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25.09.2014 > 04.01.2015

Sensation and Sensuality Rubens and his Legacy

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Peter Paul Rubens, *Pan and Syrinx*, (detail) 1617. © Museumlandschaft Hessen Kassel. Photo Ute Brunzel.

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RUBENS AND HIS LEGACY

***Sensation and Sensuality* looks at the impact of Rubens on the art of painting, from van Dyck to Gainsborough and from Delacroix to Kokoschka.**

25 September 2014 > 4 January 2015

Peter Paul Rubens was one of the most innovative painters in the history of art. His impact on subsequent generations has been immense. For the first time, the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA), the Royal Academy of Arts in London, and BOZAR in Brussels have joined forces to look at Rubens as a role model. The exhibition *Sensation and Sensuality: Rubens and his Legacy* brings together some 160 works, including some iconic paintings by Rubens himself and, more particularly, works by his artistic heirs.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Pan and Syrinx*, 1617, © Staatliche Museen (Kassel), Photo Ute Brunzel



Honoré Daumier, *Woman Pursued by Satyrs*, 1850 © The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. Brian Merrett

It is a paradox that **Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640)** is both inimitable and has served, for four centuries now, as **the great model** for painters such as **Rembrandt, Murillo, Watteau, Fragonard, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Delacroix, Cézanne, Renoir, Kokoschka**, and many others, often far beyond the frontiers of Europe. Even in the work of **Picasso**, we encounter his visual language. The international exhibition *Sensation and Sensuality. Rubens and his Legacy* looks at this phenomenon and brings works by these celebrated artists to the world-renowned Flemish master's homeland.

Sensational and sensual

Many Rubens works are **sensational**: loud, forceful, and sometimes violent, created in the service of Catholic propaganda and of absolutist rulers. With his almost cinematographic depiction of aggression, fighting, and barbaric scenes, Rubens could be called the Quentin Tarantino of his time.

But he is also a **sensual** painter in his informal family portraits, landscapes and pastoral scenes, peasant dances and gardens of love, in which he was a precursor of Rococo, Romanticism, and Impressionism.

Rubens was so many-sided that he appealed to artists of every nationality. Their interest was often selective. **Spaniards** preferred his religious works. The **English** were inspired by his portraits and landscapes. **French painters** were attracted, above all, by the eroticism and poetry in his work. **German** and **Austrian artists** admired his vitality and vigour.

A great many talented artists were captivated by his use of composition, colour, and technique and developed flourishing careers by following his example. After meeting Rubens, Velázquez began to paint in a different way; following his counsel, he used a lighter undercoat.



Peter Paul Rubens, *The Tiger Hunt*, 1616, Musée des Beaux-Arts Rennes © 2014. White Images/Scala, Florence



Eugène Delacroix, *The Lion Hunt*, 1855, Nationalmuseum Stockholm, Photo: Hans Thorwid, Nationalmuseum, Sweden

160 works of art, 6 themes

The *Sensation and Sensuality* exhibition presents **more than 160 works of art** and takes the visitor through **six fascinating themes** that explore different aspects of life and of the painter's art: **violence, power, lust, compassion, elegance, and poetry**. Each of these chapters demonstrates the links between masterpieces by Rubens and the work of artists who came after him. *The Tiger Hunt* from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes hangs alongside the Delacroix *Lion Hunt* from Stockholm and the voluptuous *Pan and Syrinx* from the Gemäldegalerie in Kassel alongside Boucher's work of the same name from the National Gallery in London; the portrait of *Marchese Maria Grimaldi and Her Dwarf* from Kingston Lacy is juxtaposed with *A Genoese Noblewoman and Her Son* from Washington, by Rubens's famous pupil van Dyck; and Manet's Rubens pastiche *Fishing* from the Metropolitan Museum in New York can be seen alongside *The Bacchanalia on Andros* by Rubens, from the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm.

The **20 paintings, 6 oil sketches, 8 drawings, and 10 prints by Rubens** himself are presented in a dialogue with works by his artistic heirs, including Böcklin, Carpeaux, Constable, Corinth, Coppel, Daumier, Delacroix, Fragonard, Gainsborough, Gérault, Jordaens, Klimt, Kokoschka, Le Brun, Makart, Murillo, Picasso, Rembrandt, Renoir, Reynolds, Sandrart, Turner, Watteau, and others.



Lucas Vorsterman, The Descent from the Cross, 1620, British Museum London
Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum



Thomas Gainsborough, The Descent from the Cross, After Rubens, 1766-69, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury



Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, Descent from the Cross, 1633, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Prestigious loans

Exceptionally, **one of the jewels of the Prado collection in Madrid, Rubens's *Garden of Love***, will travel to Brussels, where it will be brought together with preparatory sketches from the Amsterdam Museum and two drawings that Rubens made of his painting for a superb print (Metropolitan Museum, New York). Bringing these pieces together allows us to see how this famous composition took shape, from idea to reproduction.

As well as those already mentioned, major **foreign lending institutions** contributing include Tate Britain (London), the Neue Pinakothek (Munich), the Nasjonalgalleriet (Oslo), Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and a number of private collections.



