

# The Rubenianum Quarterly

2020  
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## A new acquisition for the Rubenshuis: *Head of a Bearded Man* by Jacob Jordaens

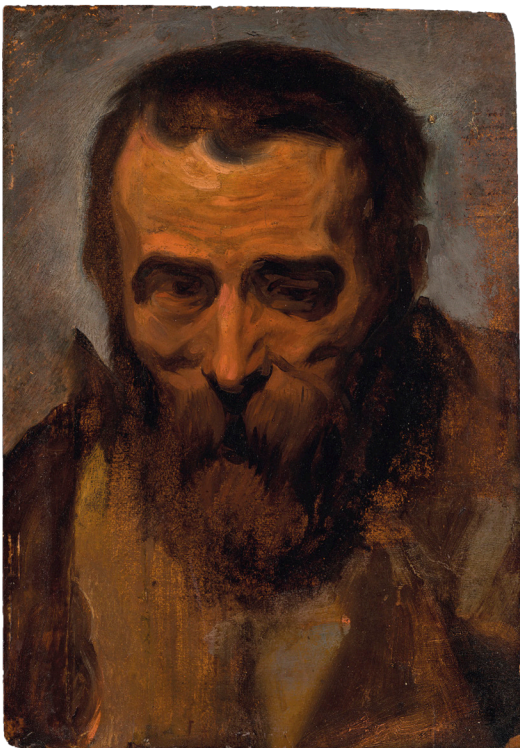
Last autumn the Rubenshuis succeeded in acquiring a previously unknown head study by Jacob Jordaens. The purchase was made possible by a generous donation. This small, rapidly painted sketch of the head of a bearded man had been hidden away in a private collection in Belgium, unknown to scholars and unrecorded in the literature on the artist.

Head studies like the present work were executed by Jordaens early in his career in particular, in keeping with the Antwerp studio tradition and, more directly, under the influence of Rubens. The newly discovered study is similar in handling to other studies painted by Jordaens c. 1620–21, including *Study for the Head of Saint Christopher*, which came up for auction a couple of years ago. In these sketches, Jordaens uses a heavily loaded brush, applying the paint with short, powerful strokes and painting *alla prima*. Interestingly, this work is painted on a sheet of recycled paper, laid down on panel. Along the upper right edge, bits of black handwriting can still be glimpsed by the naked eye below the paint layer. Though unusual, such recycled supports can also be found in head studies made by Rubens and Van Dyck.

The practice of painting head studies was common in Antwerp and dates back at least to the work of Frans Floris (1517–70), who, according to his biographer Karel van Mander, ‘always had a few of those to hand on panel’. Inspired by Italian examples, Rubens started to paint head studies during his years in Italy, and produced a large number of them in the decade following his return from the peninsula in 1608.

For Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens alike, head studies provided a stock of intriguing faces that could populate large-scale history paintings. In fact, Jordaens used the present study as the model for the head of Saint Augustine in his magnificent *The Four Doctors of the Latin Church* (c. 1630) at Stonyhurst College in Blackburn (UK), and the same bearded man also features in *Odysseus in the Cave of Polyphemus* (c. 1635), now in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow.

*Head of a Bearded Man* will be displayed in the Antechambre, where it will join Anthony van Dyck’s superb head study of a young man, *The Apostle Matthew*.  
Ben van Beneden



## *The Corpus in times of pandemic*

On 19 June 1626, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc reported in a letter to Girolamo Aleandro that their mutual friend Rubens is currently still in Antwerp: ‘But he writes to me that the plague is increasing, which could cause him to leave the city, as he did last year.’ In fact, Rubens had already fled the raging plague the year before. On that occasion he perhaps suffered no more than inconvenience, to judge from a letter he wrote at the end of November. But in 1626 disaster struck. Isabella Brant died on 20 June, probably of the very disease that was ravaging Antwerp at the time. Almost four hundred years later, a pandemic has broken into our modern world with elemental force. And again people are struck down. Friends and colleagues fall ill. There are deaths close to home. The grief is paralysing. But the thought of the dead also brings humility. I do not complain about the everyday restrictions. Although I try to devote the time spent in self-imposed quarantine to the Corpus project, systematic work is hardly possible. Museums and libraries are closed. Letters remain unanswered. Where digital copies are still being processed, the overload on the remaining staff means long delays in delivery. Communication, which has completely shifted to digital, consumes time and energy. Under these circumstances it was and is not possible to move the Corpus project forward in the way we would have expected. Hope springs from the knowledge that this is a shared suffering. And from news of a vaccine that may put an end to this epidemic: next year. Then we will catch up with cancelled trips and have lectures at the Rubenianum. And then we will complete the next Corpus volumes.

