

Rubens

Paris Art Studies - Winter 2009

Peter Paul
Rubens 1577- 1640

1577 – Born in Siegen, Westphalia, son of Jan Rubens Protestant lawyer and alderman of city of Antwerp and Maria Pypelincks. His parents had fled Antwerp to escape war and the prosecution of the Protestants by the Spanish troops of the duke of Alba. In Cologne an adulterous affair with Anne of Saxony, the estranged wife of Prince of Orange, leads to Jan's arrest and jailing. He is saved by his wife's pleading and bribes and exiled to Siegen. In future Rubens who will be deeply ashamed of father's disgrace will thirst for respectability.

1578 – Father's punishment lifted, return to Cologne.

1587 – Jan Rubens dies.

1589 – Peter Paul returns with his mother to Antwerp. He enters Rombout Verdonck college, receives thorough classical education and studies Greek and Latin literature. From mother receives solid Catholic education. In college meets Balthasar Moretus heir of great Plantin printing house (founded in Antwerp in 1555) for whom he will often design frontispieces.

1590 – Leaves college and is admitted as page (arranged by mother) in house of Marguerite de Ligne-Arenberg a count's widow. Learns etiquette and aristocratic manners which will prove useful in future diplomatic career. Draws when idle, copies from prints by Dürer and Holbein.

1591 – Apprenticed to Tobias Verhaecht modest landscape painter.

1592 – Moves to studio of Adam Van Noort, master and future father in law of Jacob Jordaens.

1596 – Enters studio of greatest living Antwerp painter Otto van Veen president of guild of St Luke, and

greatest early influence on young Rubens. Van Veen is a member of "Roman" group of Flemish painters, having studied in Rome and introduces Rubens to Barocci, Michelangelo, Raphael. Also a fervent catholic and loyal subject of Hapsburgs.

1598 – End of apprenticeship years and admission into guild as master, takes on pupil.

1600 – Leaves with pupil Deodat (stays with him for 8 years) for Italy. In Venice discovers Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto. Presented to Vincent I Gonzaga, duke of Mantua patron of Mor, Tasso, Galileo and Monteverdi. In Mantua Rubens charged with copying Renaissance pictures, familiarizes himself with Titian, Mantegna, Corregio, Raphael and Guilio Romano (in duke's summer palace, the Palazzo del Te, which will later inspire his own house and garden in Antwerp.) In October assists at wedding by proxy of Marie de Medici (sister in law of duke) in Florence which he will later paint. Discovers Michelangelo's tombs in Medici chapel and Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari in palazzo Vecchio.

1601 – Arrival in Rome to copy pictures for his patron. Coincides with rise of Caravaggio and Carraci (Farnese ceiling just finished with its new mix of painting and illusionist sculpture and mix of sensuality and erudition.) Copies from Caravaggio's Calling of St Mathew and Supper at Emmaus. Draws from Sistine ceiling too. Infuses copies of antiques with life and vitality of live models. "Painting requires the intelligence of the antique but mustn't have the sense of stone". First church commission obtained thanks to influence of Flemish ambassador a friend of his brother's Philip's.

1602 – Return to Mantua. Receives visit of brother Phillip and Jan Woverius both pupils of great neo-stoic philosopher Justus Lipsius. This visit will later inspire the "Four Philosophers". First diplomatic mission, sent by duke to new king of Spain Phillip III with cargo of royal presents, including 16 copies after Raphael and Titian and six horses. Drenched in sea crossing the pictures have to be restored in Madrid by the painter with the help of local painters. Paints his first equestrian portrait of the all-powerful prime minister, the duke of Lerma. In royal collections discovers more Titians and Raphaels.

1604 – Return to Mantua. Receives first original church commissions.

1605-6 – New trip to Rome where Phillip is now librarian to influential Cardinal Colonna. The study of antiquity by both leads to publication in 1608 of Phillip's Electorum Libri II illustrated by his brother. Rubens builds up his antique collection, later brought back to Antwerp and sold to duke of Buckingham. Receives commission of important altarpiece for Santa Maria Chiesa Nuova.