Peter Paul Rubens, The Garden of Love, c. 1633, © Museo Nacional del Prado Madrid

International cooperation

Sensation and Sensuality is an exhibition organised by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA), the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and BOZAR (Centre for Fine Arts), Brussels. After the show at the Centre for Fine Arts Brussels the exhibition will travel to the Royal Academy of Arts in London (23.01 > 10.04.2015)

Multidisciplinary programme

This autumn, BOZAR pays homage to Rubens and shows how the Antwerp master has also inspired artists in other artistic disciplines. **BOZAR MUSIC** is presenting a concert series, *The Musical Humors of Rubens*, with music of the painter's time; the highlight will be the concert on 6 December 2014, *The Ear of Rubens*, performed by the **Huelgas Ensemble**. Besides, BOZAR MUSIC and Ricercar (Outhere) present a CD with examples of the major musical genres that Rubens would have heard during his travels in Europe. **BOZAR LITERATURE** has invited six writers – **David Bosch, Annemarie Estor, Lydia Flem, Peter Holvoet-Hanssen, Pjeroo Roobjee, and Jean-Philippe Toussaint** – to draw inspiration from a work by Rubens: you can read the results in the visitor's guide or listen to them on a videoguide. **BOZAR CINEMA**, moreover, is screening the art film that **Henri Storck** made about Rubens in 1948. There will also be two multimedia installations on show during the BOZAR NIGHT and the BEAF: **Ingrid Van Wantoch Rekowski** will present her video installation *Rubens-Metamorfoses* during the **BOZAR NIGHT** (10 November 2014); during the **BEAF** (25 > 27 September 2014), the video artist **Quayola** will show his installation *Strata #4, a* – literally – penetrating look at the great altarpieces of Rubens and van Dyck via high-resolution images.

Seated regally beneath a portico in front of his easel, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) is shown painting an allegory of peace ‘from life’. He portrays Venus, the goddess of love, enthroned at the right, who turns and raises her hand to prevent her lover, Mars, from waging war. She endeavours to safeguard political power, whose attributes – the sceptre and the globe – lie in the left foreground. There we also see symbols of commerce and science (an astrolabe) and of the arts (a rolled-up manuscript, a mask, a score and a musical instrument), which can flourish only in times of peace. A putto releases the dove of peace, as Minerva and Abundantia, carrying a cornucopia filled with fruit and grain, descend on the scene.

The Italian painter Luca Giordano pays tribute in this canvas to the talent of his artistic hero – who had died twenty years earlier – and does so on a suitably monumental scale that would have met with his approval. Giordano refers in the painting to the famous allegories of peace that Rubens had painted for the King of England and the Grand Duke of Tuscany. That is no coincidence either; Roger de Piles, Rubens’s biographer, also believed that no one else had ever treated allegorical subjects in such a clear and well-considered way: ‘Because allegory is a kind of language and must therefore be justified by usage and understood by many, he [Rubens] introduced only those symbols that medals and other monuments of antiquity have made familiar to us, at least to the learned.’¹ The aristocratic image and success of Rubens – who had aspired to the mythic status of Titian – meant that he in turn became a role model for Van Dyck and the young Rembrandt. Rubens also made an impression on Velázquez, who met him in Madrid in 1628 and visited Italy on his advice. And later on, both Sir Thomas Lawrence and Hans Makart attempted to equal the success of the court painter-cum-entrepreneur. In 1879 Makart even dressed as Rubens to march in a triumphal procession through Vienna.² Rubens’s fame drove some artists mad. The Belgian painter Antoine Wiertz considered himself a reincarnation of the master, but his creations, as gigantic as they are hilarious, are among the most caricatural expressions of Rubenism.³

Rubens became known not only as ‘the prince of painters’ but also as ‘the Homer of painting’ – a true film director *avant la lettre*; notions that are firmly rooted in the art-historical literature. Johann Joachim Winckelmann stated that Rubens, like Homer, ‘composed in accordance with the inexhaustible fertility of his mind ... he is rich to the point of prodigality. He sought the miraculous, just as Homer did, in fact just as any poetic and all-embracing painter does, particularly with regard to composition and chiaroscuro.’ This German classicist was mainly attracted by Rubens’s pictorial idiom of allegory, which he equated with the poetic and the sublime.⁴ One of the most important characteristics of the painter is his universality, according to Charles Baudelaire in his *Salon de 1845*: ‘Just as the epic poet, Homer or Dante, knows how to produce equally well an idyll, a narration, a speech, a descriptive passage, an ode, etc., so it is with Rubens, who, when painting fruit, paints fruit better than any specialist.’⁵ The master’s almost limitless range of subject-matter and boundless creativity also struck Hippolyte Taine, who wrote the following in 1869: ‘the whole of human nature is

¹ De Piles 1699, p. 402: ‘Aucun Peintre n’a traité de doctement ni si clairement que Rubens les Sujets Allégoriques: & comme l’Allégorie est une espèce de langage, & que par conséquent elle doit être autorisée par l’usage, & entendue de plusieurs, il y a introduit seulement les symbols que les Médailles & les autres Monuments de l’Antiquité ont rendus familiers, du moins entre les Savans.’

² Schaffer 2007, pp. 36–37.

³ *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1842) measures 1,153 x 793 cm, *The Triumph of Christ* (1848) 625 x 1,104 cm and *A Great of the World* (1860) 918 x 680 cm. See Namur 2007.

⁴ Eiselein 1825, p. 145: ‘Rubens hat nach der unerschöpflichen Fruchtbarkeit seines Geistes wie Homer gedichtet: er ist reich bis zur Verschwendung: er hat das Wunderbare wie jener gesucht, überhaupt wie ein dichterischer und allgemeiner Maler, und insbesondere was Komposition und Licht und Schatten betrifft.’