Nils Büttner  
Secretary of the Editorial Board of the  
Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard

# Corpus Rubenianum

## Interview with our generous benefactors, A. Gary and Anita Klesch, founders of The Klesch Collection by Prof. Katlijne Van der Stighelen

**Q** *When did you take the first step to collecting? Was it a decision you made as a couple or on a more individual basis?*

**A** We started collecting – always as a couple – soon after we got married. Initially, we collected modern art for a number of years. After Anita got her doctorate in art history in the 2000s, her passion for ‘Old Masters’ became very evident and that passion was so infectious that it eventually took hold in Gary.

**Q** *Dr Klesch, has your education as art historian and your position as Honorary Research Fellow at Birkbeck, University of London, played a part in this?*

**A** Yes and no. Yes, in that it allowed me to continue researching subjects near and dear to my heart, but also near and dear to Birkbeck. No, in that the period we are interested in collecting was not necessarily the only period Birkbeck was interested in researching.

**Q** *What are the criteria by which you decide to purchase a work of art? Is it an emotional process or rather a rational decision weighing worth, investment, and whether it matches the focus of the collection?*

**A** First and foremost, a painting has to be in our targeted period of interest which is sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European painting. Second, we both have to love the painting. Third, we are very disciplined buyers and we stick to a strict regime of deliverables from any vendor; by that we mean condition reports, attribution reports, provenance, etc. We have walked away from buying a painting that we loved simply because the attribution report was not strong or convincing enough.

**Q** *What is currently the focal point of the collection? Has it evolved much from the initial focus?*

**A** The focus of our collection is sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European painting and that focus hasn’t changed since we started it about seven years ago.

**Q** *What do you see as the logical further development of the collection?*

**A** Our aim is to continue to add to the collection whenever the right opportunity arises. Separately, we hope to invest in education through our scholarship programme and sponsor various exhibitions or events.

These efforts can be seen on The Klesch Collection website.

**Q** *Are you planning to make art by female artists the focus of the collection?*

**A** A better description would be that we want to call attention to very competent women artists who were overlooked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We have five impressive paintings by women artists from that era. While we wouldn’t call it a focus of our collection, it is a very important part of it and we plan on making further acquisitions in this area. We are proud to be one of the leaders in collecting women artists.

**Q** *Which genres do you gravitate towards the most?*

**A** Within our focused period, so much of the paintings produced were of a religious nature in the early part of that period while increasingly veering towards secular subjects in the later part. That’s why these genres are well represented in our collection – not by choice, but because they corresponded to what was being painted at those various times. A welcome relief for us is when we see very attractive allegorical paintings such as our *Patience* by Vasari or our *Four Seasons* by Arcimboldo.

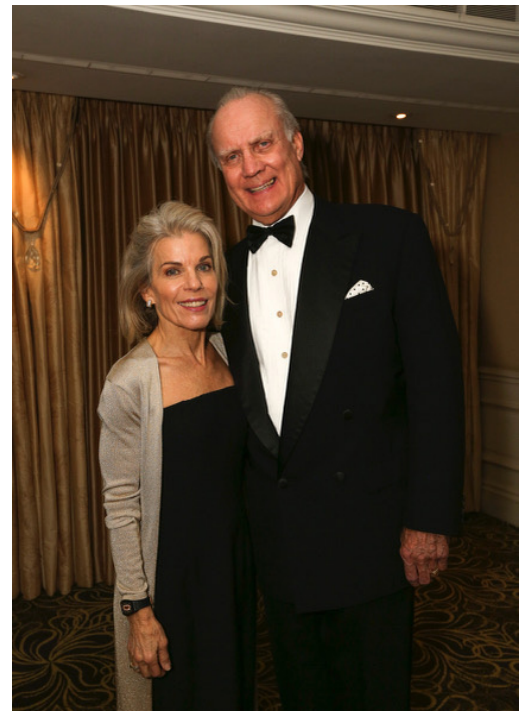
**Q** *Do you have a special interest in Flemish art in general?*

**A** The Flemish art that we own is an important, if not vital, part of our collection. As collectors of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Old Masters we couldn’t imagine not having adequate representation of Flemish art and we plan to acquire further Flemish paintings.

