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Rubens and his School, 1600-1700

In the 17th century, the Southern Provinces of the Netherlands were under the rule of the Spanish Catholic members of the Hapsburg dynasty: Archdukes Albert and Isabella followed by Archduke Ferdinand. The Hapsburg governors were major patrons of Peter Paul Rubens, who served them not only as a painter but also as a diplomat. He traveled and had major commissions in almost every Catholic country in Europe. Known as a painter of grandiose cycles glorifying monarchs, heroes, and the faith, he was also an architect, portraitist, and an innovative landscape painter. Rubens had a huge range of expression, and when painting subjects from history, mythology, and religion he was able to convey jubilation and tragedy with equal ability. His art, with its free brushwork, grandeur, and sense of movement and emotion, quickly dominated the art of the Southern Netherlands. Indeed, Rubens became so popular that he needed many assistants to execute the large and numerous commissions. The best of these assistants, such as Anthony van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens, adapted his style and lessons and became the most admired and successful artists after the master himself.



Peter Paul Rubens

Flemish, 1577-1640, active in Antwerp

Osias Beert the Elder

Flemish, c. 1580-1624, active in Antwerp

Pausias and Glycera, c. 1612-1615

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 219

Glycera was an ancient Greek woman known for her skill at making floral wreaths of which her lover, Pausias, made exceptionally realistic paintings. Their relationship has come to represent the rivalry between nature and art. Which is more beautiful: Glycera's flowers or

Pausias's paintings of them? The friendly competition between the ancient artisans is repeated in this work, in which the viewer is asked to compare the skills of Rubens, who painted the figures, with those of Beert, who painted the floral still lifes.



Peter Paul Rubens

Flemish, 1577-1640, active in Antwerp

The Departure of Lot and his Family from Sodom, c. 1613-1615

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 218

In this Old Testament scene, Lot and his family are led by angelic messengers away from their home in the sinful city of Sodom before it is destroyed by God. Rubens's mastery of gesture, facial expression, and emotion bring this moment of transition and uncertainty to life. His vibrant draperies and brilliant effects of light heighten the drama, offering a counterpoint of elegance and beauty to the sorrow and adversity Lot's family faces.



Peter Paul Rubens

Flemish, 1577-1640, active in Antwerp

Thetis Dipping Achilles into the River Styx, c.
1630-35

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 221

Thetis dips her infant son Achilles into the river Styx as protection against the early death prophesized for him. Only the heel by which she holds him remains vulnerable and is where an arrow will strike and kill this future hero of the Trojan War. This scene is the first in a series of eight works on the life of Achilles that was made into tapestries. Following a *bozetto*, or first sketch, this *modello* would be the

master's autograph model that studio assistants would use to make full-scale painted cartoons from which the tapestries would then be made.



Peter Paul Rubens

Flemish, 1577-1640, active in Antwerp

Portrait of Infante Ferdinand, 1635

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1948, SN 626

The younger brother of King Philip IV of Spain, Ferdinand (1609/10-1641) represented Spanish interests in northern Europe as governor of the Netherlands. He is depicted here as a military commander fresh from his victory over the king of Sweden at Nördlingen in 1634. Rubens turned to Titian for his prototype, influenced by the Italian artist's mastery of psychological character-ization in his portraiture and his daring use of color and dynamic brushwork. He

obviously succeeded – Ferdinand establishes a direct visual and emotional contact with the viewer, suggesting an unusual rapport between sitter and artist.



Peter Paul Rubens, studio of
Flemish, 1577–1640, active in Antwerp

Danaë and the Shower of Gold, c. 1616/18
Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 220

The ancient writer Ovid tells of the princess Danaë who was imprisoned in a tower by her father, Acrisius, because a prophecy stated that he would be killed by his daughter's son. While secluded, Danaë was

seduced by the ruler of the gods, Zeus, disguised as a shower of gold. We see her gaze upward at the apparition while her old servant tries to catch the coins that are often used symbolically to represent the golden presence of Zeus. A son, Perseus, was born of this illicit encounter and he did indeed fulfill the prophecy by accidentally killing his grandfather during a game of discus.



Peter Paul Rubens, studio of
Flemish, 1577-1640, active in Antwerp

Saint Thomas Aquinas, 1610s
Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 224



Jacob Jordaens

Flemish, 1593-1678, active in Antwerp

Boaz, c. 1641-42

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase, 1984, SN 987



Jacob Jordaens

Flemish, 1593-1678, active in Antwerp

Ruth and Naomi, c. 1641-42

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase, 1984, SN 988

This painting and its companion *Boaz* show Jordaens as master of the monumental figure. They may have been installed high up, above a doorway or flanking a window. The subject is taken from the Old Testament book of Ruth where Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, return to Bethlehem and seek the protection of Boaz, a wealthy cousin to Naomi's deceased husband. The tender story of Boaz's kindness (he marries the widow Ruth) and Ruth's loyalty is the theme of the biblical book.



Jan Fyt

Flemish, 1611-1661, active in Antwerp

***The Calydonian Boar Hunt*, 1648**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 236

An arrow of the young huntress Atalanta has just wounded a wild boar ravaging the countryside of Calydonia. There is no escape for the beast from the hunting dogs that surround it. This dramatic moment from a famous ancient hunt was a popular subject among the knighted class passionate about this time-honored and noble pastime. It was also an opportunity for an artist like Fyt, who specialized in animal paintings, to show his powers of realistic representation. The human figures and the landscape were painted by other artists, an example of artistic collaboration that was common in the Netherlands in the 17th century.



Abraham Janssens

Flemish, c. 1575-1632, active in Rome and Antwerp

Cephalus Grieving over the Dying

***Procris*, c. 1610**

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase with funds from The Ringling Museum of Art Investment Trust Fund, 1999, SN 11035

This is the climactic scene of an ancient love story. Various gods jealously interfered with the happiness of a newly wed young couple. The suspicion and intrigues that followed ended tragically when Cephalus mistakenly killed his beloved Procris. Here, Janssens depicts the dramatic moment of discovery, when a grief-stricken and horrified Cephalus attends to his dying wife. The fatal wound alone disturbs the purity of her smooth flesh already appearing pale and cold, executed in Janssens's harsh and sculptural manner.



Anthony van Dyck

Flemish, 1599-1641, active in Genoa, Antwerp, London

***Saint Andrew*, 1621**

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 227

While working as Rubens's studio assistant, Van Dyck began painting individual pictures of the apostles, later repeating them for different series. The *St. Andrew* panel is from the Böhler series of apostles, named for the Munich art dealer, Julius Böhler, who discovered them in 1914 and later became one of John Ringling's most important dealers. The young Van Dyck reveled in his ability to handle paint, but he also did not hesitate to leave sections of the painting unfinished, betraying the expressive nature of his workmanship.