⁵ Baudelaire 1992, p. 162: ‘Un des caractères principaux du grand peintre est l’universalité. – Ainsi le poète épique, Homère ou Dante, sait faire également bien une idylle, un récit, un discours, une description, une ode, etc. De même, Rubens, s’il peint des fruits, peindra des fruits plus beaux qu’un spécialiste quelconque.’ The comparison also holds true for Eugène Delacroix; see Delacroix 1996, p. 627.

in his grasp, save the loftiest heights. Hence it is that his creativeness is the vastest we have seen, comprehending as it does all types, Italian cardinals, Roman emperors, contemporary seigneurs, burghers, peasants and cowherding lasses, along with the innumerable diversities stamped on humanity by the play of natural forces and which more than fifteen hundred pictures did not suffice to exhaust.’⁶

The image of the painter-diplomat has persisted in exhibitions up to the present day. The show in Lille in 2004 told the story of Rubens’s royal, ecclesiastical and bourgeois patrons, and those in Wuppertal in 2012 and in Lens in 2013 analysed the complex European politics of Rubens’s day. These exhibitions affirmed the image of the artist as a servant of the Catholic establishment, a defender of absolutism and an architect of peace. Rubens was certainly all of those things, but that is only part of the story. If he were merely an outstanding painter of propaganda, he would have been quickly forgotten, but alongside the eloquent history painter there exists another Rubens: the creator of family portraits, landscapes and pastoral scenes, of peasant dances and gardens of love, a poetic Rubens who was present at the inception of rococo and Romanticism, a painter of sensuality as well as sensation, a Rubens who, in the imagination of Ferdinand de Braekeleer the Elder, immortalised the attractive Susanna Lunden in his garden pavilion in the famous *Chapeau de Paille*. Here the Belgian Romantic painter clearly pays tribute to that other Rubens, even though his loving ‘reconstruction’ tells us more about nineteenth-century taste than about seventeenth-century reality – as evidenced by the Biedermeier sofa, the footstool, and the table with a jug and dish of fruit.

Most exhibitions, however, feature the Homer of painting and his astonishing craftsmanship. The exhibition in Brunswick in 2004 presented Rubens as a painter of human emotions; in London in 2005 visitors were introduced to his sources of inspiration; and in Brussels in 2007 the genesis of a group of his works was reconstructed.⁷ *Rubens and his Legacy* fits into this last category. The selection of works examines the relevance of Rubens’s artistic legacy to other artists and invites visitors to look at the paintings before reading the labels, because, just like Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt and Picasso, Rubens reshaped art history. That the face of the Baroque also belongs in this illustrious roll-call of masters is not in doubt, for the after-effect of the Flemish master extends across four centuries. Quite a few artists collected his prints, drawings, oil sketches and even paintings,⁸ and yet the phenomenon of Rubenism has been investigated only narrowly and sporadically. In fact, the subject was long relegated to the bottom drawer of art-historical research. It was not until 1975 that the theme was examined in a small exhibition in Providence, Rhode Island,⁹ and in 2004 academics delved into Rubenism again at a conference held in Lille.¹⁰

Of course, neither the exhibition nor its catalogue can present an entirely exhaustive overview of the broad arthistorical subject of Rubenism. A number of interesting artists who were not essential to the conceptual framework of the exhibition fell by the wayside; these include the Frenchmen Jacques Blanchard and Joseph Parrocel, the Austrians Martin Johann Schmidt and Johann Michael Rottmayr, the Dutchman Jacob de Wit, the Mexican Cristóbal de Villalpando and the Belgian Gustaaf Wappers. Moreover, quite a few of the larger works, such as the painting by Luca Giordano discussed at the opening of this introduction, cannot travel. This is even the case with some of the smaller works, such as the iconic *Chapeau de Paille*, and the late landscapes that Rubens painted on fragile panels

⁶ Taine 1869, p. 63: ‘... il a sous sa main toute la nature humaine, sauf la plus haute cime. C’est pourquoi son invention est la plus vaste qu’on ait vue et comprend tout les types, cardinaux italiens, empereurs romains, seigneurs contemporains, bourgeois, paysans, vachères, avec les diversités innombrables que le jeu des focus naturelles imprime aux creatures, et plus de quinze cents tableaux ne suffisent pas a l’épuiser.’

⁷ London 2005; Brussels 2007.

⁸ Artists who collected Rubens’s drawings include Prosper Henry Lankrink, Jan Boeckhorst, Erasmus Quellinus II, Joachim von Sandrart, Matthäus Merian II, Jonathan Richardson I, Jacob de Wit, Thomas Hudson and Sir Thomas Lawrence (see New York 2005). Rembrandt, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Léon Bonnat owned paintings and oil sketches by the master.

⁹ Providence 1975.

¹⁰ Heck 2005.

with complicated butt joints. In the interests of clarity and focus, sculpture has been excluded from the exhibition, despite Rubens's undeniable impact on Artus Quellinus, Georg Petel, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux and Auguste Rodin. The influence of his painting on works of sculpture is so complex that it merits a separate study and exhibition.

