian art-historical community as we embark on our careers, whether academic or curatorial.

Suzanne: Yes, exactly. It is such a great opportunity to be part of the network of scholars that work here or visit to utilize the Rubenianum's many resources. Our small group of visiting scholars recognizes the value of this as well as the chance to bounce ideas off each other. We are sure to stay in touch after the end of our residency, both among ourselves and with the staff at the Rubenianum.

The Calumny of Apelles by Maerten de Vos

Maja Neerman



Maerten de Vos, *The Calumny of Apelles*. Private collection, on extended loan to the Rubenshuis, Antwerp

Thanks to an active and remarkably successful loan policy, the Rubenshuis has been able to surprise the specialized and larger public as well as the international press on multiple occasions over the last few years. To its increasing list of masterpieces on display, it recently added the hitherto unknown *Calumny of Apelles* by the Antwerp artist Maerten de Vos (1532–1603). With this première, the painting returns to Antwerp, where it can finally be admired by all, a few steps away from where De Vos once lived.

There are many aspects that contribute to the importance of this intriguing work. Its striking pictorial quality and refinement are a clear testament to De Vos's artistic genius. With its graceful and beautifully adorned pale young women, the fantastical and elaborate dresses and jewels, and the typical rural landscape element on the far left, this work fits perfectly in De Vos's oeuvre. However, the choices made by the artist in both the theme and the manner of depicting it, are revelatory in several ways.

In his treatise on the dangers of slander, the Greek rhetorician Lucian (c. AD 125–after 180) recounts the predicament the acclaimed painter Apelles (4th century BC) found himself in and which inspired him to paint his *Calumny*. A rival artist accused Apelles of conspiring against the Macedonian General Ptolemy in the revolt of Tyre. Being denied

a fair trial, Apelles was given the death sentence. However, just before receiving the capital punishment, a last-minute testimony in his favour proved his innocence and Apelles was released. The *Calumny* he painted as an allegorical rendition of this painful experience can be seen as a critique on the partial (and thus failing) judicial system and above all as a warning against the dangers and repercussions of slander. Lucian described Apelles' painting as follows:

On the right of it sits a man with very large ears, almost like those of Midas, extending his hand to Slander while she is still at some distance from him. Near him, on one side, stand two women – Ignorance, I think, and Suspicion. On the other side, Slander is coming up, a woman beautiful beyond measure, but full of passion and excitement, evincing as she does fury and wrath by carrying in her left hand a blazing torch and with the other dragging by the hair a young man who stretches out his hands to heaven and calls the gods to witness his innocence. She is conducted by a pale ugly man who has a piercing eye and looks as if he had wasted away in long illness; he may be supposed to be Envy. Besides, there are two women in attendance on Slander, egging her on, tiring her and tricking her out. According



Giorgio Ghisi after Luca Penni, *The Calumny of Apelles*. Engraving. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

to the interpretation of them given me by the guide to the picture, one was Treachery and the other Deceit. They were followed by a woman dressed in deep mourning, with black clothes all in tatters – Repentance, I think, her name was. At all events, she was turning back with tears in her eyes and casting a stealthy glance, full of shame, at Truth, who was approaching.¹



During the Renaissance, Lucian's text was rediscovered, translated and published widely. It became immensely popular in Italy, where it inspired many artists to attempt the painting's reconstruction. Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, Federico Zuccaro and Raphael among many others partook in this exercise. The popularity of the *Calumny* reached far beyond the borders and influenced artists in France, Germany and the Low Countries. In the Low Countries however, depictions of the theme are limited. Lambert Lombard and Pieter Bruegel the Elder drew their versions and in the 1610s Rubens (who was often referred to as the Apelles of his time) was inspired by Zuccaro's design to include the subject in the iconographical scheme of the façade of his workshop in Antwerp. The *Calumny* by De Vos is the first and only known painted rendition of the theme in the Southern Netherlands. By its sheer size and refinement, the work is extraordinary and unparalleled.

Combining a literary and visual tradition rooted in antiquity, the choice of this subject is far from random. Apart from being an opportunity to display artistic prowess, the subject of the *Calumny* was the perfect way for an artist to demonstrate their substantial knowledge of antique literature, which was exactly what many Renaissance artists aspired to.

Maerten de Vos had an in-depth knowledge of the literary background of the theme and clearly wanted to demonstrate this in his work. After an apprenticeship with his father Pieter de Vos and with Frans Floris, De Vos travelled to Italy where he is thought to have worked in the studio of Tintoretto. It is possible that he first encountered the text on the *Calumny* or a visual representation of it on that journey around 1552. Most likely, however, he took his visual cue from a print by Giorgio Ghisi after a painting by Luca Penni that circulated in Antwerp.

The fishing-net and the addition of the figure of Time as the father of Truth are unique to both compositions. But De Vos did not copy the print. He merely selected a few elements from Ghisi's composition that he used in his own in order to clarify its content. Thus, the fishing-net identifies its holder as Deceit and the added figure of Time emphasizes the moralistic nature of the scene.

A panel-maker's mark on the back of the panel and the usage of certain pigments in the painting help date the *Calumny* to late in De Vos's life.² A further argument suggests De Vos painted it within the last eight years of his life. In 1594 De Vos and Ambrosius Franken were commissioned to make the designs for the decorations on the occasion of the Joyous Entry of the new Archduke Ernest of Austria, the son of Maximilian II and Maria of Spain. A series of preparatory drawings by De Vos for those designs is still kept at the Plantin Moretus Museum. Compelling resemblances between the painting of the *Calumny* and seven of these sketches tie them together. Stylistic parallels can be drawn mainly in the rendering of the clothing. Dresses, corsets, sleeves and hairstyles are almost identical. De Vos re-used designs again and again to create new works. In all likelihood, some of the drawings that were designed for the Joyous Entry were used for the *Calumny* at the end of De Vos's life.

