

# The Rubenianum Quarterly

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## Rubenianum library in quarantine

When the pandemic struck, the country came to a standstill. Only pigeons roamed the Antwerp city streets, as if overnight the whole of humankind had vanished from the surface of the earth. That early spring morning in March, the Rubenianum too remained closed to the public. No readers or staff were allowed on the premises and it was not permitted to consult the collections.

In the weeks that followed, art historians were clearly among the many scholars who took this period of home confinement as an opportunity to work on manuscripts and research projects that had been tucked away during the hectic days of normal life. We began to notice an increasing demand for remote access to the digital collections, while requests for permission to consult the collections on paper also fluttered into our mailbox.

As a first step to meet these research needs, a more elaborate digital service was rolled out: remote access to our databases (Art Sales Catalogues Online, Artprice) was set up so our colleagues could browse through the auction information normally only available in our reading room. The centralized access to our digitized material was optimized, and our staff facilitated access to the digital collections by assisting in research queries from their home offices. After a few weeks, our request for permission to re-enter the premises of the Rubenianum was granted. From April onwards, one of our colleagues was allowed to go to the office once a week, in order to create digital copies to support researchers in need of analogue documentation.

In the meantime the preparations began for the reopening of the reading room. To create a safe environment, a number of measures were taken, including the mandatory use of masks and disinfectant, Plexiglass shields, a limited number of seats, the obligation to make an appointment and even solitary confinement of the research material after consultation. On Monday 11 May, the Rubenianum reading room was among the first cultural institutions in Belgium – and even neighbouring countries – to reopen its doors. After eight weeks of closure and while the general lockdown continued in a quiet Antwerp, the meditative study atmosphere in the reading room was as welcoming as ever.

Now the summer has passed and while the panic seems to have subsided somewhat, slackening the population's discipline as a result, the virus clearly has lost none of its potency. Will another lockdown follow this autumn or winter? We certainly hope that with the experience built up in the last half year, we will be able to keep up an acceptable level of service at any given time.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues for their joint efforts in making all of the above possible. Special thanks to Martine and Inez for their incessant care of the collections and readers in need; and to Tinne and Freya with their ever-friendly welcome for all visitors, even with faces hidden behind masks...

*Ute Staes, Librarian*

## Coping with Corona

*While Corona has transformed so much of our existence in recent months for the worse, I have been pleasantly surprised by how my research has been affected. While the total closure of libraries and research institutions during the lockdown had a tremendously dampening effect, as institutions began to reopen, many were exceedingly generous and focused on researchers' needs. The Rubenianum, for example, has allowed visitors to return to its reading room since 11 May, provided they make an appointment. For those who are farther away or do not feel that they can safely travel here, the staff have been scanning articles and book chapters upon request – something I encouraged my students to take advantage of as they completed their research papers this past June. Not only the Rubenianum but also Antwerp's Erfgoedbibliotheek Hendrick Conscience was performing this service for those holding a currently active user's card. Incidentally, the EHC also welcomes requests for scans of their rare books, which they then add to a list of items to be digitized. And needless to say, the range of things that one can find online continues to expand. While many libraries are still closed – and for some needs, nothing can beat flipping through a book yourself – it is comforting that in these unnerving times, I can still get tremendous pleasure from the arrival in my e-mail of a scanned article.*

*Abigail Newman*





### Remembering Elly Miller



It is with much sadness that we record the death on 8 August of Elly Miller, whose association with the Corpus Rubenianum goes back more than forty years, even predating the first appearance of our volumes under the Harvey Miller imprint in 1977.

Elly was the daughter of Béla Horovitz who, with his friend Ludwig Goldscheider, founded the Phaidon Press in Vienna in 1923. Initially specializing in literature and cultural history, Phaidon went on to produce from the early 1930s a whole series of elegant and well-illustrated, yet reasonably priced, monographs on artists, effecting a radical transformation in the appearance, status and availability of art books. Horovitz's timely transfer of the ownership of the Press to a British 'Aryan' publisher before the Anschluss in the spring of 1938 meant that London would become its eventual base and the United Kingdom as a whole the principal beneficiary of this great cultural asset.