Rubens and his Legacy aims to continue in the vein of the London exhibition of 2005, which presented Rubens as the heir to antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. Six chapters explore specific facets of Rubens's *oeuvre*: violence, power, lust, compassion, elegance and poetry. This division is only natural, for it was mainly in the portrayal of these themes that artists had recourse to Rubens. Court painters took an interest in his virtuoso engagement with allegory. For Spanish artists, it was his religious paintings that were important, for the British it was his landscapes and portraits, whereas French painters drew inspiration from his bucolic scenes. In fact, their interest was largely fuelled by the specific taste of Spanish, British and French art lovers, who appreciated not only the Flemish master's subject-matter, but certainly also his sumptuous palette, which Charles Baudelaire compared with many-coloured fireworks launched from the same place.¹¹ Or, in the words of Hippolyte Taine: 'Like an Indian deity at leisure, Rubens assuages his fecundity by creating worlds, and from the incomparable creased and refolded crimsons of his robes to the snowy whites of his flesh or the pale silkiness of his blonde tresses, there is no tone in any of his canvases that does not appear there purposely to afford him delight.'¹²

Before the rise of the great European museums, the visibility of Rubens's *oeuvre* was limited, and practically nothing was known about the stylistic evolution his work had undergone. Rubens's most accessible paintings were in the churches of the Southern Netherlands, in which many of his altarpieces were (and still are) to be found. Thus Sir Joshua Reynolds travelled around Flanders in 1781 with orders to buy paintings from private collections and at auctions selling the property of disbanded convents and monasteries.¹³ It is no coincidence that Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun accompanied her husband – an art dealer – that same year on a treasure hunt through the Low Countries. In those days Rubens's works could be admired in places other than their present homes, such as in the Palais du Luxembourg and the Palais Royal in Paris, and in the Elector's Picture Gallery in Düsseldorf. The rich Rubens collection in Madrid, however, went largely unnoticed for many years because it stood well outside the field of vision of those taking the Grand Tour to Italy. Not infrequently, artists and critics discovered the master's work in their patrons' collections. Roger de Piles, for example, described the works by Rubens in the possession of the 2nd Duke of Richelieu, while Watteau and Charles de La Fosse became acquainted with the master's paintings and drawings owned by their Maecenas, the banker Pierre Crozat, and Sir Thomas Lawrence admired the *Chapeau de Paille* that had been purchased by the statesman Sir Robert Peel in 1823.

There was, however, another way to form an idea of Rubens's work: the master himself had supervised the engraving of a large number of his compositions.¹⁴ After his death, that selection quickly grew into a flood of prints that reproduced – not always faithfully – nearly his entire *oeuvre*, long before the invention of photography. Prints after Rubens's religious paintings were frequently used for missionary work in Asia and the New World. Local painters copied his compositions, as a result of which his footprint can be found not only in Europe, but also in numerous churches in Mexico, Peru, the Philippines and Quebec.¹⁵

¹¹ Baudelaire 1992, pp. 373–74.

¹² Taine 1869, p. 67: 'Comme un dieu indien qui est de loisir, il soulage sa fécondité en créant des mondes et, depuis les incomparables pourpres froissées et reployées de ses simarres jusqu'aux blancheurs neigeuses de ses chairs ou la soie pale de ses chevelures blondes, il n'y a pas un ton dans une de ses toiles qui ne soit venu se poser de lui-même en lui faisant plaisir.'

¹³ Reynolds 1996, pp. 201–13.

¹⁴ Renger 1974–75; Van Hout 2004.

¹⁵ Herremans and Van Hout 2012; Porter and Beland 2004.

Artistic influence occurs on various levels. At its most basic, the copy is an exercise in painterly technique. The next step up is the recycling of borrowed motifs in a new work. Resourceful artists, of course, would rather rework other artists' original ideas than make copies, so they subtly forge influences into a style of their own, and in the end their sources of inspiration are detectable merely as echoes, in the same way that a reaction between chemicals gives rise to a new substance. Manet used a composition by Rubens as the point of departure for several artistic experiments, the results of which cannot unreservedly be called Rubenesque (see cats 67 and 128).

Rubens was not universally admired; on the contrary, he became a target of criticism as early as the seventeenth century. The Italian biographer Giovanni Pietro Bellori reproached him for his unnatural and distorted forms, banal and insufficiently individualised faces, and a historically incorrect use of costume.¹⁶ Both his palette and his reputed sloppiness in drawing were the subjects of an arthistorical debate among French Académiciens in the late seventeenth century.

In the nineteenth century Rubens's reputation suffered at the hands of a Protestant and bourgeois public, in whom modesty and prudishness had been instilled. They showed little understanding of Catholic, erotic and exuberant subjects, which were considered offensive or immoral.¹⁷ Criticism also came from an unexpected quarter: Delacroix, who thought that Rubens could not distinguish the main subject from matters of secondary importance, compared his paintings to an assembly at which everyone talks at the same time.¹⁸ Compared to Titian, Rubens was 'exterior ... all surface', in the view of Renoir, who is nevertheless the painter who learned the most from the Flemish master.¹⁹

Bridget Riley rightly describes Rubens as a pragmatist, 'an artist whose aim it was to master the best of the past'²⁰ – in other words, an artist who sought to tell the stories of the past in a better way, as Horace tried to do.²¹ This conclusion makes one wonder if it wouldn't be more correct to view Rubens as the last great master of the Renaissance, rather than the first painter of the Baroque. Admittedly, Rubens was no innovator, as Caravaggio and Rembrandt were, but he possessed an enviable talent for combining the most complex subjects and seemingly contradictory movements into a coherent and convincing composition. Today, viewers who are unfamiliar with antiquity or Christian iconography look at Rubens's creations as Westerners look at Kabuki theatre: they are fascinated by the form, but the meaning escapes them. Rubens succeeded in orchestrating a rich palette with astounding ease, and his virtuoso brush strokes betray a level of self-confidence undreamt of by most artists. This was also observed by Velázquez, whose encounter with Rubens prompted him to work more efficiently and on a lighter ground.²² It was for this reason, perhaps, that after the French Revolution painters and art lovers came to think of Rubens as an Old Master who was, admittedly, difficult to understand, though much could be learned from his brilliant *oeuvre*. This is how he became a 'painter's painter'. Even though Van Gogh thought Rubens 'superficial, hollow, bombastic', he was at the same time stunned by his unparalleled manner of painting, 'precisely because he is, or rather seems, so supremely simple in his technique. Does it with so little, and paints – and above all draws,

¹⁶ Bellori 2005, p. 205.