1607 – In Genoa under patronage of duke of Mantua paints local nobility.

1608 – Back in Rome finishes altarpiece, convinces duke to buy Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin refused

by convent. Learns of mother's serious illness and immediately leaves for Antwerp but arrives too late. Places first version of Chiesa Nuova altarpiece on her tomb.

1609 – Phillip named secretary of city of Antwerp. New hope for peace in Flanders with ongoing negotiations between Spain and rebellious Dutch provinces for "12 year truce". Burgmaster Nicolas Rockox commissions Adoration of Magi for City Hall. Archduke Albert and archduchess Isabella offer to take him into their service at court (along with Van Veen and Jan Brueghel), though "burning" to return to Italy Rubens cannot refuse such an offer. Marries niece of his sister in law, 19 year old Isabella Brandt.

1610 – Buys a plot of land in fashionable quarter and designs Italianate house and classical pavilion in garden. House finished in 1616. 1610-20 immense altarpiece production along with mythologies and portraits. Numerous young painters paint over chalk drawings of master who adds finishing touches.

1611 – Rockox commissions Descent from The Cross for Arquebusiers' chapel in cathedral. Becomes one of his most famous paintings thanks to publication of print by Lucas Vostermann. Fame increases with publication of his compositions through talented printmakers. Birth of first child Cara Serena, and death of Phillip. Paints in commemoration "Four philosophers".

Most famous assistants: Jan Brueghel (though 9 years older) flower specialist.

Frans Snyders (bird and animal specialist). Antoon Van Dyck (enters studio 1616-1620).

1615-20 – Progressive evolution toward looser, less polished style.

1621 – Death of Philip III, succeeded by son Philip IV – end of 12 year truce, war resumes despite archdukes' efforts to prolong truce. Italian general Ambrogio Spinola heads Spanish troops. Death of Albert without heir, Flanders reverts automatically to Spain. Isabella uses Rubens for clandestine talks with Dutch enemy.

1622 – Called to Paris by Marie de Medici (in good terms with Isabella) to paint gallery of her new palais de Luxembourg. Doubtlessly also a diplomatic journey.

1625 – Assists at Henrietta Maria's (sister of Louis XIII) marriage by proxy to Charles I of England. Meets impetuous and vain duke of Buckingham who commissions portrait. Sensing Richelieu's rise to power he abandons Marie and Paris. Fall of Breda – great Spanish victory. Rubens flees plague in Antwerp by going to country. Death of William of Nassau..

1626 – Death of Isabella Brandt. Rubens grieves.

1627 - Sells antique collection plus 13 of his own pictures to Buckingham for 100 000 florins in Delft (another disguised diplomatic journey.) Meets some of the great Dutch painters: Terbruggen, Bloemaert, Honthorst.

1628 – Diplomatic journey to Madrid under pretext of painting portrait of new king. Re-examines and copies Titians in royal gallery. Meets Velasquez to whom he probably recommends to visit Italy.

1629 – Sails for England. Given master of arts by Cambridge University. Meets humanists and receives commission for Whitehall banqueting hall ceiling (finished 1634). Banquet in his honour, knighted and given diamond ring and a sword by Charles I.

1630 – Marriage with Helen Fourment, 16-year old daughter (Rubens is 53) of tapestry and silk merchant whose sister Suzanne the artist had already painted some years before. Will have 5 children with her (last born after his death.) To commemorate marriage paints “Garden of Love”. Rejuvenation of his art.

1631 – Knighted by Philip IV (only painter to ever receive two titles by 2 different kings:) “Painter of princes and prince of painters”.

1633 – Death of his great patron Isabella. Commissioned to create triumphal arches for arrival of new Spanish governor. Economic misery created by endless Dutch war.

1634 – Buys country residence Het Steen at Elewijt, between Brussels and Malines.

Paints famous late landscapes.

1636 – Commissioned to paint a series of mythological paintings for Philip’s summer hunt pavilion near Madrid (60 models painted after Ovid.) Frequent attacks of gout.

1640 – Dies after violent gout attack. Succeeded as first painter to the court by Jacob Jordaens.

