

The Rubenianum Quarterly

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Peter Paul Rubens: The Power of Transformation

Mythological dramas and biblical miracles, intimate portraits and vast landscapes – Peter Paul Rubens's creative power knew no limits. His ingenuity seems inexhaustible, his imagination boundless. The special exhibition 'Kraft der Verwandlung' (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 17 October 2017–21 January 2018) sets out to explore this spirit of innovation, taking an in-depth look at the sources on which the Flemish master drew and how he made them his own.

Rubens had an unrivalled ability to apply his examples freely and creatively. Ignoring the boundaries of genre, he studied the small-scale art of printmaking as well as monumental oil paintings. The artist's extensive library provided a further source of inspiration, as did antique coins. He took three-dimensional sculptures – bronze statuettes, casts from nature and marble statues – and brought them to life in his paintings.

Rubens drew, copied and interpreted as he saw fit throughout his life. Existing sources were transformed by his hand into something entirely new. The same dynamic process of continuous development fed into his own compositions too. It was not unusual for him to enlarge his paintings, physically extending them to accommodate his overflowing creativity. The Vienna *Stormy Landscape with Philemon and Baucis*, which has been thoroughly researched and restored with the assistance of the Getty Panel Paintings Initiative, is a particularly imposing example of this dynamism. Rubens twice increased the size of the central support, altering not only the painting's format but also its content. X-radiography reveals that having enlarged the work for a final time, he added a group of horsemen on the right edge, before subsequently overpainting them. It was only at the last stage that he decided to embellish the landscape with the mythological theme.

Rubens drew on a wide variety of sources, the residue of which can be traced in each of the paintings on display. The exhibition invites visitors to follow the works back to their origin and to experience their visual creation in a unique way. | Gerlinde Gruber, Curator Flemish Baroque Painting, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien



Rubens, *Stormy Landscape with Philemon and Baucis*. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Drawn to drawings: a new collaborative project

Although the Rubenianum seldom seeks the public spotlight for its scholarship, specialists and institutions in the field know very well where to turn to for broad, grounded and reliable art-historical expertise. Earlier this year, the Flemish Government approached us with a view to a possible assignment concerning 17th-century drawings. Given that another of the Rubenianum's unmistakable trademarks is its open and generous attitude to collaboration, this task was indeed assigned to us thanks to a thoroughly prepared partnership with the Royal Library of Belgium. We are proud, therefore, to announce that from this autumn, and together with colleagues at the Royal Library's Prints Department, we will be conducting a critical and complete survey of the heritage of 17th-century draughtsmanship on Flemish territory.

The framework for this task is the legislative instrument by which the Flemish government in 2003 laid down specific and stringent criteria for the selection and protection of works of exceptional importance in all fields of heritage – the so-called Topstukkendecreet. In 2004 our institution compiled a long-list of 17th-century paintings as the basis for the final selection of heritage masterpieces. Now the time has come for a long-list of 17th-century drawings. This is a significant challenge: there are many collections rich with drawings, but they are generally not as easily accessed. Furthermore, besides museums and public collections there are less visible drawings in archives, church treasuries and private hands. Thankfully, those working on the project will be able to draw upon the Rubenianum's reference library, documentation and connections, as well as on the profound understanding of the technical and material aspects of draughtsmanship and the research collections of the Royal Library's Prints Department.

We look forward to a mutually enriching collaboration with our colleagues in Brussels, with the two enthusiastic project assistants, and not least with a project steering committee that brings matchless experience to the table. Above all, we are happy to be able to contribute to the better understanding and protection of our magnificent 17th-century heritage. | Véronique Van de Kerckhof

Adriaen de Bie meets Caravaggio: *The Saint Eligius Altarpiece*, Lier

Upon entering the Sint-Gummaruskerk in Lier, one is confronted by a large triptych in bold colours [fig. 1]. The central panel depicts the titular bishop preaching from a pulpit, surrounded by an eager congregation assembled within a lofty gothic nave, plausibly representing the Gummaruskerk itself. Signed and dated 1628, it was painted by Adriaen de Bie, father of Cornelis de Bie, author of *Het Gulden Cabinet* (1662). Here it is praised as a paradigm of Adriaen's 'fulfilling art', which 'with reason preserved his fame and name'.