¹⁷ I refer to instances of 'Rubens hatred' such as that expressed by the American painter Thomas Eakins: 'Rubens is the nastiest, most vulgar, noisy painter that ever lived ... His pictures always put me in mind of chamber pots and I would not be sorry if they were all burnt.' See Kirkpatrick 2006, pp. 121–22. See also William Blake's tirades in Wark 1997, appendix I, p. 308: 'All Rubens's Pictures are Painted by Journeymen & so far from being all of a Piece, are The most wretched Bungles.' 'To My Eye Rubens's Colouring is most Comtemptible. His Shadows are of a Filthy Brown somewhat the Colour of Excrement; these are fill'd with tints & messes of yellow & red. His lights are all the colours of the Rainbow, laid on Indiscriminately & broken one into another. Altogether his Colouring is Contrary to The Colouring of Real Art & Science.'

¹⁸ Delacroix 1996, p. 365.

¹⁹ Vollard 1938, p. 222.

²⁰ Riley 1997, pp. 41–42.

²¹ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 128–31.

²² McKim-Smith 1995.

too – with such a swift hand and without any hesitation. [...] And how fresh his paintings have remained precisely because of the simplicity of the technique.’²³ Yet artists do not always admit that they, too, stand on the shoulders of giants. ‘Well, regarding the influences in painting, I shall tell you about a personal experience,’ Renoir confided in the art dealer Vollard: ‘In the beginning I applied thick layers of green and yellow, thinking to achieve in this way more tonal values. One day in the Louvre I noticed that Rubens had achieved more sense of values with a simple scumble than I had been able to with all my thick layers of paint, on another occasion I discovered that Rubens used black to make silver. It goes without saying that both times I profited from the lesson, but does this mean that I am under the influence of Rubens?’²⁴

At any rate, readers of this book will form their own opinions about Rubens and his impact on art history. It is important that they let themselves be led by their eyes and not by prejudices, preconceptions or reputations. The selection of works has been kept to a manageable size so that the viewer’s gaze can roam undisturbed over the surface of the paintings. The image of Rubens’s talent is invariably distorted by the many inferior studio pieces that bear his name. For the sake of more honest viewing, therefore, we have tried to select autograph works: in this case, less is more.

At the conclusion of this introduction, it is worthwhile to reflect for a moment on a comment made by John Ruskin, who had no natural affinity with the Baroque style: ‘I have never spoken, and I will never speak of Rubens but with the most reverential feeling; and whatever imperfections in his art may have resulted from his unfortunate want of seriousness and incapability of true passion, his calibre of mind was originally such that I believe the world may see another Titian and another Raffaele, before it sees another Rubens.’²⁵

²³ Vincent to Theo van Gogh in a letter (552) written between 12 and 16 January 1886 and sent from Antwerp.

²⁴ Vollard 1838, p. 210: ‘Aussi bien, pour ce qui est des influences en peinture, je vais vous citer un trait personnel. Dans les commencements, je mettais des épaisseurs de vert et de jaune, croyant avoir par la plus de “valeurs”. Un autre jour, au Louvre, je m’aperçois que Rubens, avec un simple frottis, avait obtenu davantage que moi avec toutes mes épaisseurs. Une autre fois, je découvre qu’avec du noir Rubens donnait de l’argent. Il va de soi que, les deux fois, j’ai profité de la leçon, mais cela veut-il dire que j’ai subi l’influence de Rubens?’

²⁵ Ruskin 1843, vol. 1, chapter 2, *Of Truth of Colour*, p. 165, §12.

Introduction

Peter Paul Rubens has been called “the Homer of painting”. He was above all a storyteller, one might even say a film director *avant la lettre*. His supreme self-assurance is manifest in his dazzling brushstrokes. Paradoxically, he was not only the most inimitable but also the most influential painter of the Low Countries. Four centuries after his death his artistic influence is still felt both in Europe and beyond. Generations of artists have admired and envied his talent.

Rubens has been seen above all as the advocate of the Counter-Reformation and of Absolutism; but this is only one aspect of his achievement. There is also a more informal side to be found in his family portraits, his landscapes and rural idylls, his peasant dances and erotic pastorals. This is the poetic Rubens who stood at the dawn of the Rococo, of Romanticism and even Impressionism: the painter of sensation and sensuality.

The interest that later artists showed in Rubens was frequently selective. French painters were attracted mainly to his eroticism and poetry, while Germans were enthralled by his vitality. Spaniards admired his religious works, while English painters profited most from his portraits and his landscapes. Many were seduced by Rubens’s brilliance of colour, of composition or technique, using them as stepping stones to their own artistic maturing.

In this exhibition Rubens’s artistic legacy is divided into six themes: Violence, Power, Lust, Compassion, Elegance and Poetry. In each, the links between Rubens’s works and those of artists who came after are explored. Besides original paintings and drawings, the exhibition also includes prints which disseminated Rubens’s art to an international audience.

Violence

Few old masters succeeded in evoking belligerence, aggression, horror and atrocity more convincingly than Rubens. He is the Quentin Tarantino of his day. The gruesome details not only in his hunting scenes, but in his representations of martyrdom and torture – particularly the massacres of innocents – remain spine-chilling even to a modern audience. The cruelty of predators and the life-or-death struggles of warriors fascinated him. Such subjects enabled him to paint bodies in motion and portray the raw emotions expressed on people’s faces.

