

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)



Rubens was born in Siegen in Germany (Westphalia) in 1577. His father, a courtier, died in 1578 and the family returned to their native Antwerp. There Rubens trained under three artists, Tobias Verhaecht, Adam van Noort and probably also Otto van Veen. In 1598 he was registered as an independent master in the Antwerp Guild, but left for Italy in 1600. He remained there until 1608, receiving employment from the Gonzaga family in Mantua, and working extensively in Rome and Genoa. He also visited Spain in 1603. By the time he returned to Antwerp, he had established his reputation as a leading painter, and had studied antique and Renaissance works of art assiduously.

Left: Portrait of Isabella Brant, coloured chalks, 1622
381 x.295 mm, PD1893-7-31-21 (Hind 92)

In Antwerp from 1609, he rapidly became the most favoured painter at the court of Archduke Albert, confirming his stature as an artist with his great altarpieces of the *Raising of the Cross* and the *Descent from the Cross* for Antwerp Cathedral (where they still hang). In 1609 he married Isabella Brant (d.1626), of whom there is a drawing in

the Museum's collection, and from 1612 began to design book illustrations for the Plantin Press in Antwerp. His contact with the English court began in 1612, when he painted the portrait of the Earl of Arundel, and in 1618 Rubens acquired a collection of antique statues from Sir Dudley Carleton, British Ambassador at The Hague. In the 1620s he was to work for Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham.

By 1620, commissions came his way in large quantities from many parts of Europe, and he employed a growing team of pupils and assistants to collaborate on his paintings. Knowledge of his style was also disseminated by engravings made after his paintings by professional printmakers working under his supervision. In 1630, four years after the death of Isabella Brant, Rubens married the sixteen-year-old Hélène Fourment. In 1635, he bought a country house, the Château de Steen, near Malines, where he spent much of his time during the last ten years of his life, the grounds inspiring several landscape paintings.

Drawing was a fundamentally important activity for Rubens, both in devising his own compositions and for recording the antique and Renaissance masters he admired. The British Museum contains a superlative collection of some eighty drawings by him, as well as forty drawings from his so-called 'Costume Book', an early compilation of study material from various sources, and a series of rapid sketches after antique coins. They were all exhibited, together with loans from other collections, at the British Museum in 1977 (see below for catalogue).

Among Rubens's Flemish pupils, collaborators and followers, the Museum has drawings by Anthony Van Dyck (an important collection), Abraham van Diepenbeck, Jacob Jordaens, Erasmus Quellinus, Cornelius Schut, Frans Snyders, Theodor van Thulden, Lucas van Uden and Lucas Vorsterman.

Only one print, an etching of *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, is believed to be by Rubens himself, although the attribution is uncertain. The Museum has impressions of this print, as well as a large

series of the reproductive engravings made after his designs and under his supervision. These are kept together with other reproductions of his work and arranged according to the catalogue by C.G. Schneevogt of 1873. Among the more important printmakers who worked for Rubens are Paul du Pont (Paulus Pontius). Schelte à Bolswert, Pieter Soutman and the woodcut specialist, Christoffel Jegher.

Other Collections

London	Courtauld Institute Galleries National Gallery Wallace Collection
UK	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
USA	Metropolitan Museum, New York National Gallery of Art, Washington Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

Further Reading

Burchard, L. and d'Hulst, R.A. *Rubens Drawings*. 2 Vols. Arcade, 1963

Held, J.S. *Rubens: Selected Drawings*. 2 Vols. Phaidon , second edition 1986

Hind, A.M. *Catalogue of Drawings in the British Museum Vol.II Drawings by rubens, Van Dyck and Other Artists of the Flemish School of the XVII Century*. British Museum, 1923

Rowlands, J.K. *Rubens: Drawings and Sketches*. British Museum Publications, 1977

White, C. *Peter Paul Rubens*. Yale University Press, 1988

The *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, a series of volumes cataloguing Rubens's work according to particular types, is still in progress.