The altarpiece does not interest me for its aesthetic properties, but rather its relationship to another, highly resonant work that used to hang in nearby Antwerp: Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary*, today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Comparing the two, De Bie's magpie borrowings are immediately apparent. In the foreground kneels a mother and son, cut and pasted from the fervent pilgrims clamouring to fondle the rosary beads offered by Saint Dominic in Caravaggio's altarpiece. Behind her, on the composition's right-hand edge, stand three men. Two are conversing, while the other, dressed in black with an aristocratic ruff, looks out at us directly. Seem familiar?

I was alerted to the altarpiece's existence by Bert Schepers of the Rubenianum, where I had been based for the previous two months in fulfilment of my PhD research at the University of York. My thesis, entitled 'Rubens and the Dominican Church in Antwerp', looks at three major additions to the Sint-Pauluskerk's interior scheme, namely the *Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary* cycle, Rubens's *Wrath of Christ* altarpiece today in Lyon, and Caravaggio's *Madonna of the Rosary*. This, the subject of my first year's research, was bought by Rubens and 'diverse liefhebbers' in Amsterdam in 1617, namely Jan Brueghel I, Hendrick van Balen and the merchant Jan Cooymans. It was then installed 'between the 15 mysteries' before having a spectacular marble altar commissioned for it to hang over in 1650. Part of my chapter deals with artistic transfer precipitated by its physical integration within Antwerp's sacred topography.

Did Adriaen de Bie pay the Antwerp Dominicans a visit and sketch the Caravaggio on the spot? Lier was of course only a short distance away, within the same diocese. In 1627, Cornelis van der Geest commissioned the restoration of an altarpiece in the same church, with new panels added by Frans Francken II, one of which, the *Miracle of Saint Gummarus*, features Van der Geest's portrait. More importantly, the Kluizekerk was just a stone's throw away. Formerly Dominican, this now-disused church once hosted Rubens's magnificent *Madonna of the Rosary* (Pushkin Museum, Moscow), commissioned for the rosary brotherhood founded in 1605

by Joannes Bocquet – prior of the Antwerp monastery and instigator of their *Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary* painting cycle the following decade. While Lier was no artistic backwater, De Bie was no ignoramus and no doubt swiftly learned of the Caravaggio's existence upon his return from Italy in 1623.

If the original was De Bie's first point of reference, why are the figures reproduced in reverse, like a print? Around the same year, Lucas Vorsterman published an engraved reproduction of Caravaggio's 'rare piece inside Antwerp' [fig. 2]. This large-scale prestige engraving – dedicated to Antoon Triest, bishop of Ghent, and sporting his superimposed portrait – was made soon after Vorsterman had left Rubens's workshop amid some acrimony. Having recently acquired his own privilege, Vorsterman's purpose was to attract new patronage. While later referred to as a 'Maecenas', Triest is known to have patronized the young Van Dyck when still bishop of Bruges. The print was a self-conscious demonstration of what Sandrart described, with some exaggeration, as Vorsterman's 'astonishing brilliance' of chiaroscuro. While detailed and largely faithful, it is by no means mechanical or unmediated. Speaking Italian with a thick Flemish accent, the pronouncedly sculptural quality of Caravaggio's figures is somewhat lost in translation from paint to intaglio matrix, their rendering communicated with noticeable awkwardness. De Bie's cut-and-pasted figures inherited the same stiffness, and lack Caravaggio's characteristic flesh-and-blood tangibility.

Rather than replicating what gave the *Rosary Madonna* its aura, not least its trademark chiaroscuro, De Bie was simply referencing it at one remove via a widely circulated print, copies of which the Lier Dominicans surely had in stock. Artists with intimate knowledge of the original took a markedly different approach.



Frans Pourbus II, who first saw it in 1607 in Naples in the possession of Louis Finson and Abraham Vinck, was to judge by his letters evidently smitten, and later reworked the entire composition in an altarpiece (Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, Paris). Rubens himself paraphrased it in the *Proclamation of the Regency* for the Medici cycle (Louvre, Paris), to witty effect. Here the enthroned Marie de' Medici is surrounded by courtiers, who kneel and gesticulate in adulation, the dirty feet of Caravaggio's pilgrims replaced by silk stockings and spurs. Evidently not of the same calibre, despite his son's dutiful hyperbole, De Bie's opportunistic quotation is nevertheless indicative of the Roman altarpiece's widespread popularity and fame.