**Q** *Why did you decide to purchase specifically Rubens’s Portrait of an Unidentified Woman?*

**A** We fell in love with it and, as we said, that is one of our golden rules. We saw the painting at an exhibition and immediately reacted to it. It was like a magnet drawing both of us to it at the same time. It was truly serendipitous and love at first sight.

**Q** *Do you have other works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Jordaens or Antwerp contemporaries in the collection?*



**A** Yes, we do. We have Joos van Cleve, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Anthony van Dyck and Michaelina Wautier.

**Q** *Which artist would you like most to add to the collection? What would be your dream purchase?*

**A** Caravaggio.

**Q** *From your website it seems that the vision you have for The Klesch Collection is not only about building an art collection, but also about contributing to the societal relevance of art through exhibitions, fellowships, educational programmes and sponsorships. Can you tell us a bit more about this?*

**A** Our commitment to the art world is founded on my wife’s passion for art history. We actively seek to share our collection with the public for the specific purpose of assisting in the interpretation of history. A large part of what we intend to do is to undertake further research on all of our paintings, produce books, produce podcasts to expand the knowledge base of our collection and share it with the public. Part of increasing the pool of knowledge in the art world is to ensure that there are going to be future generations of art historians, conservationists and curators, and that is why we are prepared to fund scholarships for MA or PhD students. It should come as no surprise that funding exhibitions and/or sponsoring events fits nicely into our objective of expanding the understanding and knowledge base of artists and their role and impact on history.

# Rubens in Stuttgart: Geronima Spinola and Her Granddaughter Maria Giovanna Serra

Nils Büttner and Anna Orlando

A Rubens exhibition is scheduled for autumn 2021 in Stuttgart. The starting point for this show will be the Rubens works in the Stuttgart collection, some of which are early works by the artist that have never been shown there. Thanks to generous support from the Karlsruhe Kunsthalle, other early paintings by Rubens will be on show, and for the first time in more than a hundred years the two Genoese portraits illustrated here will be shown side by side. In preparation for this exhibition, two specialist conferences were planned in cooperation with the Rubenianum, the first of which had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. Véronique Van de Kerkhof, Sandra Diefenthaler and their colleagues involved with the organization in Antwerp and Stuttgart continue to hope that the event planned for late summer 2021 can take place all the same. The speakers for the cancelled Stuttgart conference have been invited to travel to Stuttgart on their own. The first such visit has now resulted in the identification of the sitters in the much-debated portrait of an old lady and a young girl in Stuttgart (inv. 2710; CRLB 1977, no. 45).

Wilhelm von Bode had bought this painting before 1890 for the collector Karl von der Heydt (1858–1922). The picture, from the collection of Marchese Paolo Coccapani Imperiale Lercari, was then considered to be the work of Van Dyck. Ludwig Burchard ascribed the portrait to Rubens and proposed that the sitters are members of the Imperiale Lercari family, given the work's provenance. In 1977 Frances Huemer questioned the traditional identification as Marchesa Bianca Spinola Imperiale and her granddaughter Maddalena Imperiale; but she had no alternative to offer.

For over a century there have been attempts to trace the picture back from the noble Genoese family of the Lercari to the early seventeenth century, but in vain. The well-known complexity of family connections among the Genoese nobility means that one often gets lost among the numerous homonyms. There are always multiple possibilities for the various transfers of ownership and inheritance processes, which are mostly hypothetical and undocumented. Starting from the quite recent hypothesis that the portrait of a lady kept in the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (inv. 2505; CRLB 1977, no. 43) actually shows Veronica Spinola Serra (1577–1617), the opposite approach has now been taken.



