On Blank Spots and Pitfalls

One of the blank spots in the field of Rubens research concerns the work produced by Rubens before May 1600, when he left for Italy where he was to spend the next eight years. In 1598, at the age of twenty-one, he had become a member of Antwerp’s painters guild, the Guild of St Luke, and could officially call himself a ‘master’. Rubens had received most of his training in the studio of Otto van Veen (1556–1629), Antwerp’s most important history painter. Only a handful of works, one of which is the *Battle of the Amazons*, survive from that early period.

The *Battle of the Amazons* is not only one of Rubens’s oldest known works, but also the result of his earliest known collaboration with his older colleague and good friend Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625). This early composition exists in several versions. How do they relate to one another, and what is their status? On the basis of its overall pictorial quality, the work from Potsdam has always been considered the original version, executed entirely by Rubens and Brueghel. But is this really the case? And what about the other two versions? There is no doubt that both paintings were made around the same time as the original. But where and by whom were they painted? Had Rubens already set up his own studio by this time, in his first years as an independent master? Or did he continue to work – as a ‘freelance’ assistant – in the studio of his teacher, Otto van Veen? There are no straightforward answers to these questions; indeed, they illustrate the complex issues surrounding the research into Rubens and his work.

The three versions of the *Battle of the Amazons* will hang alongside one another in the Rubenshuis until 20 April. The examination of the *Battle of the Amazons* fits into broader research undertaken for the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, the catalogue of Rubens’s work published by the Centrum Rubenianum. The need for in-depth research into these versions has arisen because of the planned publication in 2015 of the first volume on Rubens’s mythological paintings. The first, provisional results of that research will be presented this year in a special issue of *The Rubenianum Quarterly*. To be continued ... | Ben van Beneden

“Très humble, très affectionné et très obligé”

The year has gotten off to an energetic start at the Rubenianum, with many exciting projects scheduled for the coming months. Together with our partner KULeuven, we look forward to a promising symposium, ‘(Un)dressing Rubens’, on which you can read more in this newsletter. In May, the second phase of the project ‘Digitizing the Corpus Rubenianum’ will commence, while in July full attention will go to the further publishing of our core collection: the archive of Dr Ludwig Burchard. Meanwhile, on the *Corpus Rubenianum* front, there has been no less activity, and we can look forward to new publications from this autumn onwards.

To generate such dynamic output, the encouragement of our stakeholders and public remains vital. The Rubenianum is blessed with diverse forms of generous support from many sides, for which we cannot be grateful enough. While maintaining its support for the Corpus, the Rubenianum Fund recently decided to provide additional funds to install a Rubenianum Fellowship within the Belgian American Educational Foundation for three years. Thus, American scholars in the early stages of their careers will be able to follow in the footsteps of Abigail Newman, who introduces herself in this issue.

Fundamentally contributing to our mission, donors of books and archival material continue to strengthen the Rubenianum’s holdings. A number of significant donations of auction catalogues – an ever-important source for art-historical research – have been made in recent years, prompting me to thank the generous donors here. They include Rubenianum supporters Dr Helena Bussers and Mr Eric Le Jeune, as well as Corpus authors Emeritus Professor Guy Delmarcel and Dr Margaret Klinge, the latter having just recently promised her donation, to which we look forward.

Less tangible – moral – support is just as essential. We greatly value the numerous delighted reactions we read on e-mail and social media upon launching the ‘Digitizing the Corpus’ project. All of this support will continue to enhance further plans on the Rubenianum’s agenda, on which we will keep you posted here.

Véronique Van de Kerckhof
Director of the Rubenianum

*From Rubens’s Letter to Carlisle of 30 January 1629.*
Corpus Rubenianum

Research fellow Abigail Newman (Princeton University) on her research on Flemish painters in Madrid

From Isabel of Castile onwards, Spanish monarchs, ecclesiastics and nobles hungered to serve them in Spain, ordered shipments of paintings from Flanders, and sent Spanish artists to train there.

My Princeton University doctoral dissertation – advised by Profectors Thomas DeCosta Kaufmann and Christopher Heuer – addresses a late chapter in Spain and Flanders’ centuries-long exchange. It examines the Flemish immigrant painters who settled in Madrid but also those who continued to flock to the city, especially during the years of Philip IV’s rule. From Isabel of Castile onwards, Spanish monarchs, ecclesiastics and nobles hungered to serve them in Spain, ordered shipments of paintings from Flanders, and sent Spanish artists to train there.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many Flemish artists’ careers were not consistently successful. While some immigrant painters garnered royal commissions and saw their paintings decorate the walls of courtiers’ homes, others struggled to eke out a living. In addressing the varied professional experiences and outcomes of these painters, I seek to contextualize them within the larger picture of artistic production and consumption in seventeenth-century Madrid.

Beginning in the fall of 2012, I spent a year in Madrid, supported by Princeton’s Donald and Mary Hyde Academic-Year Fellowship for Research Abroad in the Humanities. While in Madrid, I conducted research in such archives and libraries as the Archivo General de Indias, the Archivo General del Palacio, the Archivo de Protocolos, the Museo del Prado’s library and the Biblioteca Nacional. My research focused on Flemish immigrant painters who settled in Madrid but also those who continued to flock to the city, especially during the years of Philip IV’s rule. From Isabel of Castile onwards, Spanish monarchs, ecclesiastics and nobles hungered to serve them in Spain, ordered shipments of paintings from Flanders, and sent Spanish artists to train there.

