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RA

Royal Academy of Arts
Exhibition in Focus



Rubens

and His Legacy

Van Dyck to Cézanne

An Introduction to the Exhibition for Teachers and Students

Written by Francesca Herrick
For the Learning Department
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Rubens and His Legacy: Van Dyck to Cézanne

Main Galleries

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FRONT COVER: Cat. 104, Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Maria Grimaldi and Dwarf*, c.1607 (detail)

BACK COVER: Cat.1, Peter Paul Rubens, *Tiger, Lion and Leopard Hunt*, 1616 (detail)

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'Rubens I mention in this place, as I think him a remarkable instance of the same mind being seen in all the various parts of the art. [...] [T]he facility with which he invented, the richness of his composition, the luxuriant harmony and brilliancy of his colouring, so dazzle the eye, that whilst his works continue before us we cannot help thinking that all his deficiencies are fully supplied.'

Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourse V*, 10 December 1772

Introduction

During his lifetime, the Flemish master Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) was the most celebrated artist in Europe and could count the English, French and Spanish monarchies among his prestigious patrons. Hailed as 'the prince of painters and painter of princes', he was also a skilled diplomat, a highly knowledgeable art collector and a canny businessman. Few artists have managed to make such a powerful impact on both their contemporaries and on successive generations, and this exhibition seeks to demonstrate that his continued influence has had much to do with the richness of his repertoire. Its themes of poetry, elegance, power, compassion, violence and lust highlight the diversity of Rubens's remarkable range and also reflect the main topics that have fired the imagination of his successors over the past four centuries. Incorporating paintings, drawings, oil sketches and prints, the show also draws attention to the many different routes through which subsequent generations of artists have been inspired by his work.

Visitors to this exhibition at the Royal Academy are invited to make direct comparisons between Rubens's artworks and those of his followers. With their works placed side by side, it quickly becomes apparent that Rubens's name has never been far from many of the most important movements in art history or its key debates. Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), all very important artists in their own right, are among those who made their own selective and original approaches to the work of Rubens. He was also an important figure for early Royal Academicians, including Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) and John Constable (1776–1837). Even Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), the first president of the Royal Academy, who was sometimes critical of Rubens's work, made him a key figure for students at the Academy to study. While he disapproved of the Baroque elements of drama and exaggerated movement in some of Rubens's paintings, he could not help but marvel at his incredible mastery of colour and composition.

Cat. 120 overleaf
Peter Paul Rubens
The Carters, c. 1620

Oil on canvas,
transferred from panel,
86 × 126.5 cm

State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg
Photo: The State Hermitage Museum,
St. Petersburg Photograph © The State
Hermitage Museum / Pavel Demidov



Poetry: The Natural Landscape

Rubens's life was closely connected with the city of Antwerp and the Brabant countryside, both then part of the Spanish Netherlands. His Calvinist parents had fled the city in 1568 when violent tensions increased between other Protestant converts and the region's Catholic rulers. Rubens was subsequently born, 1577, in Siegen, Germany, where his father Jan Rubens had been a legal adviser and, causing much scandal, a lover of Princess Anne of Saxony.

However, after a brief period spent in Cologne and following his father's death in 1587, his mother Maria returned to Antwerp where Rubens was brought up as a Catholic. He attended a well-regarded Latin school, probably until the age of 13. After working briefly as a page for a noblewoman, he undertook three apprenticeships with local painters before gaining his position as an independent master in 1598.

Cat. 120 Following eight years spent working and sketching in Italy from 1600, Rubens returned to Antwerp to find the city undergoing something of a cultural revival, fuelled by patronage from the Catholic Church and from the region's sovereigns, Archduke Albert of Austria (1559–1621) and his wife Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566–1633), daughter of Philip II of Spain. It was an exciting and supportive place to work and even during his most prestigious artistic and diplomatic missions to Spain, France and Britain in the following decades, letters to friends and patrons reveal his longing to come home. In the last decade of his life, Rubens was finally able to divide his time between the city and nearby countryside and in 1635 he purchased Het Steen, a country manor house near Malines. *The Carters*, painted c. 1629, connects his interest in the routines of rural life with wondrous and plentiful nature.

The painting is rich in naturalistic detail, but Rubens directs our attention to the figures in the central foreground by making this the brightest area of the composition. Two men are shown struggling to guide their horse and cart down the uneven bank of a stream. A large rocky outcrop provides a dramatic background and shows Rubens's knowledge of earlier Netherlandish landscape art, since similar natural phenomena appear in the religious works of Joachim Patinir (c. 1480–1524). In Rubens's painting though, the weather-worn rocks and the tree roots that desperately cling to them seem to reflect the men's own struggle with the elements. It is tempting to read further symbolic value into the scene's unusual division of sunlight on the right-hand side and moonlight on the left. However, the work can perhaps be seen as part of a wider investigation into evening-light effects that preoccupied Rubens at the time. Above all, *The Carters* creates a landscape of the senses; the rotting tree stumps, the babbling stream and the crackling campfire on the left-hand side of the painting all evoke strong impressions.