In Greek and Roman mythology the abduction of women is a recurrent theme, and one which occurs regularly in Rubens’s oeuvre. Are these women overpowered by passion or are they victims of brutal assaults? Did Rubens consciously mitigate the violence through a filter of love? Whatever the case, he returned time and again to the tension between rampaging riders and struggling women.

Rubens was also a master of special effects. At times we are sucked into a dizzying whirlwind of bodies in free-fall, damned souls suffering divine retribution. The fear of being thrown into the eternal fire is etched onto their faces.

Power

Rubens was an unequalled propagandist. Some even consider him as a predecessor of such proselytising filmmakers of the twentieth century, as Sergei Eisenstein or Leni Riefenstahl. He certainly committed all his energies to bringing about peace in Europe, though. We may never know for sure whether he was personally interested in the life of Maria de’ Medici, the political struggles of Henri IV of France, or James I’s ambition to create a permanent union between the crowns of England

and Scotland. Rubens was a master of the double entendre. He painted political allegories with layered meanings that only insiders understood. Subsequent propaganda painters long considered Rubens as a shining example to their trade.

Over time the mixture of mythology and actuality in political paintings met with growing incomprehension. The public wanted a clearer, unambiguous message. Allegories slowly faded as relics of the Ancien Regime after being stripped of their historical context and following the emergence of democracy. By the nineteenth century it was the pictorial possibilities of the figures in Rubens's political works that most interested artists; they were less concerned with the French queen mother than the sexy water nymphs at her feet.

Lust

Rubens enjoyed portraying buxom nudes. He shows them as sensual, ripe and blushing, most often playing a passive role in any given story. He is thus often accused of portraying women simply as objects of desire and of coercing the spectator into the role of a voyeur.

The triumph of Rubens's nudes is his magnificent evocation of the textures of human skin, to which he gives a more than lifelike glow. Paradoxically, his female nudes are often goddesses or allegorical personifications unseen by mortals but embodied through his art. Many modern spectators find this difficult to understand: does nudity not exclude the sublime?

From the eighteenth century Rubens's voluptuous nudes have met with sneers. Opulent came to be considered obese as the concept of ideal beauty changed. Actresses from the 1950s look plump compared with today's etiolated stars. Perhaps the problem with Rubens's style is that it leaves too little to the imagination.

Compassion

In Belgium Rubens is best known as a religious painter, largely because he and his studio produced a countless stream of altarpieces for Flemish and Northern French churches from the second decade of the seventeenth century onwards. These works propounded the dogmas of the Catholic Church. Poignant passion scenes were designed to inspire emotion in the faithful, to elicit empathy, and awaken compassion.

Rubens's religious paintings had a great impact on his Spanish contemporaries; and his compositions were disseminated throughout the whole world through prints. These reproductions proved to be useful teaching aids for missionaries eager to convert the indigenous population in such colonies as Mexico, Peru and the Philippines. As a result Rubens's pictorial inventions could be found, if at second hand, even in the most remote villages both in the Americas and in Asia.

Many of Rubens's largest altarpieces were exhibited in Paris between 1794 and 1815 as trophies of war, looted from the communities for which they were made by Napoleon's armies. By placing what had been designed as objects of veneration in the Louvre they were elevated to the status of "fine arts", like landscapes, portraits or still-lives. These often gigantic paintings inspired many Romantic painters to express themselves on an equally monumental scale.

Elegance

Rubens may well be the inventor of the Italian diva. He flattered the Genoese jet set in life-size portraits. These wives of immensely rich bankers dressed to impress in stunning silks and lace collars, dripping with fabulous jewels. This glamour and elegance did not fail to impress the sophisticated

Anthony van Dyck, when, after working with Rubens in Antwerp, he visited this port city, then the wealthiest in Italy. There he followed Rubens's example, painting models that would not look out of place in Vogue magazine.

The more intimate portraits that Rubens made of his family were snapped up after his death by royalty for their private collections, and became available to artists in various European capitals. The portrait of his wife, known as *Le chapeau de paille* inspired Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun to paint a charming and informal portrait of herself similarly attired. She would go on to influence fashion at the court of Marie-Antoinette with this "shepherdess" style. In England Rubens's famous painting was studied by portraitists such as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence, who tried to incorporate the master's warm glow in their own works.

Poetry

In 1635 Rubens purchased a large country estate near Malines, called *Het Steen*, having already owned land and farms in Ekeren and Zwijndrecht from which he drew an income. Throughout his career he was inspired by the idyllic meadows and orchards on his lands. He studied natural phenomena, including reflections on water, the sky at dawn and at sunset, rain showers and rainbows. It was his landscapes in particular that came to exercise an irresistible attraction on British painters.

In the autumn of his life Rubens painted peasant fairs and frenzied dancing parties, which afforded a wealth of licentious details. These leisure scenes refer back to an earlier Flemish tradition exemplified in the work of Peter Brueghel the Elder. He also idealised the civilised manners of the upper classes in more gallant scenes. The lightness of being and the *joie de vivre* of these works were to be cultivated by Antoine Watteau.

TRANSVERSAL ACTIVITIES

BOZAR MUSIC

THE MUSICAL HUMORS OF RUBENS

To coincide with the *Sensation and Sensuality. Rubens and his Legacy* exhibition, BOZAR MUSIC takes a look at the musical life of the glorious period in which the master lived, exploring the “Musical Humors” of the great traveler dubbed by Delacroix the “father of warmth and enthusiasm”.