Thus concludes my musings on the Lier altarpiece, possibly the first in print since Hans Vlieghe's *album amicorum* contribution from 1973. An entire section of my thesis will be devoted to Caravaggio's altarpiece. The first chapter concerns its status as a 'sacred commodity', rejected by Roman Dominicans and accumulating in value as it travelled across Europe to Amsterdam, where it was purchased for 1,800 gulden. The second chapter concerns the circle of the four *liefhebbers* who 'procured' it, namely their working friendships and participation in elite Antwerp circles, including the Romanists confraternity and Violieren chamber of rhetoric. After an analysis of the print and its dedication to Triest, the section will conclude with a discussion of spectatorship, admired by, amongst others, Archduke Leopold Willem and Queen Christina of Sweden.

Based at the Rubenianum with full access to its unparalleled art-historical resources, I made frequent trips to state archives around Belgium and consulted many artworks in question. Thanks to the library's superb new scanning machine, I have instant access to a plethora of local literature. In short, two months productively spent! | Adam Sammut



Fig. 2 Lucas Vorsterman after Caravaggio, *Madonna of the Rosary*. Engraving

Fig. 1 Adriaen de Bie, *The Saint Eligius Altarpiece*. St Gummarus Church, Lier

The Rubenianum Fund Field Trip to Princely Rome, October 2017

Michel Ceuterick



The entire field trip party in the Medici gardens. The statues are copies after an antique Niobe group. Rubens copied one of the sculptures in his *Massacre of the Innocents* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto)

12 October, 7 pm, Palazzo Eitch-Borromini, Piazza Navona: exhilarated Rubenianum Fund members gathered at our Roman field trip HQ for an eye-opening introductory talk by Ben van Beneden on the manifold inspirations the young Rubens drew from his early years in the Eternal City. The 54 Fund members that were lucky enough to get in on the oversubscribed Rubenianum tour of princely Rome, knew they were about to experience just such a brainwave in the following three days.

One hour later, His Excellency Frank Carruet welcomed us for a dinner at the Residence of the Belgian Ambassador in Italy, offering stunning views of the Forum Romanum.

Friday the 13th was our lucky day as Principessa Pallavicini kindly granted us access to her residence, the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi, with one of Italy's most prestigious private and secluded Old Master collections. The famous Casino dell'Aurora Pallavicini in the palace gardens with its stunning Guido Reni fresco was equally impressive.

Our good fortune continued as we obtained special permission to visit Palazzo Caetani, the marvellous residence of the Brazilian Ambassador to the Holy See, with soaring ceilings, splendid frescoes and a most pleasing atmosphere. One flight of stairs up in the same palace and we were welcomed by Fund members Alice Goldet and Olivier Bourgois in their lovely residence for drinks and a delicious lunch *all'aperto* on their sun-

drenched terraces with fabulous views of Rome's historic centre. The afternoon's programme continued with visits to the Archivio Secreto and the Torre dei Venti at the Vatican; the private residence of Principessa Nicoletta Odescalchi at the Palazzo Odescalchi, boasting an extraordinary painting of the *Conversion of Saint Paul* by the young Caravaggio; and a private visit to Palazzo Colonna where the gallery forms a staggering backdrop to an astounding display of paintings.

What better way to end such a day in style than to dine at the Circolo degli Scacchi in the wonderfully preserved 18th-century Palazzo Rondinini.

Saturday morning the gates of the Palazzo Pamphilij, seat of the Brazilian Embassy in Rome, swung open especially for us. The gallery designed by Borromini and frescoed by Pietro da Cortona, with beautiful sunlight streaming through the serliana windows, impressed us all. Next was the Chiesa Nuova, which to this day holds the three paintings on massive slabs of slate that were ordered from the young Rubens. Prof. Arnout Balis and Ben van Beneden took turns in explaining the details of the commission which upon completion created a stir in Rome.

A visit to the Rome of princes could not be complete without calling in to the Galleria Doria Pamphilij, a truly fabulous private collection, and to the Galleria Borghese, an equally amazing collection (including two early Rubens paintings) which was sold en bloc by the family to the Italian State. At Santa Maria del Popolo,

the parish church to Rubens and to many of the northern artists that resided in Rome, we took special interest in the Caravaggio paintings for the Cerasi chapel. The *Conversion of Saint Paul*, seen the previous day at the private residence of Principessa Odescalchi, had been the first version of a commission to Caravaggio for this chapel. The comparison with Caravaggio's second version of this subject, still present in the chapel, inspired us all.

We concluded the day with dinner at the prestigious Circolo della Caccia at Palazzo Borghese, where we were welcomed by Count Jacques de Liedekerke and his charming wife. The glorious autumnal sunshine that had accompanied us throughout our stay in Rome made our visit on Sunday morning to the Villa Medici and its gardens a most memorable one. We continued our walk from there to the Casino dell'Aurora Ludovisi, residence of the Principi Boncompagni Ludovisi, with its magnificent frescoes by Guercino, Dominichino, Dughet, Brill and the only murals Caravaggio ever painted.