Ten-year-old Elly had her own complicated journey to Britain to join her parents. Transplanted to school in Oxford, she rapidly mastered English and proved an outstanding student, going on to read Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at Somerville College (University of Oxford). But she was drawn to art books and to publishing, and joined the family firm in 1950, working as editorial assistant to Goldscheider. Already as a teenager, Elly had proved herself an acute judge

of a promising title: she unhesitatingly recommended her father to publish Ernst Gombrich's *The Story of Art* (Phaidon's best-seller of all time), after reading a couple of draft chapters. Working at the Press in the 1950s and '60s, she was responsible for the production of a whole series of remarkable and beautifully laid-out books which, however, while aiming at a wide public, never sacrificed scholarship to design. In fact it was with a real commitment to the importance of scholarly values and the catalogue raisonné in particular that she and her husband Harvey, who had taken over on the death of Horovitz in 1955, left Phaidon to found their own press (Harvey Miller Publishers) in 1968. By this time, with an increasingly broad range of art books available to the general public, Elly and Harvey felt it was important to support studies aimed at more specialist readers. The Corpus Rubenianum, happily, was one of the specialist projects that they came to take on.

The earliest volumes of the Corpus Rubenianum were published by Arcade, Brussels. When, in the late 1970s, Harvey Miller took over, the Corpus entered a new phase. Elly made it her business to be personally involved with each of the volumes. She worked closely with the authors and editors, making regular trips to Antwerp (a city she loved) to get the text into shape and above all to present the illustrations in the best possible way, to ensure they helped elucidate the arguments as well as presenting Rubens's works to advantage within the confines of the format of our books. A woman of wide culture and sophistication, she was a publisher who actually read her books and got to grips with their content. As she once put it: 'I believe that, for an editor, understanding is more important than knowledge, and it is this kind of understanding in art publishing that is the key to the achievement of a meaningful assembly and arrangement of illustrations that supports the textual thesis of the scholar.' It was easy to see how much she enjoyed not only the process of the *mise en page* for both text and pictures but the pleasure of sharing this enjoyment with the author.

Elly had a special love of medieval manuscripts – a large number of Harvey Miller books were, and continue to be, produced in this area. And I first got to

know Elly when she came to the Warburg Institute to consult various medievalists based there. She had close connections with other Warburgians too, notably my colleague and friend Ruth Rubinstein, whose *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* (written with Phyllis Bober) has become a Harvey Miller classic. But working with Elly on my volume in the Corpus series revealed that a love of medieval illumination was perfectly compatible with an enthusiasm for Rubens. I saw at close hand too her intelligence, dedication and generosity, not least when, over Christmas of 1996, Arnout Balis and I struggled together to revise the indexes of *Subjects from History* after a technical problem altered the whole pagination of the book and when, thereafter, she celebrated our achievement in style with a great party. The Rubens Corpus was a project in which Elly took special pride, and she ensured that it continued to appear under the Harvey Miller imprint after the Press entered into partnership with Brepols in 2000. Elly's clear vision and exacting standards will continue to prove an inspiration to us.

Elizabeth McGrath  
For the Editorial Board  
of the Corpus Rubenianum

### Rubenianum Lectures 2020

25 October  
**Peter van den Brink**  
Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen  
*Dürer was here ... and portrayed Antwerp (amongst other things)*

15 November  
**An Van Camp**  
Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford  
*Drawings after Antiquity: Flemish artists in Italy*

13 December  
**Prof. Nils Büttner**  
Staatliche Akademie der bildenden Künste, Stuttgart  
*Rubens recto/verso. Writing the Corpus volume on Rubens's Medici Cycle*

*The lectures are in Dutch and take place at the Rubenianum at 11 a.m. The dates of these lectures are subject to national regulations regarding public events. Possible changes in the programme will be communicated through our website.*

## A painting by Willem Panneels, an intriguing pupil of Rubens

Arnout Balis



Fig. 1 Willem Panneels, *Cleopatra Committing Suicide*. Canvas, 99 x 76 cm. Whereabouts unknown.

Fig. 2 Willem Panneels, *Cleopatra Committing Suicide*. Etching, state II. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Cleopatra depicted in her last moments (fig. 1): it's a painting that caught my eye immediately when I entered a certain stand earlier this year in Brussels art fair (BRAFA).<sup>1</sup> This was not so much because of its aesthetic qualities (better paintings were on show) but because I recognized who was responsible for it, given the existence of a print (an etching, fig. 2) with the same composition and signed 'Guille(lmu)s Panneels'. In that print Panneels advertised himself as a pupil of 'that very noble and most excellent painter, Peter Paul Rubens', adding where (Frankfurt am Main) and when (1631) it was made. (Most likely in Antwerp this Guillelmus would have been called 'Gilliam' or 'Guillaume', but this is now usually modernized to Willem.) Panneels is not a household name even among those interested in Flemish art of the seventeenth century, but Rubens scholars are very familiar with him because, unwittingly, he has been a great help to their research, since he documented works by Rubens, especially drawings, that have not survived and are known only thanks to his copies. These – an enormously important drawing collection – have since the seventeenth century been kept together (now in Copenhagen, Royal Museum,

Department of Prints and Drawings).<sup>2</sup> On some of them Panneels noted that he had taken them from Rubens's 'Cantoor' (study), and the collection is accordingly known as the 'Rubens Cantoor'.