'In no other branch of art is Rubens greater than in landscape; the freshness and dewy light, the joyous and animated character which he has imparted to it [...] Rubens delighted in phenomena – rainbows upon a stormy sky – bursts of sunshine – moonlight – meteors and impetuous torrents mingling their sound with wind and wave.'

John Constable, lecture on landscape delivered in Hampstead, June 1833

Cat. 124

John Constable

Full-scale sketch for *The Hay Wain*, c. 1821

Oil on canvas,
137 x 188 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Bequeathed by Henry Vaughan
Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum,
London

Rubens's creative interpretation of rural subject matter found its strongest following in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, where it was adopted by a group of artists who were moving towards forming their own national school of landscape. During this period, Rubens's landscapes were much sought after by English patrons. It is likely that Sir Thomas Gainsborough had in mind both *The Carters*, owned by Sir Robert Walpole, and Rubens's *Evening Landscape with Timber Wagon*, 1630–40, (cat. 121), owned by John Pratt, first Marquis of Camden, when he painted *The Harvest Wagon*, 1767, (cat. 122).

Cat. 124 John Constable already admired the landscapes of Gainsborough and Rubens by the time he enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools in 1800. He would have been delighted when a few years later in 1803 his early supporter Sir George Beaumont purchased Rubens's *A View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*, 1636, (now in The National Gallery). In his own paintings, Constable went beyond Gainsborough's generic scenes of earthy and rugged nature and applied Rubens's model to specific locations. The full-scale sketch for his famous work *The Hay Wain*, c. 1821, depicts a cottage owned by a farmer called Willy Lot in Flatford, Suffolk, near to where he grew up. Once again, carters add a narrative dimension. A storm has just passed and the party, having emptied their load, are about to return to the fields beyond to gather more hay. Constable, following an approach similar to that of Rubens, compiled his large composition from smaller sketches of individual elements made outdoors.

Do you think there is anything significant about Rubens's use of light and dark? Why?

Which image suggests the most peaceful vision of rural life? Explain your choice.



Poetry: The Garden of Love

Cat. 130 *The Garden of Love*, painted around 1635, is representative of an important second strand of Rubens's late poetic works. Like *Château in a Park*, c. 1632–35, (cat. 127), it depicts Antwerp's elite in contemporary fashions of the era and associates nature with relaxation and romance. However, *The Garden of Love* stands out as particularly remarkable, partly because of the amount of work Rubens put into it (five of nine surviving preparatory chalk drawings for the principal figures are exhibited here [cat. 131–35]), but also because of its inclusion of mythological elements. The painting in this exhibition is the most famous of several versions of the same composition that preoccupied Rubens from 1631 to 1635. In this version, as in the others, Cupid-like *putti* lead two couples into a courtyard garden, where other couples have already gathered around two seated women in yellow silk dresses and the woman in a blue silk dress standing beside them. Together, these women perhaps represent the Three Graces (Greek goddesses of beauty, charm and amusement).

The large canvas was painted for pleasure at a happy time in Rubens's life. Four years after tragically losing his first wife Isabella Brant in 1620, Rubens found contentment again at the age of 53 with Hélène Fourment, the daughter of an Antwerp silk merchant. The woman on the left of the central triangle bears a close resemblance to his young bride, who was just 16 at the time of their marriage. The scene is not specifically about their own lives, but more generally reflects the new middle class concept of marriage for love and companionship, rather than purely for convenience. There was a long artistic tradition going back to medieval illuminated manuscripts for an enclosed garden to represent chaste and pure love. For Rubens, who was also inspired by sixteenth-century Dutch and Flemish scenes of peasants celebrating outdoors, the garden became a symbol for fertile and bountiful love.

Cat. 140 Rubens effectively updated a long-standing pictorial association between love, leisure and landscape that was also present in the work of the sixteenth-century Venetian artist, Titian (c. 1488–1576). Throughout his career Rubens made copies after Titian's paintings and was particularly inspired by his scenes of beautiful couples from classical mythology, drinking, dancing and relaxing in idyllic settings. This subject matter underwent a further reinvention at the hands of the French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau in the early eighteenth century. His painting, *The Pleasures of the Ball*, 1715–17, depicts a social activity known as the *fête galante* that became popular at the court of Versailles during the reign of Louis XIV (1638–1715). These were lavish garden parties at which courtiers, often in fancy dress, were offered rich sensory experiences and opportunities for romantic flirtations.