His Excellency Count Jean Cornet d'Elzuis and his lovely wife were perfect hosts and the Belgian Embassy to the Holy See with its soothing gardens and great dining hall was the best location to conclude these three days of wonder.

Our sincere thanks go to Lieve Vandeputte and Martine Menten who managed once again to organize an outstanding Rubenianum Fund field trip.



▲ The party on its way to the Casino dell'Aurora at the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi



▲ At the Villa Medici



▼ Palazzo Caetani, residence of the Brazilian Ambassador to the Holy See

▼ Casino dell'Aurora Pallavicini: Baroness Dora Janssen, our guide Alexandra Massini, Tijo van Marle and Simon Mumford



▲ The Borromini gallery at the Palazzo Pamphilij in Piazza Navona with frescoes by Pietro da Cortona



Walking the streets of Rome



▼ Arnout Balis and Joseph de Gruyter at the Chiesa Nuova. In the background a copy of the Caravaggio *Entombment* presently at the Vatican



A happy chairman of the Rubenianum Fund at Palazzo Caetani

Rubeniana



Frans Snijders, *Boar Hunt*. © KBC Antwerp, Snijders & Rockox House

Snijders & Rockox House New museum in the heart of Antwerp

Nicolaas Rockox and Frans Snijders were key figures in Antwerp during the Baroque era. They both made their mark on the city's cultural and social life – Rockox as burgomaster and Snijders as a brilliant painter of animals and still lifes. They were also next-door neighbours in Antwerp's Keizerstraat for twenty years. Rockox bought his house in 1603, the year in which he was appointed *buitenburgemeester* for the first time. Snijders purchased his patrician dwelling in 1620 after his first successes portraying the economic revival during the Twelve Years' Truce through opulent still lifes and market scenes.

Their original homes, now carefully restored, both belong to KBC, which opened the Rockox House as a museum some years ago and is now doing the same with the Snijders House. The everyday world of 17th-century citizens will be evoked through items from the museum's own collection, supplemented by loans from museums and private collections in Belgium and abroad.

We will be able to view Rockox and Snijders's domestic environment through

their own eyes, along with the making and promotion of art, its collecting and display, markets and richly set tables, nature and gardens, as well as the humanist and the average citizen in the turbulent era in which they lived.

The Frans Snijders House will mainly highlight the art of this prominent Antwerp artist, revealing his sources of inspiration (e.g. Joachim Beuckelaer), his inventions in still life and animal painting, as well as in impressive hunting scenes, his collaborations and his influence until the end of the 17th century. His pupils and collaborators Jan Fyt and Paul de Vos, Snijders's brother-in-law, will also be given a place of honour. The new museum will be here for you to discover from 24 February 2018!

www.rockoxhuis.be (until 31 December 2017)
www.snijdersrockoxhuis.be (from 1 January 2018)

Residencies 2018-19

The Rubenianum is pleased to host two visiting researchers from Brown University next year. Both Rubenianum Fellow Suzanne Duff and Koen Bulckens prepare a dissertation under the guidance of

Prof. Jeffrey Muller. Suzanne introduced her project on the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke previously in *The Rubenianum Quarterly* (2016/4). Koen presented his *Corpus Rubenianum* volume in our previous issue; his current research addresses the functioning of Rubens's workshop.

Study Day on Research Archives *Rubenianum*, 18 December 2017

Whether affiliated to a university or working autonomously, researchers leave behind a vast body of research material, digital or on paper. Although their focus is on the results of their research rather than on the research data, these collections are valuable for future research and should therefore be preserved with care, as has been done increasingly over the past decades. The Rubenianum invites representatives of heritage and research institutes to present their ideas and case studies on various aspects of this specific type of collection.

The Rubenianum Lectures

Sunday, 11 December 2017, 11 am

MATTHIAS DEPOORTER
Vlaamse Kunstcollectie

*The Beauty of the Bird:
Birds in the Arts*

Writer and art historian Depoorter will take us on a journey through this fascinating world of ornithology, with a focus on painted birds in the arts. Special attention will be paid to paintings from museum collections in Antwerp.

The lecture is in Dutch and takes place at the Rubenianum.



Frans Snijders, *Still Life*. © KBC Antwerp, Snijders & Rockox House



Attributed to Paul de Vos, *Concert of Birds*. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp

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