Apart from those Rubens copies, Panneels is of interest for his print production (as illustrated by the *Cleopatra*):<sup>3</sup> all done in pure etching (without use of burin) and in an easy but rather unsophisticated graphic style. In part these too are copied after his master's compositions and duly identified as such, while others are of his own invention (though largely indebted to Rubens's oeuvre). Often, in the text or legend added (always in Latin) under the image, the young artist proudly proclaims his apprenticeship with Rubens, in formulas like the one just quoted: former pupil of that great (etc.) Rubens. One suspects that this is not just in tribute to his master but in the hope that in this way the aura of this most celebrated artist would reflect on his person – and, as we will see, he may well have needed every support he could muster for life as an independent artist.

But he could certainly prove that he was one of Rubens's pupils, and that is the next

interesting thing about this figure. In the year 1630 Panneels made plans for a voyage to Germany and asked Rubens for a letter of recommendation.<sup>4</sup> This is a statement, dated 1 June 1630, drawn up by the city fathers of Antwerp, recording the sworn declaration of Rubens that 'Guillelmus Panneels' (in the Latin text) had under him earnestly studied the art of painting for five and a half years and duly completed his apprenticeship with good results (something that might have been important if the young artist needed to be enlisted in a local guild elsewhere). But the next statement is even more significant for us (and would supposedly not be so for those guilds): that Panneels, during the master's absence on his diplomatic missions to Madrid and England (late August 1628 to end of March 1630), had been in charge of Rubens's house, acquitted himself exceedingly well in this job and given Rubens a fully satisfactory account of his management on his return. (At this point art historians start putting two and two together – as we will see.) Before departing, as a token of gratitude to his revered master, Panneels may have etched Rubens's portrait (fig. 3, based on the *Self-Portrait* now in the Rubenshuis), dated 1630, with an inscription in which he outdid even himself in enumerating all his master's qualities and titles, including a reference to his diplomatic mission to England, from which he had just returned. We don't of course know how Rubens would have reacted to this ostentatious flattery on





Fig. 3 Willem Panneels, Portrait of Peter Paul Rubens, 1630. Etching.

the part of his 'most diligent' (*studiosissimus*) pupil.

### Panneels's life

But first, perhaps, more about what we know of Willem Panneels's life. Born in Aachen from (presumably) émigré Antwerp parents, at an uncertain date (if we believe the certificate drafted by the Antwerp city fathers in June 1630), he was then thirty years of age, and therefore born in (or around) 1600, which is not, however, consistent with the inscription on his tombstone, which recorded that he died on 1 July 1634 (in Baden-Baden) 'aetatis suae xxix', which would mean a birthdate around 1605. He is first recorded in Antwerp on 27 May 1627, acting as a witness for Rubens together with Rubens's engraver Paulus Pontius, and again on 19 August 1628, with Justus van Egmont, another pupil of the master. Both Willem and Justus would be signed up as free masters in the guild ledgers in the guild year 1627–28, so this was presumably in August 1628 when Rubens closed his studio and departed on his long journeys to Spain and England. The two pupils were mentioned as staying with Rubens, and it is now clear that Panneels continued to inhabit the Rubens house for two years thereafter during the painter's absence (Rubens being a widower at that point and not yet remarried). When Rubens testified that Panneels had been his pupil for five and a half years, we must reckon back from the date the young man became a master (August 1628) to conclude that he entered the studio in 1623, aged either eighteen or twenty-three. Maybe he had previously learned the rudiments of the craft elsewhere, and he may have had a school education, to judge from the Latin on his etchings. Interestingly, he had a brother, Jan, who was also a painter in Antwerp, and a disciple of Willem ('Guilielmo') van Haecht – on whom more later.

Willem Panneels was still unmarried in 1628: in December he figures in the list of the

Sodality of Senior Bachelors (administrated by the Jesuits), and in the document the city fathers provided on 1 June 1630 he is referred to as a 'juvenis' (youth), but it so happens that on the 27th of the same month a 'Gilliam Panneels' is registered in the parochial archives of St Jacob's as marrying Sara Raynenbourch. By 1636 both spouses must already have died, because in a document of Jan van Reyenborh (supposedly Sara's father) a Jan and Herman Panneels are mentioned as orphans. In the recent biographical study of Panneels (see n. 4) it is thought unlikely that their father 'Gilliam' was our painter, since it is hard to believe that he would have returned so soon from Germany. But maybe we should see it differently and suppose that he had not left on his trip abroad till later that year, and then departed with his new wife, with whom he was to have two sons. At the time of his death in Germany in 1634 (on which more below) he would thus have left behind a family which would then have decided to return to Antwerp.