09.09.2014 SOLISTENENSEMBLE KALEIDOSKOP, NUSSBAUMER, MARINI, PINCOMBE, XENAKIS, FRESCOBALDI, DILLON, PHILIPS, NICOLAUS A KEMPIS



Few people are aware that a paved street still links the Centre for Fine Arts to what was once the residence of the rulers of the Southern Netherlands in the 17th century. Exploring the past of the Kunstberg/Mont des Arts, BOZAR MUSIC opens its season with a concert tribute to Peter Paul Rubens, a regular visitor to the Coudenberg Palace, which has since been destroyed. Court painter to the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, Rubens travelled throughout Europe at a time of radical transformation. The Berlin-based Kaleidoskop ensemble presents the first section of BOZAR's musical portrait of the artist dubbed "the second Titian".

02.10.2014 VOX LUMINIS, LIONEL MEUNIER (CONDUCTOR), RIMONTE, CORNET, BULL, PHILIPS, DE GHERSEM



Lionel Meunier and his young vocal ensemble are unquestionably worthy of taking their place alongside the greats of Belgium's early-music scene. To inaugurate this "portrait" of the ensemble offered by BOZAR MUSIC, they invite us to discover some gems of vocal music from the age of Peter Paul Rubens, to whom the Centre for Fine Arts is paying tribute throughout the autumn.

16.10.2014 LA FENICE, JEAN TUBÉRY (CONDUCTOR), THE MUSICIANS OF RUBENS



The La Fenice ensemble needs no introduction. Its indefatigable conductor, Jean Tubéry, has been delighting the musical world for many years with his talent and his original programmes. The Miniemen/Minimes church will host a concert of 16th- and 17th-century instrumental music, entirely devoted to the sound world of Peter Paul Rubens. An opportunity to discover the "soundtrack" to the Antwerp master's paintings.

20.11.2014 ARNAUD VAN DE CAUTER (ORGAN), PEETER CORNET



Specially for this recital, the Belgian organist Arnaud Van de Caüter is moving the organ - built by Rudi Jacques in 1997 - of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Ter Kapellekerk/Notre-Dame de la Chapelle church to the Horta Hall in the Centre for Fine Arts. On this neo-baroque instrument, he will play works by Peeter Cornet, a 17th-century organist who was in the service of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella in Brussels. Cornet's music shows Italian, Spanish, and English influences and demonstrates that Brussels was already a major European city.

28.11.2014 A 2 VIOLES ESGALES & REINOUD VAN MECHELEN, A MUSICAL DREAM



The A 2 violes escales ensembles saves unknown Renaissance and Baroque music from oblivion. English literature contains an almost inexhaustible supply of Renaissance masterpieces. Besides Downland there are several other composers who know how to create magic with the combination of lute, gamba and the human voice. The promising tenor Reinhoud Van Mechelen will perform the role of minstrel.

06.12.2014 HUELGAS ENSEMBLE, PAUL VAN NEVEL (CONDUCTOR) - RUBENS' EAR



In a concert that complements the *Rubens and His Legacy* exhibition, the Huelgas Ensemble presents a splendid selection of vocal and instrumental music that the painter might have heard in Antwerp and Cologne, as well as on his travels in Italy, England, and Spain. Alongside works from the late Renaissance (by Pevernage, Pontac, and Marenzio), you can discover works composed during the painter's lifetime, including Arnt von Aich's *Livre de chansons* and pieces by Mateo Romero and Thomas Tomkins. This concert will take you on a journey into the heart of the great Flemish baroque painter's sound world.

16.12.2014 RICERCAR CONSORT, PHILIPPE PIERLOT (CONDUCTOR)



Music at the Kromeriz court

Philippe Pierlot always likes to make each of his concerts a distinctive event, with a unique focus on a musically fascinating theme. This evening, surrounded by stringed instruments, he gives us a programme of music by some great Austrian baroque masters. Johann Heinrich Schmelzer, Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, and Johann Josef Fux were composers who left their mark both on their own era and on history, with descriptive music that was very much in the avant-garde of the 17th and 18th centuries.

RUBENS AND THE MUSIC OF HIS TIME - CD

Peter Paul Rubens lived precisely within one of the most exciting periods of the history of music, one that stretched from the summit of Renaissance polyphonic style to the beginnings of the Baroque period and of opera. Released in connection with the exhibition *Rubens and his Legacy* (Bozar, Brussels from 25 September 2014 to 4 January 2015), this CD presents examples of the major musical genres that Rubens would have heard during his visits to Brussels, London, Rome, Venice, Mantua, Madrid and Paris.

With: Vox Luminis, Capilla Flamenca, Odhecaton, Scherzi Musicali, Ricercar Consort, La Fenice, Choeur de Chambre de Namur, La Caccia, La Fenice, Clematis, Cappella Mediterranea, Le Poème Harmonique, Mare Nostrum

Coproduction : BOZAR MUSIC – Ricercar (OUTHERE MUSIC)
For sale: BOZAR BOUTIK

BOZAR LITERATURE

PROSE FOR P.P. RUBENS

Look at Rubens' work through the eyes of a writer. Six authors were inspired by a painting of the BOZAR-exhibition *Sensation and Sensuality. Rubens and his Legacy*. You can read and hear the result in the video guide and the multimedia guide. The authors will also participate in a panel discussion during two tribute events.

