Dear Friends of the Rubenianum

In early February a wall separating the garden of the Rubens House from the busy shopping street Hopland came down. This remnant of a 1906 warehouse closed off the museum site from its surroundings. Its removal is the first step in a major overhaul. The construction zone for a Robbrecht & Daem-designed addition has meanwhile been prepared and builders have drilled down 150 metres to harvest the geothermal energy that will power the future climate control system. The sound of machinery has permeated the solemn silence of the Rubenianum's reading room in the Kolveniersstraat. This temporary inconvenience is warranted, as we gear up to reinstall the library on the very spot where Rubens installed his in 1639.

With a new building, a redesigned garden, and a complete renovation of the house itself, the site will gradually be transformed in the coming years. As was the case in Rubens’s day, construction work attracts the close attention of neighbours and local merchants, whose businesses have often already been heavily impacted by the pandemic. Taking a cue from the master, we have been communicating our plans in detail and we have worked together to mitigate nuisance. This exercise was a reminder of how central the Rubens House is to the social and economic fabric of the neighbourhood surrounding it.

The Rubenianum will continue its operations in the Kolveniersstraat until the end of 2023, when the collections will be moved into the new building. The museum itself will close its doors on 9 January 2023. Just like in Rubens’s day, this magical place is supported not only by a local community but also by a much broader international one. As we have been doing on site for locals, we will keep you informed of progress on this transformative project through The Rubenianum Quarterly.

Bert Watteeuw,
Director Rubenshuis & Rubenianum

Rubens House’s masterpiece by Van Ehrenberg on view in St. Louis Museum of Art

It was in the summer of 2015 that the Rubens House was first contacted by Dr Judith Mann, Curator of European Art to 1800 at the St. Louis Museum of Art, in connection with an exhibition project about paintings on stone produced between 1530 and 1800. The ambition was to present the first systematic examination of the pan-European practice of this unusual and little-studied artistic tradition. In such an exhibition, the Rubens House’s painting by Wilhelm Schubert van Ehrenberg, Interior of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp (1668, oil on marble) was a fundamental loan.

After several years of intensive research, the exhibition, Paintings on Stone: Science and the Sacred 1530–1580, was scheduled to open in October of 2020. Covid ensured otherwise. The scholarly catalogue was published, but the exhibition was delayed until 20 February–15 May 2022. It was worth the wait: bringing together more than 70 examples by 58 artists, Paintings on Stone represents major centres of stone painting and features 34 different stones, nearly the full range that were used. In a short introductory video – in which ‘our’ Ehrenberg appears as the opening image – Judith Mann encapsulates the uniqueness of the exhibition: ‘There has never been a show that addresses the breadth geographically and in numbers of stones, and it will never happen again.’

(continued on page 5)
During his career, De Vos took commissions Catholicism after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585. Of his own city and converted again to century Antwerp. A convert to Lutheranism, the religious disarray of late sixteenth-century Antwerp, De Vos has been understudied and conservative painting practices, with the maligned as a derivative artist adhering to Antwerp, De Vos sorting through the image files, and reading all the secondary literature on my research has focused on the important, many of his religious works of erudite and symbolically complex things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the central panel portraying Christ, telling of my routings while in Antwerp. These everyday textile works were woven in Kortrijk and Haarlem within the guild of weavers, and they reflect a converging of politics, education and dining rituals at the dinner table. The Texte Museum in Kortrijk graciously opened their collections to me. I also examined painted representations of narrative scenes featuring local relatives of Mayer van den Bergh and in collections in Bruges and Stratford-upon-Avon. In October, I had the pleasure of presenting my findings at the Abegg-Stiftung’s colloquium ‘Linen Damasks in its Historical Context’ in Riggisberg, Switzerland, the proceedings of which will be published this year.

My research also centred upon a late sixteenth-century embroidery with an unusual and captivating iconography from the Phoebus Foundation, featuring an allegorical representation of the Low Countries under assault by foreign soldiers. Despite its fragile condition, the Phoebus Foundation gave me the opportunity to study the embroidery close up, which allowed me to understand the technique of how it was made. The embroidery holds many mysteries that have propelled me into the archives and pages of heraldic books to connect the textile with a noble Flemish family. I also visited the collections of the National Museum of the Renaissance in ECOn, France, where I was delighted to find late sixteenth-century domestic embroideries of the same technique. I look forward to presenting my findings at the Historians of Art in History at the University of Pennsylvania in 2020, under the direction of Professors Larry Silver and Shira Brisman.