In this new version of the story, another factoid may (just may) have some importance. We have a print (*of The Holy Family*), which is signed 'Joannes Panneels fecit Francofurti'. It has been doubted that this Joannes could have been Willem's brother, Jan Panneels, whom I have mentioned earlier, since we know that he was certainly in Antwerp in 1637. But could not this brother, in my alternative story, have travelled to Germany to assist the family in settling Willem's estate, which might then explain the curious circumstance that his brother's copper plates ended up in Antwerp, where the etchings came to be published again by Frans van den Wyngaerd (see below)? Jan may also have secured the survival of that precious group of drawings, the 'Rubens Cantoor' and possibly himself contributed to the collection (which now contains much more material than can be attributed to Willem on a stylistic basis). Unfortunately, it is not known when and how the 'Cantoor' drawings came to Copenhagen.

### The 'Rubens Cantoor'

Let us say a few more words about the treasure trove that is the 'Rubens Cantoor'. It certainly is on several counts an exceptional phenomenon, since for Rubens we know of no other case of 'serial copying' of the more intimate, possibly even confidential, studio material. What makes this all the more intriguing and invites speculation into the psychology of those involved, is the fact that on some eighty sheets Willem Panneels added inscriptions in a self-devised code – which of course has been broken long since. The commentaries he supplies refer mainly to where (in the 'Cantoor') he found this material and which features he thought he captured pretty well in his copies (often regarding the 'contours').

Rubens scholars have, as I said, put two and two together. We now know that Panneels was for two years left in charge of Rubens's home on the Wapper, possibly with a free hand to open and close drawers

that were supposed to be locked, and giving himself unimpeded access to Rubens's material, which other pupils and assistants could perhaps consult only occasionally and under the watchful eye of the master. What we find in the Copenhagen 'Cantoor' can therefore be likened to the spoils of a campaign of systematic photocopying of confidential material, a case of industrial espionage. Panneels's code, then, served the purpose, not so much of hiding the identity of the perpetrator, as that of his source and the illicit way in which he accessed it.

And we know what followed soon after Rubens's return, in early April 1630, from his long mission to Madrid and London, after two years of absence (but for a very brief stopover of a few days in mid-May 1629, in Brussels and supposedly also Antwerp). Or rather we don't know much, and concerning his relationship with Panneels we have only the aforementioned certificate some months later.

### Interpretations ...

The entire situation has of course helped to install in our minds (here I indulge in some introspection) some ideas and suspicions regarding the motives and feelings that might have been at play. One is the idea that Rubens must have discovered what his trusted caretaker had been up to during his absence and taken it amiss. He might have put an abrupt end to their collaboration, so that the certificate really was nothing but a golden handshake to be rid of the boy, ... effectively saying 'Get lost'. It looks pretty strange, and like a desperate move, that Panneels's goal in 1630 should have been Germany, where right then the Thirty Year's War (1618–48) was raging. All this, with all these ingredients, sounds like a juicy story, but we simply don't know whether there is anything to it. On soberly re-reading that 1630 certificate, one has to concede that, whereas Rubens's statement on the artistic potentialities of the young man sounds a little lukewarm ('cum eidem arti gnaviter incumberet, et in ea non parum profecisse'), his praise for how he managed his job as a caretaker is marked with superlatives ('summa cum fidelitate id munus gessisse et actorum suorum perfectissimam rationem ... cum summo suo beneplacito reddidisse').

### Departure for Germany

And, approaching Panneels's plans from another angle, might it not be the case that – given that Rubens apparently was, after his two years of absence, organizing his studio on a different basis altogether – the young artist was looking forward to standing at last on his own feet and could look to Germany for an opportunity? He was born there (in Aachen, according to his own testimony) and his wife's family may have come from Germany (if the wedding hypothesis holds up). And, to tell the truth, in the early months of 1630, Germany might have looked relatively at peace: the Danes had retreated in 1629, and the emperor's party seemed to have the upper

hand. Besides, we may suppose that young Willem could rely on good friends back home to further his career by using their network of contacts. After all, he was able eventually to obtain a letter of recommendation by no less a person than the emperor himself, Ferdinand II of Habsburg, dated from Regensburg, 11 November 1630.