Watteau himself was not aristocratic but may have encountered similar gatherings when he stayed at the country home of his wealthy friend, the banker

'I am leading a quiet life with my wife and children, and I have no pretensions in the world other than to live in peace. [...] I have taken a wife of honest but middle class family [...] one who would not blush to see me take my brushes in hand.'

Rubens, letter to Peiresc, 18 December 1634

'There were several allées of orange trees and four fountains of orange flower water. The scent filled the entire room, which agreeably surprised everyone there.'

Madame Du Noyer's description of a *fête* given by the Ambassador of Venice in 1713

Pierre Crozat. Significantly, Crozat also owned an impressive art collection, including Rubens's drawings (cats. 138.1–2) for Christoffel Jegher's woodcut version of *The Garden of Love*, c.1635, (cat. 139). In *The Pleasures of the Ball*, Watteau similarly cultivates a dreamlike atmosphere. The setting is unspecific, although the ringed columns perhaps reference those of the Luxembourg Palace in Paris. Most figures wear contemporary dress, but characters in theatrical costumes can also be discerned among the crowd. They include a man dressed as the clown Pierrot (a stock character from the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*) at the back on the left-hand side of the scene. Like Rubens, Watteau was representing the behaviours of his age. In an era when courtiers had no real political influence, these gatherings allowed them to define their status instead through etiquette and fashion.

In the second decade of the eighteenth century, Watteau's *fête galantes* helped to settle debates about the training of artists, which had been taking place at the French Royal Academy since the end of the previous century. As one of Rubens's most committed followers, Watteau naturally aligned himself with the *Rubénistes* who extolled the expressive colour of their seventeenth-century hero, while their opponents the *Poussinistes* promoted the careful drawing of the landscape painter Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). In directing attention to the more poetic and refined qualities of Rubens's work, Watteau's paintings served to undermine the claim by the *Poussinistes* that Rubens represented a less sophisticated artistic role model. They also moved French art further towards the light and playful style of Rococo.

What symbols of romantic love appear in Rubens's painting, *The Garden of Love*?

How is a sense of music conveyed in each painting?

Cat. 140
Jean-Antoine Watteau
The Pleasures of the Ball,
c. 1715–17
Oil on canvas,
52.5 × 65.2 cm

By Permission of the Trustees of
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London
Photo: By Permission of the Trustees of
the Dulwich Picture Gallery

Cat. 130 overleaf
Peter Paul Rubens
The Garden of Love,
c. 1633
Oil on canvas,
199 × 286 cm

Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
Photo © Madrid, Museo Nacional del
Prado





Elegance

Rubens realised early in his career that his artistic talents could gain him access to Europe's courtly circles and palaces. Fluent in five languages and a naturally gifted diplomat, he gained his first real experience of aristocratic society at the court of Vincenzo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua (1562–1612), which he used as a base during his trip to Italy in 1600. Here he was introduced to a lifestyle of grand houses, carriages and servants that he would one day be able to acquire for himself. During this time, Rubens must have become aware of a new class of self-made people who could rival Europe's traditional nobility in terms of lavish expenditure.

Cat. 104 Rubens visited the maritime republic of Genoa several times during his eight years in Italy. There he encountered a fashionable elite who had amassed great fortunes through banking and trade. He found a ready market for portraiture, particularly among the city's women, who enjoyed high status within the family and society. Genoese women had to be given a large degree of financial responsibility so that they could manage the family business in the event of their husband's death. Rubens's full-length portrait of Maria Grimaldi combines the qualities of elegance, confidence and strength. The young woman is shown seated on a terrace with her servant, a dwarf, in attendance. Her opulent dress of black velvet and gold brocade, along with her large cartwheel ruff, give her an imposing presence.

The grand architecture alludes to the palaces of the Strada Nuova, which was the preferred address for Genoa's richest families. Rubens was so impressed by these Renaissance palaces that he later published a book on their elegant façades and remodelled his own Antwerp townhouse along similarly classical lines. The massive columns and red curtains that frame the image give a sense of tightly compressed space, with little room for the figure of the dwarf. We must presume that with his tired skin, he was included as a counterpoint to the youthful and luminescent Maria Grimaldi. Other unusual elements of the composition may allude to her recent or forthcoming marriage. The honeysuckle plant on the left and the dog below are both traditional symbols of fidelity, while the rays of sunlight in the background recall scenes of the Virgin Mary being visited by the Holy Spirit and perhaps suggest hopes for a future heir.