At the Rubenianum, my research centred on the religious paintings of Maerten de Vos (1532–1612). I have successfully navigated the Antwerp art market during wartime. Despite being one of the most prolific painters in late sixteenth-century Antwerp, De Vos has been understudied and maligned as a derisive artist adhering to conservative painting practices, with the last major study of his paintings dating from 1980. Maerten de Vos’s own biography registers the religious disarray of late sixteenth-century Antwerp. A convert to Lutheranism, De Vos lived through the religious changes wrought by the political events of his own age that led to the Reformation and Catholicism after the Fall of Antwerp in 1585. During his career, De Vos took commissions from moneyed local merchants, decorated the castle chapel for the Lutheran Duke Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Lüneburg, and painted large-scale altarpieces for Catholic churches affected by the Iconoclastic Fury. My project investigates how De Vos astutely negotiated the religiously diverse art market of late sixteenth-century Antwerp. It documents the range of doctrinal and political arguments he put forward for his clients. By studying the Vos’s imagery facilitated by his own project animates painting as a key agent in shaping the theological discourse of late sixteenth-century Antwerp.

There is no better place to study Maerten de Vos than the city of Antwerp. Most importantly, many of his religious works are housed in local collections, including Antwerp Cathedral, the Maagdenhuis Museum, St. James’s Church, St. Andrew’s Church, and the Royal Museum of Fine Arts. At the Rubenianum, all publications (even of the rarest sort) on Maerten de Vos were at my fingertips as well as bibliographic documentation files. I spent my first months reading all the secondary literature on De Vos, sorting through the image files, and visiting his publicly accessible paintings throughout Belgium.

My research quickly became focused on his dining room cycle for Gillis Hooffman, a well-connected and affluent merchant of maritime trade, who lived nearby Het Steen. Painted around 1568, the dining cycle was made and commissioned at the start of the Eighty Years’ War, and the panels depict scenes from the apocryphal mission of St Paul. With the three extant paintings in three separate collections, I traversed Belgium and France to examine and analyse the works in person. With the war just commencing, the iconographical programme is a complex thesis on Pauline doctrine intended as a backdrop for dinner conversation about the contemporary events of war and religious division.

As a corollary to these early De Vos paintings, I also focused on De Vos’s 1601 Minter Tryptich, executed at the end of his career for St Andrew’s Church, though today the main panels are in the collection of Antwerp’s Royal Museum of Fine Arts. The altarpiece is centred around a monetary theme. The central panel portraying Christ, telling the Pharisees to ‘Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s’. With its assembly of erudite and symbolically complex panels, my research has focused on the interaction of taxation, commerce, and De Vos’s representation of currency from the Bible.

While volumes of the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard – authored by a multitude of scholars – have steadily come off the presses since 1968, a parallel and equally daunting project was led by a single author Anne-Marie Logan has published broadly on Rubens’s drawings, but her magnum opus is undoubtedly this critical catalogue of the artist’s drawings, the first volume of which was recently published. Spanning the formative period 1590–1608, Rubens’s early years in Antwerp, his narrative and allegorical mastery, and subsequently spent in Italy, the catalogue presents us with a draughtsman gearing up for greatness. (See also TRG 2013.)

Anne-Marie, you are the uncontested doyenne in this field. How does it feel to have the first volume of the catalogue out and how did this monumental project come into being?

It’s a relief! With the remaining two volumes well under way, I feel that my life’s work is coming to fruition. I started work on Rubens’s drawings at Yale in 1976, after assisting Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann on the 1970 catalogue of European Drawings and Watercolours in the Yale University Art Gallery. While Egbert and Roger d’Hulst, to whom the catalogue is dedicated, initiated the Rubens drawings project, I ended up taking the lead. Many female curators and art historians of my generation found opportunities through research on drawings collections. I don’t think I was in it for the long haul. As a polyglot European, a great lover of English, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch, I was well-equipped for the task at hand. I’ve travelled extensively to see all the drawings. Today, I cannot but think of Russia, which I visited long before glassist. It was highly unusual to travel to Russia in the early 1970s, let alone as a woman by herself. My husband was worried but it was wonderful to see the drawings at the Hermitage and the Pushkin Museum. In the fifty years since I embarked on this project the world has changed, the technologies we use for communication, research, and the production of books, too, have changed, but among those interested in the subject the love of drawings has been and remains quite similar everywhere. Meeting like-minded people, such as George Goldner, first at the Getty, later at the Metropolitan Museum, and authors working on the Corpus Rubenianum, has been one of the great joys of this project. I very much hope that this catalogue will inspire a new generation of scholars to engage with drawings.

Kristin, you have taken on the role of editor. As the author of two volumes in the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard, how would you describe the relationship between both cataloguing projects?

The Corpus volumes I wrote, The Costume Book (XXX) and Copies and Adaptations from German and Netherlandish Artists (XXXI), both concerned drawings, so I was very familiar with the subject. Other Rubenianum volumes, such as those on Copies after the Antiqua by Marjan van der Meerlen (XXXII), on Book Illustrations and Title Pages by Richard Judson and Carl Van de Velde (XXXIII), and on Copies and Adaptations after Italian Masters by Jeremy Wood (XXXI 2.1–2.3), all shed light on important aspects of Rubens’s activities as a draughtsman. A wealth of drawings are discussed in most other volumes in the Corpus Rubenianum, and eventually include all the drawings listed by Anne-Marie, due to its thematic arrangement it allows us to see all the drawings in order. For the first time, Anne-Marie allows us to see all the drawings in order Rubens’s development as a draughtsman has made itself seemingly apparent by leaving through the plates of the catalogue, which is revelatory. While Anne-Marie has single-mindedly compiled the catalogue, I have assisted her with the other volumes, on which those in the Corpus Rubenianum. The exercise made me appreciate her deep connoisseurship, and it allowed me to view some of my earlier work. It is a privilege to work on such exquisite material and to take on the role of editor, expanding my role in the two volumes to come.