This late dating of the work adds to the mystery surrounding the painting, as it fits somewhat oddly within the timeline of De Vos's oeuvre. His painted output can be broken down into two distinct parts, divided by the Fall of Antwerp in 1585 as a pivotal point. During his early career, De Vos, who was a Lutheran, received his commissions mostly from prominent Protestant figures and friends such as Antonius Anselmus, Gilles Hooffman and Peter Panhuys, for whom he painted delicate family portraits and large

compositions with a Reformist undertone. The orders given by Alexander Farnese after the capitulation forced many people into exile, resulting in a massive emigration to the North. In order to stay in his beloved city, De Vos was forced to convert to the Catholic faith. Through this, he found new patrons. Towards the end of his life, his painted output would convey a strong Catholic message and contribute to the restoration of the damages caused by the Iconoclasm and the war. Thanks to this Catholic patronage, De Vos was one of the few remaining artists who could boast a solid and prosperous career.

The Reformist and allegorical themes that predominated in his early painted oeuvre still seemed to interest De Vos greatly after 1585 but are confined to his prints. Thus, the *Calumny* is something of an oddity within De Vos's later work. It is his last secular painting and the figure of Truth is his last painted full nude.

This raises questions that will never have a clear answer. Although they are all depicting the same figures, many *Calumnies* convey dissimilar messages. Their iconography relates to the context of the period in which they were made. Building on the same foundation, they are personalized works in which the interpretation is linked to the religious or political beliefs of their patron or their maker. Sadly, nothing is known about the patron or the destination of this painting. Although it remains a mysterious work, it is safe to say that it is more than just a pretty picture. In all subtlety, De Vos slightly strays from Lucian's text and gives us a few clues to its interpretation. Amid the fantastically dressed figures stands Repentance, in contemporary clerical clothing, introducing a religious element to this allegorical composition. In the same way, Envy can be seen wearing an armour under his tatters, possibly referring to the military. While De Vos is known to have been an engaged artist, who in the most subtle of ways criticized the complicated and unfair socio-political and religious struggles of his time through his art, he normally confined this critical attitude to his prints.

With the *Calumny*, the Rubenshuis is once more offering a true gem to its public. It helps us form a better understanding of this major artist, his knowledge of the Antique, his sources of inspiration and his working methods. The message it conveys, however, remains shrouded in mystery. But as we gaze upon Father Time, who is presenting his beautiful daughter Truth, we can feel reassured that it must have been a message of hope.

¹ Lucianus Samosatensis et al., *Lucian I*, London: Heinemann, 1913, pp. 365–67.

² An interdisciplinary study on the painting, carried out at the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK/IRPA), Brussels, by Christina Currie, Maja Neerman, Gaëlle Pentier and Steven Saverwyns, will be published in the *Bulletin van het Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium/Bulletin de l'Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique* in 2018.



Bert Schepers taking his PhD

On 14 October Bert Schepers, our eminent senior editor, took his doctor's degree *summa cum laude* from the University of Leuven, with a dissertation entitled 'Voor aap gezet in het zeventiende-eeuwse Antwerpen' / 'Monkey Madness in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp' (supervisor: Professor Katlijne Van der Stighelen), which is scheduled for publication in Brepols's *Pictura Nova* series. The candidate defended his thesis at the Rubenianum, amid numerous colleagues and friends, and the degree ceremony was followed by a lively reception in celebration of the brand-new doctor.

HNA Conference, Ghent 24–26 May 2018

Call for sessions and workshops

Historians of Netherlandish Art (HNA) are preparing a three-day conference which will take place at Het Pand, a former Dominican monastery in Ghent. The organizing committee has not set a specific conference theme, but would like to stress the ambition of the event, i.e. to stimulate clear new takes on art history in the twenty-first century. This conference aims at clarifying the paths to follow in the study of Netherlandish art, and to remould old and new ideas. Where do the sources meet the theory? What does the concept add to the fact? What is the impact of technical art history on iconology? Furthermore, we would like to stimulate interdisciplinary and especially multi-media approaches. See www.hnanews.org. Proposals are to be sent to koenraad.jonckheere@ugent.be and maximilian.martens@ugent.be by 31 January 2017.



CRLB book launch

On 20 December part XIX (4) of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* was launched, Koenraad Jonckheere's *Portraits after Existing Prototypes*.

The presentation took place, under great interest, in the historic Dominican monastery Het Pand. In the photo, the author hands over his book to Anne De Paepe, Rector of Ghent University.

Art Evaluation Day 2016

Just as last year, the Evaluation Day organized by the Rubenianum on 7 December was a success. Paintings as well as sculptures, drawings and prints, belonging to more than 35 owners, were viewed by a team of enthusiastic experts. This event is becoming a pleasant and relevant tradition in Antwerp and a great opportunity for the public to experience the knowledge and expertise of our institutions.

The Rubenianum Lectures

Sunday, 19 March 2017, 11 am

PROF. KOENRAAD BROSENS
(KU Leuven)

Joy, Despair and Tapestries – and Digital Art History

Archival documents reveal happiness and pain, failure and success underpinning the seventeenth-century Antwerp and Brussels tapestry industries. Professor Brosens will entertain us with a handful of both funny and tragic stories. But he will also explain that we can model, visualize and compute 'big archival data' so that we can study the interplay between social dynamics and developments in baroque tapestry and painting.

The lecture is in Dutch and will take place at the Rubenianum.



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