Cat. 105 In 1621, Rubens's most famous pupil, Sir Anthony van Dyck, visited Genoa and found the same privileged class eager to have their portraits painted. The son of an Antwerp silk merchant, Van Dyck proved himself something of a child prodigy and was already highly accomplished by the time he started to assist Rubens at about the age of sixteen. His portrait of *A Genoese Noblewoman and Her Son*, c. 1626, is clearly indebted to portraits by Rubens. The woman's dignified seated pose recalls that of Maria Grimaldi and the delicacy of her skin is similarly offset against rich dark fabrics. However, in this painting the

Cat. 104
Peter Paul Rubens
Portrait of Maria Grimaldi and Dwarf, c. 1607
Oil on canvas,
241.3 × 139.7 cm

Kingston Lacy, The Bankes Collection
(The National Trust)
Photo © National Trust Images /
Derrick E. Witty





Cat. 105
Sir Anthony Van Dyck
A Genoese Noblewoman and Her Son, c. 1626
 Oil on canvas,
 191.5 × 139.5 cm

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
 Widener Collection, 1942.9.91
 Photo Courtesy National Gallery of Art,
 Washington

'Rubens [...] liking the good manners of the young man and his grace in drawing, considered himself very fortunate to have found so apt a pupil [...] he employed Anthony [van Dyck] as copyist and set him to work directly on his own canvases, to sketch out and even execute his designs in paint, activities which brought him very great benefit'
 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, 1672

'I can tell you truly, without exaggeration, that I have had to refuse over one hundred [assistants], even some of my own relatives or my wife's, and not without causing great displeasure among many of my best friends.'
 Rubens, letter to Jacob de Bie, 11 May 1611

more theatrical elements of classical architecture and the red curtain have been consigned to the background and the woman's young son appears as a more logical companion than the dwarf. Van Dyck, who is known for his particularly sensitive portrayal of children, gently mocks the little boy's confident pose by adding a dog that clearly wants its young master to return to play.

Van Dyck's more restrained interpretations of Rubens's portrait compositions in turn left a rich legacy in Britain. At the invitation of Charles I, Van Dyck relocated there in 1632 and almost immediately received a knighthood. With a £200 annual salary in addition to the fees he received for portraits, he enjoyed a lavish lifestyle similar to that of Rubens. His elegant portrayals of the Stuart family in sumptuous costumes, and with references in the background to their grand estates, were much admired by eighteenth-century portrait painters, including Sir Joshua Reynolds and Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830).

What are the main compositional similarities between the two portraits?

What are the obvious signifiers of wealth and status in each image?

Power

Rubens's skills as a businessman and manager of people, as well as his good social connections, all played an important role in securing his legacy. By the early 1620s he had built up a studio large enough to take on projects from Europe's most powerful and demanding patrons. This resulted partly from the special privileges granted to him by Antwerp's sovereigns when they made him court painter in September 1609, just a year after his return from Italy. Exempt from the regulations of the local painting guild, he was able to make his studio larger than any other in the region. Most assistants were employed in everyday tasks like preparing canvases and palettes, while a select few, including Van Dyck, were involved in transferring Rubens's sketches or *modello* onto the final canvases.

The studio allowed Rubens to take on large-scale commissions within timescales that most artists would balk at today. In 1620, he signed a contract to produce 39 ceiling paintings for Antwerp's new Jesuit Church (destroyed in 1718) and completed the commission in just 18 months. Not long after, in February 1622, Rubens was contracted by the royal court in Paris to paint two massive cycles, each of 24 paintings, for the Luxembourg Palace, although only the sequence depicting 'the most illustrious life and heroic deeds' of Marie de Médicis (1573–1642) was actually completed. The other, intended to glorify her late husband Henry IV (1553–1610), had to be abandoned after she was exiled by their son Louis XIII (1601–1643) in 1630. The project (later recorded in prints) allowed Rubens to develop a highly imaginative language by which humans, who were not necessarily very remarkable in their personal achievements, were ennobled by association with characters from classical mythology.

Cat. 46 In the late 1620s Rubens employed the same allegorical language to glorify James I of Britain (1566–1625) in the ceiling paintings of the Banqueting House, Whitehall. The use of characters and stories to symbolise abstract concepts and qualities was particularly popular in Rubens's era and widely publicised in manuals. In his sketch for the ceiling, executed between 1628–30, James I is depicted seated on a globe and ascending to heaven on an eagle, a powerful bird that associates him with Jupiter, king of the Roman gods. The female figure hovering directly above him can be identified by her helmet and shield as Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom, while the figure guiding the king on the right represents Justice (a pair of scales in his hand can be seen more clearly in the finished painting). Perhaps most significantly, the winged messenger swooping in from the left with a laurel wreath represents the peaceful nature of his rule, which saw England and Scotland united.