Fig.1 Peter Paul Rubens, *Geronima Spinola and Her Granddaughter Maria Giovanna Serra*, canvas, 208 × 132/133 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, inv. 2710

The identification had already been proposed in 2018 but it is now supported with an increasing body of evidence of documented accessories and jewellery. The painting now in Karlsruhe was executed for Geronima Serra by Rubens, in his function as court painter to the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga. Serra was a feudatory of the Duke of Mantua and partner of his major banker Nicolò Pallavicino.<sup>1</sup>

The provenance of the Karlsruhe painting is unknown before 1827, when the collection of the late King of Poland was sold in London.<sup>2</sup> That of the Stuttgart painting can only be traced back to 1890. Given that the two paintings of approximately the same size were found together in the early twentieth century, it seems quite possible that they belonged together from the very beginning. Both appear compositionally

related to one another. In fact, if we make this assumption, all the pieces fall together as in a jigsaw. Not only does it confirm the hypothesis about the identity of the Karlsruhe sitter, Veronica Spinola Serra, but it also allows us to give a name to the two sitters in the Stuttgart painting as Veronica's mother and daughter.

Research carried out in six different parish archives in Genoa between 2017 and 2020 has made it possible to reconstruct the genealogies of the immediate family of Veronica Spinola, daughter of Geronima Spinola from the 'San Luca' branch and Giacomo Spinola from the 'Luccoli' branch,

and those of her husband Geronimo Serra di Paolo (1547–1616).<sup>3</sup>

The elderly lady is shown without jewellery and accessories. She is sitting on a rather plain so-called Spanish chair. Her face stands out against a red curtain, which is fastened with a cord from which a large tassel hangs. The veil on her head and the severity of her dark dress as well as her sad look are probably references to her widowhood. The white headscarf can be explained as a monastic garment. These two considerations are not mutually exclusive but complement one another in leading to the lady's

identity: Veronica's mother, Geronima Spinola di Luca, had lost her husband Giacomo Spinola di Federico in 1604 and became a nun after being widowed. In the family genealogy as reconstructed so far, among the children of Luca and Violante Spinola (Veronica's maternal grandparents) there was indeed a nun Geronima, whose biographical details could not be traced and whom we know today to be none other than Veronica's mother. Married to Giacomo Spinola in 1570, Geronima decided not to marry again but to wear the monastic habit after his death, a choice of life which, as the portrait tells us, was suggested to her granddaughter. The name of the latter can be found in the same genealogy: Maria Giovanna, the first female child among Veronica's thirteen children, was born in 1598. Documents mention her as a nun. The apparent age of the child in the portrait (she may be seven to ten years old) and the dating of the picture on stylistic grounds (between 1604 and 1606) are compatible with the age of Maria Giovanna. She is therefore the girl who posed for Rubens at the age of seven or eight, probably in 1605, and who looks unmistakably like her mother, Veronica. At about the same time, Veronica herself posed for the painting now in Karlsruhe. The luxury manifested in the girl's clothes and accessories in the Stuttgart painting – abundant gold thread, large collar edged with expensive lace, three large pearls for each earring and an elaborate hairstyle – is something she was soon to leave behind to embrace a life of austerity and chastity. The tassel behind her grandmother's shoulders also hints at this idea. The solidity of this choice, based on firm principles, is perhaps suggested in the unusual shape of the column and base behind her, where two columns are placed directly above one another.

An in-depth study is projected which will elaborate on what is only touched on here and will also try to explain how the painting entered the Lercari family collection. The conference planned in Antwerp for next year and the catalogue of the Stuttgart exhibition scheduled for 22 October 2021–20 February 2022 will publicly present and discuss these results, as well as the outcome of research on the other Rubens paintings in Stuttgart.



Fig.2 Peter Paul Rubens, *Veronica Spinola Serra*, canvas, 225.5 × 138.5 cm. Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, inv.2505

- 1 A. Orlando, in [exh. cat.] *Van Dyck e i suoi amici. Fiamminghi a Genova 1600–1640*, ed. by A. Orlando, Genoa 2018, pp. 304–11; A. Orlando, 'I soggiorni di Rubens a Genova. I dipinti per le famiglie Pallavicino e Serra e nuove identificazioni per alcuni ritratti genovesi', in *La dama genovese con l'orecchino di perle. I Serra e le rotte del collezionismo tra Fiandra, Italia e Spagna*, Genoa 2020, pp. 50–81.
- 2 P. Boccardo and A. Orlando, [exh. cat.] 'Dipinti di Rubens a Genova e per Genova', in *L'Età di Rubens. Dimore, committenti e collezionisti genovesi*, ed. by P. Boccardo and A. Orlando, Milan 2004, p. 28, no. 1.8.
- 3 A. Lercari and F. Gattiglia, 'Alberi genealogici', in *La dama genovese ...* (as note 1), pp. 10–13.