Certainly some lobbying must have been needed for such a feat, and it is maybe no coincidence that we find Panneels dedicating etchings (bearing that same date of 1630, and stating he was in Frankfurt) both to the Antwerp Jesuit father Michael de Weerd and to his 'good friend' Willem van Haecht, whom we happen to know was his brother Jan's master. Let's put this in context: it is well known that the emperor was very much inspired by the Jesuits in his Counter-Reformation plans for the Holy Roman Empire of the German nations. And behind Van Haecht, we may assume the presence and political influence of his patron, Cornelis van der Geest, a wealthy Antwerp merchant now best known as an art collector – an aspect of his personality immortalized by Van Haecht's painting (now in the Rubenshuis), *The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest*, which features a visit on the part of the Habsburg governors of the Spanish Netherlands, Albert and Isabella. That Van der Geest stood squarely behind Willem Panneels in his plans to travel to Germany is made clear by the fact that he officially endorsed, before the city fathers, Rubens's certificate – which by now we know so well. And of course Rubens himself, if indeed he still gave his full support to his former pupil, had access to the inner circle of Spanish Habsburg diplomacy; so, from this perspective, the etching dated 1630 that Panneels made with his portrait (fig. 3), may also have been a 'thank you' to him from Panneels, made at the end of that year, in Frankfurt. All of this may give an idea of the possible diplomatic wheels that could have been usefully set in motion. Should we not conclude, then, that it was not an irresponsible or foolhardy plan young Willem made in June 1630?

### The Thirty Years' War

But times proved sadly inauspicious! If we set side by side the chronology of the Thirty Years' War (revealing how Germany became the battleground for all European forces) and the few dates we have for Panneels in Germany, for which we depend on the information on certain etchings and the few documents that have come to light, we can only empathize with and feel sorry for him.

A first etching dated 1630 proves that the artist passed through Cologne, but he was heading for Frankfurt, where he arrived in the same year (as testified by the two dedicated etchings already referred to) and where he apparently hoped to settle. Indeed, on 3 March 1631 he applied for citizenship to the local authorities, supporting his case with the declaration of the Antwerp city fathers (with Rubens's certificate) and the letter of recommendation from the emperor, but to no

avail. His renewed pleas of 9 September and 13 October were also turned down, and he was requested by the magistrate to leave town.

In his final appeal he had referred not only to the approaching winter but also the threatening dangers of war. Indeed, by October that region of Germany was fully ablaze. In an incredibly efficient and devastating military campaign a new enemy, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, who quickly found allies among the Protestant princes of northern Germany, took one town after another, and the emperor was for a time incapable of responding in kind. It had all begun with the Swedish king's invasion of Pomerania in July 1630, scarcely a month after Panneels had asked for that Antwerp declaration. Nobody could have foreseen the outcome, and other political manoeuvres were then taking place, such as the organization of an Electoral meeting in Regensburg (July–November 1630), at which the emperor tried to agree a few points with his various opponents, but without the desired result. (This was when he composed the letter of recommendation for Panneels.) A pivotal role was played at Regensburg by the Elector of Mainz, Archbishop Anselm Casimir von Wambolt, and it so happens that an etching with the title *Cursus Mundi*, dated 1631, bears a legend stating that 'Guilielmus Panneels' painted the image at the court of the same Anselm Casimir, so clearly the artist's Catholic network had been active again. This might suggest that Panneels found refuge with this patron in Mainz after his enforced departure from Frankfurt in October, but that can hardly be the case. At this point Anselm Casimir himself, who was in Frankfurt earlier that year to make an agreement with the Protestants (the Frankfurt Convention, starting in April) had fled to Cologne when the Swedish troops approached. On 27 November 1631 Gustavus Adolphus entered Frankfurt am Main, on 24 December he took Mainz, to advance further south, making his triumphal entry into Munich on 17 May the following year. The imperial and the Catholic cause now appeared to be in ruins. Luckily for some, however, the King of Sweden died the same year, at the battle of Lützen (in Saxony, 17 November 1632), which put an unexpected end to the brief Protestant tide of success and caused Sweden largely to concentrate its energies thereafter on northern Germany. The Habsburg forces, under the command

of both Ferdinand, King of Hungary (and future emperor), on the Austrian side, and the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand (newly appointed governor of the Southern Netherlands) on the Spanish side, crushed the Protestant troops at Nördlingen on 6 September 1634, which meant that the fortunes of war were again temporarily reversed.