Rubens first proposed himself as artist for the project in a letter to an agent of James I on 13 September 1621, a day after the completion of the Jesuit Church paintings. The project was eventually carried out under Charles I (1600–1649), whom Rubens met when he travelled to England in 1629 as a political envoy for Spain. Rubens may have considered it necessary to submit this initial sketch for the king's approval, although the subject of his father's royal apotheosis (elevation to divine status) was always likely to appeal. Executed in thin washes of white, brown, black and grey, and worked on from different angles, it is much rougher than the *modello* used by his students. The main figures in the sketch relate to the central oval of the finished scheme. The loosely drawn figures on the left and right represent kingly virtues trampling on vices and outlines of processing children can just be discerned along the top and bottom. These elements were later separated to form subject matter for another six of the final nine canvases.

Cat. 50 The Banqueting House ceiling, the only one of Rubens's great schemes still in situ, made its greatest impact around the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1707, it would have been very much in the mind of the English painter Sir James Thornhill (1675–1734) as he took on the commission for the ceilings of the 'Painted Hall' in Greenwich Hospital, designed by Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723). Thornhill's sketch for the Lower Hall, produced around 1710, employs a similar language of allegory and apotheosis, this time to glorify William III and Queen Mary who came to power in 1689. However, the continuous space of the Lower Hall provided an added challenge. The monarchs appear just above the centre, but seem a little lost among the host of figures representing the triumph of peace and liberty and the benefits that these things brought. In fact, so complex was the symbolism that Thornhill found it necessary to publish a guidebook in 1730.

Cat. 46
Peter Paul Rubens
The Apotheosis of James I and other studies, c. 1628–30
 Oil on oak, 94.7 × 63 cm

Tate: Purchased with assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Tate Members, the Art Fund in memory of Sir Oliver Millar (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation) Viscount and Viscountess Hampden and Family, Monument Trust, Manny and Brigitta Davidson and the Family, and other donors 2008
 Photo © Tate, London 2013

'[R]egarding the hall in the New Palace, I confess that I am, by natural instinct, better fitted to execute very large works than small curiosities. Everyone according to his gifts; my talent is such that no undertaking, however vast in size or diversified in subject, has ever surpassed my courage.'

Rubens, letter to William Trumball, 13 September 1621





Cat. 50
Sir James Thornhill
 Sketch for a ceiling
 painting *King William III*
and Queen Mary
Presenting Europe with
Peace and Liberty,
 c. 1710
 Oil on canvas, 96 × 66 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum, London
 Photo © Victoria and Albert Museum,
 London

Compare the use of perspective in the sketches by Rubens and Thornhill. Do you think the ceiling paintings were meant to be seen from one place or multiple positions?

Why do you think the use of allegory in painting eventually went out of fashion?

Compassion

In his religious works, Rubens frequently combined violent and gruesome detail with displays of intense emotion. Following the guidance on art outlined by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (held between 1545 and 1563), his altarpieces portrayed scenes of the life of Christ in the most direct way possible. His *Christ on the Straw*, 1617–18, triptych, painted for the Cathedral Church of our Lady, Antwerp (cat. 91), puts aside idealisation and forces viewers to confront the gory reality of a broken and bloodied crucified body. In fostering this new plainspoken pictorial language, the Catholic Church responded to the iconoclasm of the Protestant Reformation in the previous century. Antwerp's Catholic churches suffered particularly during the 1560s and 1570s as Protestant rebels tore out and destroyed hundreds of altarpieces, which they deemed to promote the veneration of images and thereby be a distraction from worship.

A sense of peace returned to Antwerp under Archduke Albert of Austria and Archduchess Isabella, aided from 1609 by the Twelve Year Truce with the Protestant provinces to the North. The city became a major centre for the revival of religious imagery, and Rubens and his studio produced around 60 altarpieces in the second decade of the seventeenth century alone. Churches in the Spanish Netherlands primarily commissioned these works, but by employing the best engravers and woodcutters of his day Rubens ensured that a number of his religious scenes had a far wider influence. He was fully aware of the commercial potential of prints made after his work and made a great effort to secure copyright for them across Europe.

Cat. 84 Rubens entrusted the printmaker Boetius Adamsz. Bolswert (c. 1580–1633) with reproducing his famous *Coup de Lance* altarpiece, originally commissioned for the Church of the Recollects, St Francis, Antwerp, and installed there in 1620. Like the painting, the engraving accurately follows the biblical text: 'The soldiers therefore came, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other that was crucified with him: but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: howbeit one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and straightaway came out blood and water.' If anything, the sense of energy and drama in Rubens's composition is intensified in the smaller-scale

engraving. The two thieves on crosses either side of Christ recoil in pain as the soldiers break their legs to speed up the crucifixions. Below, to the right of the scene, expressions of grief and sadness characterise the faces of the Virgin Mary and followers of Jesus. The piercing of Christ's side, the central focus of the scene, is by contrast carried out in an almost dispassionate way.