With **David Bosc, Lydia Flem, Annemarie Estor, Peter Holvoet-Hanssen, Pjeroo Roobjee, Jean-Philippe Toussaint**

22.11.2014
Literary debate
Language : Dutch

06.12.2014
Literary debate
Language: French

BOZAR EXPO

25.09 > 05.10.2014: *STRATA #4* - QUAYOLA (BEAF)

The altarpieces of Rubens and Van Dyck seem very far removed from our time. The Italian contemporary artist Quayola established a harmonious dialogue between the past and present in the *Strata#4* installation. He uses special software to convert the symbols of universal beauty and perfection into triggers and instructions to create new, contemporary art.

Quayola, *Strata #4*, 2011,
Audiovisual Installation



10.11.2014: *RUBENS METAMORPHOSES* - INGRID VON WANTOCH REKOWSKI (BOZAR NIGHT)

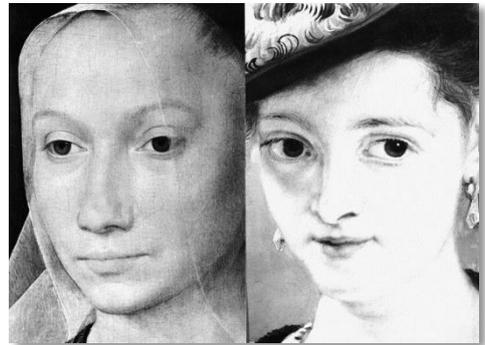
With her video installation *Rubens-Metamorphoses* the French-German artist Ingrid von Wantoch Rekowski evokes the theatricality in Rubens' paintings. Actors use gestures and expressions to convey the theme of the masters' paintings, which are projected in the background. A *tableau vivant* of Rubens' work.

Rubens Metamorphoses
Ingrid Von Wantoch Rekowski



30.10.2014: *RUBENS* - HENRI STORCK. INTRODUCTION: NICO VAN HOUT

This educational film (1948), an innovation at the time, on Peter Paul Rubens is a thorough and detailed examination of the major events in the life and work of the master, as well as the development of his art. A Belgian documentary by Henri Storck and Paul Haesaerts. Copy recently restored by the Royal Belgian Film Archive.



Rubens - Henri Storck

RUBENS FOR FAMILIES

DISCOVERY TRAILS FOR FAMILIES (6>12)

Date

29.10, 26.12.2014 & 02.01.2015 - 14:30

Tickets

€14 - 12 (BOZAR*friends*) - 6 (<12 jaar)

FAMILY DAY (3+)

Family activities with exhibitions, workshops and music.

Date

16.11.2014 - 10:00 > 17:00

Concert *Les mémoires de M. d'Artagnan* (La Fénice) - 15:00

Tickets

€14 - 12 (BOZAR*friends*) - 6 (<12 jaar)

Concert La Fénice included in ticket

AUDIOKIDS

For its Rubens exhibition, BOZAR has introduced a videoguide with augmented reality, thereby adding an extra dimension to visitors' experience. In the audio section, a little dog called Max playfully guides young visitors through the exhibition, stopping at 14 points along the way. The guide also offer elements of augmented reality. When a user points it at a work, the application recognises the picture and highlights an extra aspect of it. Particular parts of a painting are explained or enlarged, bringing the works to life on the screen.

**Date**

25.09.2014 > 04.01.2015

Price

Included in ticket (€2)

VIDEOGUIDE WITH AUGMENTED REALITY

For the *Sensation and Sensuality: Rubens and his Legacy* exhibition, BOZAR has come up with a **unique interactive videoguide**. This fun guide offers the visitor **in-depth information** on the exhibition's six themes and on a number of the key works. A first in the Belgian art world!

The videoguide is designed for use at a number of different levels. The visitor can retrieve **audio material**, "**audio films**" (audio with a difference), and **animations**. The videoguide also contains interactive "**augmented reality**" applications. Once it is pointed at a particular work of art, it recognises it and the scene comes to life.

If, for example, you point the videoguide at the triptych *Christ on the Cross*, you will see the panels close, revealing the hidden side of the altarpiece. When you come to *The Garden of Love*, swipe your finger across the image on your screen and you can see the preparatory sketches. In the case of *The Coronation of Marie de Médicis*, in which a number of different characters are depicted, the videoguide recognises and identifies the various figures.

Let yourself be surprised by this brand new educational app and enjoy a really intense experience of the exhibition!

Price: € 3 (two for € 5).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

SENSATION AND SENSUALITY. RUBENS AND HIS LEGACY

Address

Centre For Fine Arts
Rue Ravensteinstraat 23
1000 Brussels

Dates

25 September 2014 > 4 January 2015

Opening hours

Open: Tuesdays to Sundays: 10 am > 6 pm (Thursdays: 10 am > 9 pm)
Closed: Mondays

Tickets

€ 14 - € 12 (BOZARfriends)- € 6 - € 2

Combiticket *Rubens and his Legacy + Paintings from Siena* (10.09.2014 > 18.01.2015): € 20 - € 18

Guided tours

max. 15 pers., on weekdays € 75 (+entrance tickets), weekend € 95 (+entrance tickets), 75 min.

Reservation: via +32 (0)70 34 45 77 or groups@bozar.be

Audiokids: free

Videoguide : € 3

Visitor's guide: € 2 - € 1 (BOZARfriends)

Catalogue

Sensation and Sensuality. Rubens and his Legacy: €49,95 (Mercatorfonds, Royal Academy Enterprises, Seemann)

BOZAR Information & tickets

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PRESS IMAGES

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Exhibition organised by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp, the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and BOZAR (Centre for Fine Arts), Brussels

Curator: Nico Van Hout (KMSKA), assisted by Arturo Galansino (RAA)

Support: Vlaamse Overheid, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Toerisme Vlaanderen

Under the High Patronage of their Majesties the King and Queen

BO ZAR PRESS

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