We left Willem Panneels in October 1631 when he had to move from Frankfurt, unsure of where he could seek shelter. Many towns had been completely destroyed, starvation was rife and plague rampant. Mainz was not an option, as we saw, so he evidently proceeded south, since one etching, still dated 1631, mentions 'Baden'. Maybe this was a brief stay to reconnoitre, as another print dated 1632 locates him somewhat further west, in Strasbourg, though he was soon to retrace his steps to Baden-Baden, where he eventually found employment as a court painter to the margrave, Wilhelm – and painted his children, whose portrait(s) may still be in existence (according to the literature). Let us hope that his last years were relatively trouble free, whether he passed them alone or in the company of his wife and two sons (an archival discovery in Baden might cast light on this part of my story). It was in the Spitalkirche there that his tombstone once existed, recording him as 'Wilhelmus Pannels Antverpiensis', adding his position as 'Pictor aulicus Badenaë', his date of death – 1 July 1634 – and his age as twenty-nine (which is, as we saw, at variance with the content of the Antwerp declaration of some four years earlier). Altogether a brief career as an independent artist.

### The painter Willem Panneels and his *Cleopatra*

We saw that in Germany Panneels was producing etchings which give us some idea of his capacity as an artist in his own right. But the verdict on him will, I am afraid, be a less than resounding one. He was certainly not in the same league as Justus van Egmont who, as we have seen, was working at the same time in Rubens's studio and together with Panneels applied to become a master in the guild. We may be curious about the part he played in the studio, and what his contribution to Rubens's oeuvre might have been in the 1620s. As a draughtsman he is at his best when copying patiently and faithfully Rubens's figure studies and drawings after

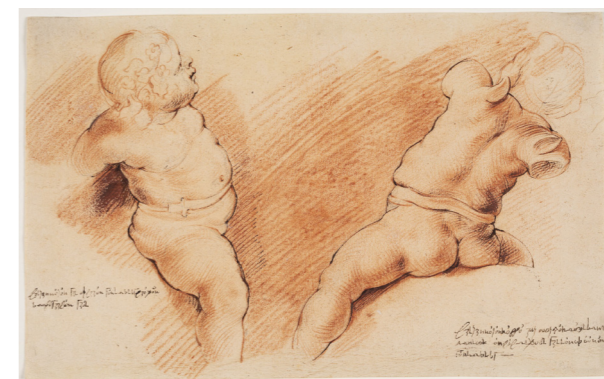


Fig. 4 Willem Panneels after Peter Paul Rubens, *Two studies of Cupid riding the Centaur (antique statue)*. Drawing. The inscriptions (in code) read: *Dit kinneken sit op dien sentaurus diemen van besijden siet* (This child is sitting on the centaur that is seen from the side); *Dit kinneken hebbe ick oock gehaelt vant cantoor ende dat moet sitten op eenen sentaurus* (This child I have also taken from the Cantoor, and it must sit on a centaur). Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Rubens Cantoor.



the antique, and some of his best sheets in the Cantoor (fig. 4) could perhaps deceive connoisseurs, which may indicate that as a painter too he would have been up to making studio replicas or executing other studio paintings on the basis of Rubens's preparatory material (such as *modelli*, figure studies and study heads). One would certainly not expect that Rubens would have entrusted him, as he did Anthony van Dyck a decade earlier, with a more creative role in the pictorial realization of a composition.

We know that in Germany Panneels was also active as a painter, for at times he mentions on his prints that he painted (*pinxit*) such and such a composition. But to date no paintings have been assigned with any certainty to his hand. I myself tentatively proposed that a large *Saint Sebastian* in the Brussels Museum might be by him,<sup>5</sup> on the basis of striking similarities with on the one hand some Cantoor drawings (for particular details), and on the other hand an etching with that subject, but in that case the print does not quite show the same composition, just something not dissimilar.

With the *Cleopatra Committing Suicide* (fig. 1) which is here introduced, we have a perfect match, a one-to-one relationship. Let me first say something about the print (as always executed in pure etching technique). In particular its inscription (of which a translation was given at the beginning of this article) is in need of some clarification, since it exists in two versions; I can show you only the second state of the print (fig. 2), where the text has been tampered with: in the first line, after Rubens's name (in a rather idiosyncratic letter type) the word 'Inuent[...]' has been added, and in the next line the 'pinxit' (which we find in the very rare first state of the print) has been replaced by 'fecit', thus attributing the invention to Rubens and to Panneels only the graphic execution. This is typical of the interventions of Franciscus van den Wyngaerd (he added his address, below left: F.v.W. ex.), engraver and print publisher in Antwerp (1614–1679), who got hold of Panneels's copperplates which had somehow been transferred from Baden-Baden to Antwerp (see above), and brought them out again as all of them due to Rubens – no doubt as a selling strategy, thereby depriving the pupil of the few designs and compositions he had to his credit.