Both the original painting and print have been much admired by artists over the centuries. Following a trip to Antwerp in 1771, Sir Joshua Reynolds was forced to reevaluate his earlier ambivalence towards Rubens. He wrote in his *Journey to Flanders and Holland* that the *Coup de Lance* was 'one of the first pictures in the world, for composition, colouring, and, what was not to be expected from Rubens, correctness of drawing'. He also considered the print to be an important work of art in its own right for its powerful use of tone. The work remained an important reference point for artists into the nineteenth century and Delacroix in France and Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–1873) in England were among those who also travelled to see it. Interestingly, none of these later artists shared Rubens's Catholic convictions, but appreciated the work for its innovative composition, with the strong diagonals of the three crosses.



Cat. 83 Perhaps the most striking evidence for the far-reaching influence of Rubens's religious works is a porcelain dish decorated with a colourful illustration after his *Coup de Lance*. Incredibly, it was produced c. 1710–20 in China, during the reign of Kangxi, fourth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty. Jesuit missionaries brought prints of religious paintings to China as teaching tools, and the anonymous creator of this dish must have seen one of Bolswert's prints. The artist has creatively adapted Rubens's dynamic composition to fill the circular form of the dish and re-imagined the monochrome scene in bright Chinese inks.

How do the lighting effects in Bolswert's print contribute to the mood of the work?

How do you think seventeenth-century viewers were supposed to respond to the scene?

Cat. 84
Peter Paul Rubens
Coup de Lance,
 1600–33
 Copperplate engraving on
 paper, 88 × 68 cm

Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten
 Photo: Royal Museum for Fine Arts Antwerp © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw, photo Hugo Maertens and Dominique Provost



Cat. 83
Unknown Artist
 Porcelain plate with
 illustration after *Coup de Lance*, 1710–1720
 Chinese porcelain with
 double glazed enamel and
 gilding, 28.5 cm

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerpen
 Photo: Royal Museum for Fine Arts Antwerp © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw, photo Hugo Maertens and Dominique Provost

Violence

Throughout his career, Rubens frequently depicted the human body pushed to its physical limits and engaged in violent struggles. For an artist capable of creating works of great poetry and elegance, he was also remarkably adept at producing images of pure horror. In 1620, he painted the massive *The Fall of the Damned* canvas (now in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich) for the Bishop of Antwerp, Marius Ambrosius. His sheet of studies for two groups in the upper half of that work (cat. 24, c. 1614–18), shows sinners cast into hell on the Day of Judgement as prophesied in the biblical Book of Revelation. The tumbling, fleshy bodies are pulled and ripped at by gargoyle-like creatures. In an era of intense religiosity it must have been terrifying, but for Rubens and a number of his successors, this canvas represented the exciting challenge of portraying the human body in motion from virtually every angle.

Cat. 1 A series of hunting scenes also produced from c. 1614–15 to 1625 are no less graphic in their depiction of violence. His almost life-size *Tiger, Lion and Leopard Hunt*, 1616, is among the most impressive of these compositions, which all depict dramatic confrontations between man and beast. An even more unlikely combination of animals appears in his *Hippopotamus and Crocodile Hunt*, reproduced as an etching (cat. 10) by Pieter Claesz. Soutman (c. 1580–1657) after 1636. Rubens would have known that hunting scenes had been popular among Europe's nobility, going back to depictions in medieval tapestries. The hunting of big game was a privilege of the upper classes and during peacetime offered them an opportunity to exhibit their fighting skills. It is therefore no surprise that Rubens's exhilarating and imaginative reinterpretations of the genre found illustrious patrons, including Maximilian I of Bavaria who bought *Tiger, Lion and Leopard Hunt*.

The colossal composition is characterised by explosive movement. At the heart of Rubens's scene, a leaping tiger takes a turbaned horseman by surprise and claws him backwards. The central trio of horse, man and tiger creates strong diagonal axes that direct us to other areas of the painting. To the left of the scene, beneath the horse's rearing hooves, a Herculean figure wrestles with the jaws of a lion. To the right, beneath the leaping tiger and the horseman's spear, a leopard lies dead and a tigress covers with her cubs. The outcome hangs in the balance, but two armoured soldiers (top right) are poised to deliver final death blows to the attacking tiger.

Cat. 14 The lively Baroque qualities of Rubens's hunting scenes captured the imagination of the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix over two centuries later. On 6 March 1847 he noted in his journal, 'I made some sketches from the Hunts by Rubens; there is as much to be learned from his exaggerations and his swelling forms as from exact imitations.' Delacroix represented a group of artists

'[T]o the Jardin des Plantes. The natural history collection open to the public on Tuesdays and Fridays. Elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, strange animals! The way Rubens has rendered this is marvellous. On entering this collection I had a feeling of happiness [...].'