My research has been critical to the Spanish; by artist. This research has been critical, past fall going through the Rubenianum’s deep holdings of the Rubenianum’s library. In addition, I have spent time in the history department of the Art Academy of Antwerp, and in Antwerp’s city archive, the Felix Archief, where I am searching for documents that shed light on the lives and careers of various Flemish immigrant painters before they left for Madrid. I am interested in these painters’ motives for moving to Madrid and what professional structures or sources of information facilitated their decisions.

By mapping information networks linking Madrid and Antwerp, I am interested in determining how Flemish painters would have heard about opportunities in Madrid and who might have aided their immigration process. I am also investigating how painters maintained contact with colleagues in Flanders, whether they continued to move between these regions, and, if so, how such trips aided in the transfer of artistic skills and motifs.

Critical to the success of my time in Antwerp has been the warm welcome I have received from the Rubenianum’s staff and affiliated researchers. It has been a pleasure to attend lectures and symposia hosted by the Rubenianum, and I have also relished the daily interactions with my colleagues at the Rubenianum. In January, I gave an overview of my research to the staff – my first academic presentation delivered in Dutch – and I look forward to giving a longer public lecture at the Rubenianum in September about my work. In the meantime, I will present a paper entitled “Netherlandish” Exchanges Outside the Low Countries: Immigrant Artists Meet in Madrid” at the conference “Art on the Move: Artistic Exchange and Innovation in the Low Countries, 1572–2007”, which will take place on 10–11 April 2014 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. My Rubenianum colleagues, Lieneke Nijkamp, Curator of Research Collections at the Rubenianum, will also give a presentation there.

Following my archival research, I expect to devote my time principally to completing the writing of my dissertation. At this stage in that process, the Rubenianum will once again become my everyday work base, and I look forward to benefiting yet again from the accessibility and abundance of the Rubenianum’s rich resources.

Most of the researchers that come to the Rubenianum are interested in learning more about the great artists that roamed Flanders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Leading painters such as Bruegel, Rubens, Van Dyck, Teniers and dozens of their followers that shared the Flemish art, and since the nineteenth century these artists have been heralded as icons of the newly found Dutch nation. Quite similarly north of the border, the Dutch counterparts were busy promoting the likes of Rembrandt, Vermeer, Van Gooyen and others as the bearers of their national identity.

Already when we were still working at the Rubenianum on our research, more than a decade ago, we (xox and nx) were struck by the steady architectural narratives that had been developed for Flanders’ Dutch art, and which were solidified in the minds of generations of art historians and the public through the education, scholarly literature and in art museums. Stimulated by Hans Vlieghe’s audacious questioning of the existence of the Rubenianum as a distinct category in a much-cited article in Simiolus in 1998 and Arnout Balliet’s insistence on a contextual study of Rubens’ artworks from this period, we started to wonder if there weren’t more similarities rather than differences in the way the history of art was told and written during the seventeenth century. And why had these not been properly researched? When we put this case of serendipity in 2006, we both got jobs at Dutch universities – Karolien in Utrecht and Filip in Rotterdam. Filip put us in an interesting position to revisit these issues. Now Flemish émigrés in Holland, we became all the more interested in the case of a foreigner, but also experienced first hand that integration and assimilation takes place in various ways and that these processes are different from the art world). We soon teamed up with Professor Eric Jan Sluijter of the University of Amsterdam, an eminent scholar of the Dutch Golden Age, and someone who also believed that the artistic dialogue between the Northern and Southern Netherlands remained very lively throughout the seventeenth century.

After a meeting of the minds we turned this idea into a grant proposal which we submitted to NWO (The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research), and were generously rewarded with substantial funding in 2009. It allowed us to put together a team that would examine the mobility of artists, works of art and ideas in these fascinating, but turbulent times. The project currently employs PhD student Sanne Hommer (based in Utrecht) and postdocs Claartje Rasterhoff and David van der Linden.
Dutchness Age and a quintessential is said to be an archetype of the Dutch Golden in painting. A telling example of this cross-fertilization occurred between the so-called Haarlem classicists and Rubens in the 1610s. Rubens’s trip to Leiden and Haarlem in the spring of 1612, among other things to visit his great example Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1616), is well documented. The artistic dialogue that ensued between both masters underscores the lasting impact of travelling artists and personal contacts. Examples demonstrating that Goltzius was clearly inspired by compositions of the great Antwerp master go to show that the influence was by no means one-sided. For instance, Rubens’s Jupiter and Callisto of 1613 (now in Kassel) clearly acted as a model for the Fall of Man (National Gallery of Art, Washington) that Goltzius painted in 1616. Cultural transmission thus took place in both directions: from Antwerp to Haarlem and vice versa. In the end, case studies like these can point to the origins of the shared artistic heritage of the Northern and Southern Netherlands, and perhaps more importantly, shed light on the complicated but fascinating process of cultural transmission in European history. It is in this context that Filip felt very fortunate that he was able to spend part of his sabbatical in 2012–13 at the Rubenianum for research on the project. Besides reconnecting with old friends and meeting new colleagues, it once more offered him the luxury of being able to ponder the best art-historical library south of the Moerdijk.

Now that the project has entered its final year, a conference has been scheduled in April in Rotterdam where more results will be presented. Moreover, a select company of invited speakers has been asked to share their insights on artistic exchanges in the Low Countries and beyond (see the adjoining announcement). A final synthesis of the project will address the seemingly different structure and organisation of the Southern and Northern art markets respectively, and the problem of innovation in the arts, whether it was market-driven or inspired solely by artistic production. In the end, our quest is to identify and put into context the similarities and differences in the visual arts in the Southern Netherlands and the Dutch Republic. In doing so, the artistic exchange team strives to answer this ultimate question: can we speak of a unified Netherlandish style and an integrated art market in the Low Countries during the seventeenth century?
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