When I spoke of a one-to-one relationship of the painting and the print that was not quite accurate, since there certainly are minor points of difference, but it is all too true in another respect which might pose a problem. In printmaking, unless an intermediate stage is involved, a composition always comes out in mirror image of the prototype – and this is usually the case with Panneels's prints, but not with the *Cleopatra*. This raises the question of whether the painting might not have been based on the print rather than the other way round. I won't enumerate all the smaller differences, some of which may have to do with inaccuracies in copying, but others might be more significant and point to deliberate changes, or changes prompted by the difference in medium (from a graphic

formulation to a painterly, or vice versa). It is obvious that the etching on the whole offers more details, such as the marked folds in the dress of Cleopatra, and extra decorative patterns (the stripes in her right sleeve and the shoulder piece); all this may have been needed in the etching where no colour could help to differentiate between the various elements of the costume. A striking difference is in the position of her eyes. In the painting are upturned eyeballs, indicative of her imminent death, as are the bluish lips. In the etching she is rather somnolent but still conscious, her eyes on the beholder but slightly out of focus, with heavy eyelids, and with that comes a more lively gesture of her left hand, which in the painting hangs motionless. Mightn't this alteration have been introduced in the print because without the bloodless lips, the expression might be mistaken for a state of mystical ecstasy? Whatever the case, the general form of the figure in the painting, round and robust, is more typically Rubensian than the elongated proportions and the more elegant type we find in the etching. Someone who was not a Rubens pupil could hardly have achieved what we see in the painting. It seems to me that Willem Panneels first painted this *Cleopatra* (and the first state of the etching said 'pinxit'), rather in the style he was used to when still in Rubens's studio, and when he came to revise it for print, took on his persona as a graphic artist, with a somewhat different aesthetic.

#### The story of Cleopatra

Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt (69–30 BC), was already celebrated in ancient times and her story was often told (Plutarch, Suetonius, etc.); above all her amorous liaisons with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony have caught the imagination of countless playwrights, novelists and artists since the Middle Ages. Mostly she is seen as a vain and ostentatious figure who liked to exhibit her riches as well as her well-formed body, seducing powerful men so as to gain influence in the world. A telling anecdote in this respect is when, to impress Antony, she dissolved a priceless pearl earring in a cup of wine (or vinegar) which she then drank. When, after the battle of Actium, Octavian/Augustus pursued Antony to Alexandria, the latter committed suicide; whereupon Cleopatra locked herself in his tomb, and, fearing that Augustus would take her captive to exhibit her in his triumph in Rome as his vanquished enemy, smuggled in a poisonous snake to give her the fatal bite. Thus her end has often been seen as a proud and courageous act of a generally less than virtuous woman.

This scene of her suicide was enormously popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and most often she is bitten in her arm (such is the case in a painting in Potsdam-Sanssouci, perhaps erroneously attributed to Rubens),<sup>6</sup> but there exists an alternative tradition where the snake clings to her exposed breast, and indeed one can refer to a Renaissance debate about exactly where the snake bite was administered, certain doctors holding that the poison would work quicker

when injected near the heart. But let us not jump to the conclusion that Panneels must have read up on this matter; more probably he used as his source an engraving (c. 1540) by Jean Mignon where we see the motif of not one but two serpents (as in Panneels's painting and etching), each attacking a nipple (though otherwise the composition is entirely different, Cleopatra figuring as completely naked). In Panneels's rendering of this detail, the snakes are very decoratively arranged as if in the form of some elaborately wrought piece of jewellery. In the story usually told and represented (as in the painting in Potsdam-Sanssouci), the snake (just one) emerged from a basket of figs brought into the death chamber; here instead we see a golden cup in the queen's right hand that can hardly be supposed to have contained the couple of asps. The viewer is more likely to have recalled that banquet for Antony where Cleopatra dissolved a pearl into a cup of wine; of course, we are not supposed to make this association, but then in the painting she is wearing a pair of pearl earrings, which ... have disappeared in the etching. Maybe (just maybe) the artist realized that this was confusing, especially since the pearl was dissolved long before, so he omitted this detail.

To sum up: an interesting painting, very Rubensian, with a few idiosyncrasies in its details, that may rather divert from than contribute to the drama here enacted. And the queen who is slowly drifting into death in a way seems never to have been very much alive, with that statuesque head reminiscent of an antique sculpture (and indeed, Panneels may have based it on a drawing we find in his 'Cantoor',<sup>7</sup> which he copied after Rubens, representing just such an ancient female head). Moreover, the pose the figure adopts is not really appropriate to the circumstances: the seat she is sitting on may support her back, but one wonders what her left arm rests upon (this is even more of a problem in the etching, where that arm extends further to the right), and one might expect her body better to reflect her waning consciousness. We can only wonder what Rubens would have thought of this work by his 'studiosissimus' pupil.

1 Jan Muller Antiques, *Winter Catalogue 2020*, p. 38 (repr. In colour), as Circle of Rubens, Canvas, 99 x 76 cm; then sale Munich, Hampel, 2 April 2020, lot 336.