Delacroix, writing in his journal, 19 January 1847

who believed that beauty should be rooted in nature and expressed in a colourful and passionate artistic language. In a position echoing that of the earlier *Rubénistes*, the Romantics opposed the more restrained and ordered ideal of beauty favoured by an opposing group known as the Classicists. In his *Lion Hunt* of 1858, Delacroix dispersed the humans and animals more widely over the canvas than Rubens had done, but as the bodies twist and turn in deadly combat the sense of drama is just as strong.

Delacroix came to know Rubens's hunting scenes primarily through prints. Some of his earliest sketches made after them (1827, Louvre) investigated possible relationships between the heads of the animals and humans. Over the course of his career, Delacroix made around 100 drawings and 30 oil sketches after Rubens's works and it was not uncommon for him to focus on specific details. He also seems to have been enthused by the Orientalism of the turbaned figures in Rubens's hunting images. The colourful costumes, sabre swords and long spears that appear in his 1858 *Lion Hunt* were probably intended to give his works a sense of exotic danger rather than to reflect reality. The mountainous background, however, may have been inspired by Delacroix's own travels to North Africa in 1832, a time when lion hunting was still practised.

In Rubens's painting, what relationships can you see between the expressions of the humans and those of the animals?

Is the outcome of Delacroix's *Lion Hunt* decided? Why, or why not?

Cat. 14
Eugène Delacroix
Lion Hunt, 1858
Oil on canvas,
91.7 × 117.5 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, S. A.
Denio Collection – Sylvanus Adams
Denio Fund and General Income
Photograph © 2014 Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston





Cat. 1
Peter Paul Rubens
Tiger, Lion and Leopard
Hunt, 1616
Oil on canvas,
256 × 324.5 cm

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes
Photo © MBA, Rennes, Dist. RMN-
Grand Palais / Adélaïde Beaudoin

Lust

Cat. 55 Of all Rubens's subject matter, it is the female nude that has come to be most closely associated with his name. He is famous for portraying a particularly sensuous and voluptuous female body type (now termed 'Rubenesque') that reflected his era's concept of ideal beauty. His nudes most often take the form of goddesses and nymphs from classical mythology who, as they sleep or bathe, attract unwanted attention from lustful gods and satyrs. His *Pan and Syrinx*, c. 1617, tells a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of a chaste naiad who flees from the amorous advances of Pan, the god of fertility. The painting depicts the final moments of the chase as she runs towards the bank of a river, where she begs her water nymph sisters to help her escape. They transform her into hollow marsh reeds, leaving a bewildered Pan with only a gentle rustle of wind. According to the story, Pan then bound together reeds of different lengths and made the pipes that bear his name.

Rubens was undoubtedly a master of the human figure by the time he painted this scene and it is not difficult to imagine real tissue and blood beneath Syrinx's soft skin. By contrast, Pan's tanned body appears hard and muscular, as was typical of Rubens's males. However, Rubens was not yet confident in his skills as a landscape artist and relied on his good friend Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) to add the marshland setting and its charming wildlife. At the time of the collaboration, Brueghel, who came from a distinguished family of Antwerp landscape painters, was the older and more established artist. It was quite common for Flemish artists of this era to specialise in a particular genre and to join forces when the subject matter demanded it. However, the coming together of two artists of such high standing was more unusual and collectors would take pleasure in trying to distinguish the different areas of their work.

Rubens's nudes, while much admired in his own era, came under criticism in later centuries as the ideal of female beauty changed. In 1768, the art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) praised Rubens's imagination and draughtsmanship but remarked that 'he has not paid due homage to the goddesses of beauty [...] and the graces! Despite what his later detractors said, Rubens based his women on the same classical and Renaissance works to which his critics referred. Between his courtly commissions in Italy, Rubens had enthusiastically sought out the work of his favourite painters – Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo (1475–1564), Raphael (1483–1520), Correggio (1489–1534) and Titian, among others – and the most famous examples of Greek and Roman sculpture. Syrinx's pose is based on a well-known antique statue, the *Venus Pudica*, described by Rubens as the 'entire assemblage of all the beauties and perfections one could wish for in a woman'.

Cat. 80 In the two centuries following Rubens's death, under the guidance of the French and British Academies, female nudes in art were often idealised to the

'From the circle, or the perfect sphere, is created all that is feminine, and all that is of the flesh, muscular, flexible, twisting, rounded, curved and arched.'

Rubens's anatomical treatise *De figuris humanis* (known only through copies)

'To me it is marvellous. Monumental. [...] In this kind of composition, I think Cézanne was trying to compete with all the things he admired. He was trying to do all he knew in it. In some of his things he was trying to learn, trying to find out and to reduce his problems to a single one!'