Anne-Marie, a critical catalogue implies countless rejections. These have not been listed in the book?

No. I’ve decided against listing them as this would weigh down the book and add little. Their omission speaks for itself. Some are rejections of drawings, but others are drafts or an autograph work. Nonetheless, rejecting drawings is inherent to this type of undertaking, to such an extent in fact that I have been called – endearingly, I have been assured – the butcher of New Haven. While my research was a rather fuzzy concept in the seventeenth century, I have aimed to restrict myself to pure Rubens, which is more easily achieved in drawings than in paintings. Copies have likewise been restricted to a minimum. Sheets from Wilhelm Panneels’s large set of drawings after Rubens in Copenhagen, the so-called Cantoor, are, for example, only included when an original by Rubens is still extant. Without such hygiene the goal of the reader with a first sight of Rubens’s development would have been under my control. The Costume Book (XXX) and Copies (XXXI), a Corpus volume that was to be authored by myself, was not included in the Corpus. These are included. A third one was discovered recently and will be included in volume three. An extra decision on publication concerning this very drawing. The completion of the project is coming to fruition, it is coming to fruition. I very much hope that the corpus will inspire a new generation of scholars to engage with drawings.

Kristin, what does this first volume of the catalogue reveal to us about Rubens as an artist?

Rubens was not a precocious child prodigy like Anthony van Dyck. From the series of copies after Rubens’s images of Delect (fig. 1), drawn at or around the age of thirteen, to the end of his Italian years, he produced an astonishing amount of copies. It is quite easy to forget that the volume spans an eighteen-year period, and that Rubens’s production remains central to Rubens’s artistic practice. He does it with unusual devotion. One gets the feeling that he is building a stockpile of images, but at the same time very much in learning mode. It is quite surprising how few original compositional drawings he makes. He is more a redactor than an artist, and remains central to Rubens’s artistic practice. He does it with unusual devotion. One gets the feeling that he is building a stockpile of images, but at the same time very much in learning mode. It is quite surprising how few original compositional drawings he makes. He is more a redactor than an artist, and remains central to Rubens’s artistic practice.
Rubens: Selected Drawings in 1959. Since the exhibition, many drawings have been discovered and are now being included in the catalogue as part of Rubens’s draughtsmanship.

What are we to expect from the next volumes?

Anne-Marie, surely the catalogue will inspire a new generation of scholars to study Rubens’s drawings. What would be your advice to them?

I would advise readers to study and enjoy these drawings in person. Technology will be an invaluable tool for the future, but it will never replace the experience of seeing a work of art up close.

Resurrection of a hostile altar

This opulent baroque altar house was acquired in 1952 in the museum’s permanent display. Deemed unfit for display for many years due to its less-than-optimal condition, it was recently restored to its former glory by Martijn Breunesse and Marc Leenaerts.

Most works of art that are auctioned are art sales stemming from private collections. Afterwards, they often disappear again behind the walls of private galleries. The auction catalogues that are published on the occasion of these sales therefore provide a unique opportunity later on to catch a glimpse of exceptional works of art. As they are an essential source for research, these sales catalogues are an essential part of the research collections of the Rubenianum.

In the past six years, we have devoted extra attention to these often beautifully illustrated catalogues. We are now digitising them one by one in the collection database. The enormous task was carried out by a project associate (2015–18), our library team and a devoted volunteer. The project reached its conclusion on 6 March 2022: 28,800 catalogues are now retrievable through title, author and auction details via our collection catalogue and the national platforms such as Worldcat.org.

Our efforts have already been very rewarding: in the past years, we have been contacted by countless interested parties from New York to Amsterdam, who wanted to consult rare catalogues they could only find in our collection in Antwerp. It is safe to say that, as long as the beauty of the Old Masters continues to enchant the art market, art sales catalogues will remain an important cornerstone of our acquisitions policy.

The Rubenianum Lectures

Zondag, 19 juni 2022, 11.00 u

PROF. DR. NILS BÜTTNER

Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste
Rubens Recto/Verso.

Werken aan het Corpusdeel over Rubens’ Medereeks

Na zijn indrukwekkende Corpusdeel over Rubens’ allegorieën en genre­werken, legt Nils Büttner de laatste hand aan de deel over de monumentale cyclus die Rubens schilderde voor Maria de’ Medici, vandaag in het Louvre. In zijn volgende Rubeniana, de derde in een oorspronkelijke serie, verklart hij hoe de kunstenaar in opdracht van de Frans­regering ooit een nieuwe inzichten over een van Rubens’ belangrijkste reeksen verkreeg. Een uiteraard boek!
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