2 Jan Garff and Eva de la Fuente Pedersen, *Rubens Cantoor. The Drawings of Willem Panneels: A Critical Catalogue*, 2 vols., Copenhagen 1988; *Rubens Cantoor* (Exh. Cat., Antwerp: Rubenshuis), Ghent – Antwerp 1993 (in which Paul Huvenne, 'On Rubens' Cantoor, Panneels and the Copenhagen Cantoor Drawings', pp. 16–37).

3 F. W. H. Hollstein et al., *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, Amsterdam, xv, [1964], p. 124, no. 30.

4 Erik Duverger, 'Some biographical details about Willem Panneels', in *Rubens Cantoor*, 1993 (as in n. 2), pp. 38–52 (a full biography, with a transcription and translation of the document on pp. 48–49).

5 Arnout Balis, 'Van Dyck: some problems in attribution', in Susan J. Barnes and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (eds.), *Van Dyck 350 (CASVA, Studies in the History of Art, 46)*, Washington, DC, 1994, pp. 177–96, esp. pp. 181–85, figs. 12–15, nn. 32–50.

6 Elizabeth McGrath, *Rubens: Subjects from History (Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, XIII.1)*, London 1997, no. 52, fig. 187 (with more information on the iconography of Cleopatra's suicide, i, p. 277).

7 Garff and Pedersen 1988 (as in n. 2), no. 14, pl. 14.

## Rubeniana

### Updates from the Rubenianum Research Adviser

Since 2017 I have been serving as Research Adviser at the Rubenianum, a position that is now jointly under the umbrella of the Rubenianum and the Universiteit Antwerpen, where I am a part-time professor in the History Department. After several years as a visiting researcher at the Rubenianum, I was delighted to transition into this new role, which has come with a range of projects and activities during the past few years.

A general goal of this position is to strengthen ties between the Rubenianum and the Universiteit Antwerpen – as well as other universities – in various ways. To that end, I brought my undergraduate students in the course *Geschiedenis en beeld* (History and image) to the Rubenianum for an introduction and tour, and guided them through their research in making the most of the Rubenianum's resources.

One of the principal responsibilities that I have in this position is being the point person for visiting researchers. This includes anyone coming to do research at the Rubenianum, for however short or long a visit, who would like to discuss their research with me, confer about the Rubenianum's most relevant resources for their project(s), and more broadly discuss what other resources in Antwerp and beyond might be useful to them. These conversations have typically occurred when someone writes to the Rubenianum

in advance of a visit, and we can plan a meeting for the beginning of their stay – so I encourage researchers to get in touch in advance.

In the same vein, I hold monthly meetings with the visiting researchers who have longer-term stays at the Rubenianum. These include doctoral students and other scholars at Belgian universities who use the Rubenianum regularly, as well as scholars from abroad on extended stays in Antwerp. A constant in the group is the holder of the annual joint fellowship sponsored by the Rubenianum and the Belgian American Educational Foundation and awarded to American doctoral students and post-doctoral scholars. At our meetings, everyone gives updates on the status of their research; we exchange suggestions on research leads and developments; and occasionally a member of the group presents ongoing research for feedback.

Given the Rubenianum's importance as a forum for scholars, I have also organized other such workshop events. This past year, the Rubenianum held two smaller meetings for staff of the Rubenianum, Rubenshuis and Centrum Rubenianum to discuss their research. A larger initiative was the inaugural Rubenianum Works-in-Progress Workshop, which took place in February 2020. The goal was to create a forum bringing together those working

on the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries in a range of media – from various universities and research institutions – for an afternoon of presentations followed by discussion and, in conclusion, a drink. The first iteration included presentations by scholars at six universities (Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Liège, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve) embracing a range of topics, media and methodological approaches. The second Rubenianum Works-in-Progress Workshop, which was being planned for June, will take place once we can again safely gather in large groups.

Among my ongoing projects in this position is the co-editing, along with my friend and colleague Lieneke Nijkamp, of a volume of essays on artistic collaboration in the early modern Low Countries. This book stems from the conference we co-organized at the Rubenianum in November 2018, *Many Antwerp Hands: Collaborations in Netherlandish Art, 1400–1750*, though strictly speaking, it is not a volume of proceedings. The book represents a selection of essays addressing the topic from a range of angles, with contributions from scholars who have already made seminal contributions to the discourse on this topic as well as younger scholars just entering the field. Most of the essays have now been edited, and I very much hope that the book will come out in the course of 2021! *Abigail Newman*



Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel I, *The Feast of Achelous*, c. 1615, oil on panel, 108 x 163.8 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 45.141

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