Henry Moore on *Sculpture*, New York, 1966

extent that they bore more resemblance to sculpture than to real women. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century did a small number of French artists begin to propose alternative models, often eliciting fierce disapproval from critics. Édouard Manet (1832–1883) was among the first of this generation to turn to Rubens to give his strikingly contemporary nudes a more realistic presence. Manet described giving the nude female figure in *Study for a Surprised Nymph*, c. 1860, (cat. 67) 'a more Rubensian fleshiness'. However, it was Paul Cézanne who developed one of the most creative reworkings of Rubens's curvaceous women. His *Three Bathers*, c. 1875, is an early investigation into a subject that increasingly occupied his later years.

As in *Pan and Syrinx*, the bathers in Cézanne's small painting are closely connected with nature and are monumental, a feature noted by the British sculptor Henry Moore (1898–1986) who once owned *Three Bathers*. Their most immediate models are the sea nymphs of Rubens's Marie de Médicis cycle (relocated to the Louvre between 1790 and 1802), which Cézanne admired and sketched. The flesh tones of the bathers pay homage to Rubens with their bluish shadows, yellow highlights and red outlines. While Cézanne's raw brushstrokes show the influence of the recently formed Impressionist group, he retains the sensuous nature of Rubens's nudes, which gives *Three Bathers* a highly energetic, even erotic, charge.

Does Rubens's *Pan and Syrinx* show the sense of fear and desperation alluded to in the original story? Why, or why not?

How did Rubens and Cézanne each create a sense of movement in their work?

Cat. 80
Paul Cézanne
Three Bathers, c. 1875
Oil on canvas,
30.5 × 33 cm

Private Collection
Photo: Ali Elai, Camerarts

Cat. 55 overleaf
Peter Paul Rubens
Pan and Syrinx, 1617
Oil on panel, 40 × 61 cm

Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel,
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel
Photo: Museumslandschaft Hessen
Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister/
Ute Brunzel





Conclusion

Rubens's successful international career was duly honoured during his lifetime with a Masters of Arts from the University of Cambridge and a knighthood from Charles I in 1630 and a further knighthood from Philip IV of Spain in 1631. By this time he had amassed a great fortune, an impressive art collection and several grand houses. Yet, even when suffering from gout in the last decade of his life, he could still be found working tirelessly in his studio or furthering his studies. Philippe Chifflet did not exaggerate when he eulogised Rubens as 'the most learned painter in the world' in 1641, a year after his death. While some of his mythological and religious subject matter has become less relevant over the centuries, as absolute monarchies have fallen and the power of the Catholic Church has diminished, his intelligence, energy and imagination have ensured the continued influence of his works.

As this exhibition has demonstrated, artists of varied generations and nationalities have in turn discovered the seemingly boundless resources in anatomy, colour, composition and subject matter offered by his paintings, sketches and prints. There is no particular 'type' of artist that is drawn to Rubens; he was regarded just as highly by the courtly Van Dyck as he was by the more rebellious Cézanne over two centuries later. Furthermore, it has become clear that there is no particular theme that has captivated artists more than others. For Watteau and Constable, it was the poetic and idyllic qualities of his later landscapes, while for others like Delacroix it was more the dramatic Baroque qualities of his hunting scenes and religious works. Faced with so many of Rubens's works today, we are in a position that all of these artists could only have dreamed of and must wonder at what future generations, perhaps centuries from now, will take from them.

Bibliography

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'Glory to that Homer of painting, the father of warmth and enthusiasm in art where he puts all others in the shade, not perhaps because of his perfection in any one direction, but because of that hidden force – that life and spirit – which he put into everything he did.'

Delacroix, *Journal*,
20 October 1853

'Whether you think you like Rubens or not, his influence runs through the pathways of painting. Like Warhol, he changed the game of art.'

Jenny Saville RA

La Peregrina

A personal and contemporary response to Rubens and His Legacy

For visitors who are curious about the impact of Rubens's artistic legacy on art of the present day, a final treat awaits at the end of the exhibition in the form of a specially curated display of work by his twentieth-century and contemporary artist followers. This concluding section brings together works by many of the most influential artists of recent times, including Francis Bacon (1909–1992), Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), Lucian Freud (1922–2011), Frank Auerbach (b. 1931) and Cecily Brown (b. 1969) among others. The varied works have been carefully selected by Royal Academician Jenny Saville (b. 1970) who has also contributed an entirely new work produced specifically in response to the exhibition as a whole. Her painterly handling of flesh tones has often led to her monumental depictions of the human body being compared to those of Rubens, a connection that she happily acknowledges. It is hoped that viewers will assume an artist's perspective when looking at the works in this room and take pleasure in discovering highly imaginative and sometimes surprising connections with the works in the previous galleries.

Cecily Brown

The Young and the Restless, 2014
Oil on canvas
277 × 287 cm

Courtesy of the Artist
Photo by Genevieve Hanson