### 'You are what you own': an exceptional cupboard from 1626 for the Rubenshuis

The Rubenshuis has a small but varied collection of seventeenth-century furniture, including a number of top-notch pieces. In Rubens's day, the art of furniture-making – and this holds true for the so-called 'minor' or applied arts in general – experienced a remarkable blossoming almost equal to that of the other arts: furniture, vessels of silver and gold, glassware and ceramics were often made expressly as works of art and considered as such. Their possession and display in the domestic interior was understood to convey the status and virtues of their owners. A very fine example of the high artistic quality of seventeenth-century furniture production in the Low Countries is the sumptuously executed five-door cupboard (*buffet à cinq portes*) that the museum was able to acquire last year with the support of the Friends of the Rubenshuis. The cupboard, which was purchased at a special Sotheby's sale in London, comes from the collection of Osterrieth House, once one of the most splendid mansions of Antwerp *a due passi* from Rubens's house.

The impressive piece of furniture consists of a short upper section with three doors, a lower section with two doors, and at the very bottom, two large drawers – a common type known in later times as a 'five-door cupboard'. It is made completely of oak, which since the Middle Ages has been the type of wood preferred in northern Europe for fine furniture.

The front of the cupboard is articulated by Ionic consoles (four on the upper section and three on the lower section) and generously decorated with lively carving inspired by antique imagery: male and female herms, lions' heads, garlands of fruit and floral motifs dominated by acanthus leaves. The panels in the doors are edged with a classical egg-and-dart moulding, an ornament frequently seen on Greek and Roman temples. An inconspicuous detail is the date, 1626, applied to a cartouche in the middle of the frieze. This makes the furniture even more special, since examples of dated cupboards from the early seventeenth century are rare.

A monumental storage cabinet of this kind, with a closed front and doors, was a comparatively new phenomenon at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the Low Countries at this time, textiles and other goods were usually stored in chests. Large cupboards such as this one served primarily to store linens (costly linen goods were the most important part of a woman's *trousseau*) or precious tableware.

Because so few pieces of well-documented furniture from the first half of the seventeenth century are known, and the figurative carving – almost certainly done by a master wood-carver – was nearly always anonymous, we can only guess at where and for whom this prestigious cupboard was made. In all probability this piece of furniture originated in Antwerp. The decoration of the doors, with a restless



pattern of profiles, and the pronounced consoles point in any case to the influence of this city.

The central upper door of the cupboard is carved with the crest of the Saint Sebastian Archers' Guild (Schuttersgilde Sint-Sebastiaan); on the three consoles of the lower section, angels carry the archers' spurs, crest and arrows. This cupboard was presumably commissioned by a prominent member of the Guild; in any case, its original owner must have been someone who believed that 'you are what you own'.

*Ben van Beneden*

### The lamentable fate of a monument on Antwerp's Meir



Visitors to the Rubenshuis can now admire an outstanding carved oak cabinet that once stood in nearby Osterrieth House, a stately home in Antwerp.

This grand old mansion on the Meir is a gem of rococo architecture, built to the design of Jan-Pieter van Bourscheit (1699–1768) in 1746. Over the centuries this remarkable house has passed through various hands and has undergone numerous changes, but since 1939 it has been listed as a cultural heritage monument.

Today Osterrieth House is owned by an investment company and that, sadly, is all too obvious. The ground floor is now occupied by Odette Lunettes, a hip eyewear brand that regales passersby with moving pictures in glaring colours, shown

in every one of the rococo windows. One wonders if the headaches caused by this flashy presentation can be remedied by the glasses on sale inside ...

We spare you the description of the entrance and the interior: bad taste and brisk business are much in evidence in this historic monument.

The City of Antwerp is doing its utmost to value its monuments, its citizens taking great pride in the recent restoration of the Handelsbeurs (Stock Exchange) and the plans for a new Rubens site. However, there are no regulations stipulating the type of advertising permissible in a monument.

What has been happening for the last two years in Osterrieth House is nothing short of a disgrace. | *Cécile Kruyffhoofd*

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