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KUNST  
HISTORISCHES  
MUSEUM  
WIEN

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# Rubens

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*THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION*  
17 OCTOBER 2017 UNTIL 21 JANUARY 2018

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## INTRODUCTION

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Dramatic stories, intimate portraits, profound piety, and powerful landscapes—Peter Paul Rubens' creativity was boundless. This exhibition examines Rubens' powers of invention, focusing on his artistic method and creative use of models. Throughout his life Rubens made sketches of the works of predecessors and reinterpreted them according to his own conceptions. He modified and adapted existing models to create something completely new. This dynamic process, which is at the core of Rubens' artistic achievement, is the focus of the present exhibition.

Rubens searched avidly for new ideas. He studied his contemporaries, the great artists of the Renaissance, and the art of the ancient world. His models extended from small prints to flamboyant oil paintings and monumental sculptures in marble.

Rubens' references to a variety of sources left traces that are to be found in every painting displayed in these galleries. This exhibition invites you to explore the origins of the works, and in so doing to relive their creation in a unique way.

## 1

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Peter Paul Rubens

### SELF-PORTRAIT

c.1638  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Throughout his life Peter Paul Rubens evinced an exuberant vision and artistic expressiveness. Physically, the great artist of the Baroque, whose creativity was boundless, could not evade the passage of time, as is clearly reflected in this, the last of his self-portraits. The brimming strength and confidence of his earliest likenesses has given way to an ambivalent expression, in which the fatigue and afflictions of old age may be detected. The picture also shows the position of esteem which Rubens had attained in the course of his career as court painter and diplomat. He presents himself as a *grand seigneur*, a nobleman, who is distinguished as a member of the aristocracy by the attributes of court portraiture—glove, dagger and column. This is a painting that was created to survive the artist's death, immortalising him as he wished to be remembered: as a man of high rank and impeccable character.

## 2

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Barthel Beham

### BATTLE OF EIGHTEEN NUDE MEN, THE BATTLE OF TITUS GRACCHUS

1528  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

In his endeavour to collect a pool of expressive figures, these two engravings were of great interest to Rubens. Barthel Beham here presents a virtual illustrated encyclopaedia of nude warriors in poses of extreme action. An additional aspect of appeal is the miniature scale in which powerful emotions are communicated. His early study of such engravings later led Rubens to have his own work disseminated in the form of prints.

## 3

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Peter Paul Rubens after  
Barthel Beham

### BATTLE OF NUDE MEN

c.1598/1600  
Washington, D.C.,  
National Gallery of Art

Here we are able to see how Rubens went about developing his compositions. Having copied the two Beham prints entirely or in part, he cut out those sections of the drawings that he considered important and combined them on a new sheet. In a further step he added a group of two figures in the upper left. This pair he also composed using two individual figures by Beham. With works such as this the young Rubens prepared his later, elaborate scenes of combat.

## 4

Tobias Stimmer

### BIBLIA SACRA VETERIS ET NOVI TESTAMENTI, SECUNDUM EDITIONEM VULGATAM

1578  
Private collection

Tobias Stimmer's bible illustrations enjoyed wide circulation from 1576, several editions of his work having been published. The young Rubens studied this source of illustrations intensively. In his study sketch (no. 5) Eve appears on the right of the sheet. The complicated pose with the slightly twisted torso, knees pressed together, and arms outstretched indisputably owes its inspiration to Stimmer's woodcut. New and entirely Rubens' own creation however is the figure's appearance of pulsating life.

## 5

Peter Paul Rubens

### FOUR STUDIES OF FEMALE NUDES

c.1595  
Paris, Musée du Louvre

Rubens related that in his youth he copied prints by German masters to practice drawing. He specifically named Tobias Stimmer as one of the artists whose work he used. This drawing—one of the earliest drawings by Rubens known—with its four representations of Eve is a repertory of female figures in different postures. Three of these were drawn from the Bible illustrated by Stimmer (no. 4). The standing nude in the upper left of the drawing was made after a woodcut by Jost Amman (1580).

## 6

Peter Paul Rubens

### SHEET FROM THE LOST SKETCH- BOOK WITH FIGURE STUDIES AFTER HOLBEIN, DÜRER AND RAPHAEL (RECTO AND VERSO)

before 1600/c.1603  
Berlin, Staatliche  
Museen zu Berlin,  
Kupferstichkabinett

Here Rubens assembles figures from various paintings by Raphael to compose a new scene. The three lamenting characters in the upper left, however, are from *Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein the Younger. The inscriptions in Rubens' hand are quotations from court scenes in a biography of Alexander the Great. On the reverse side of the sheet (not shown here) notes from Dürer's doctrine of proportion are combined with sketches made after Raphael's *Judgement of Solomon* in the Vatican. It is probably around this theme too that the drawings on the recto of the sheet revolve.

## 7

Florentine

### FARNESE HERCULES

2nd half 16th century  
Washington, D.C.,  
National Gallery of Art

A statue of Hercules measuring over three metres in height was discovered in 1546 in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and acquired soon thereafter by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. The monumental sculpture immediately fascinated artists, and numerous small-scale reproductions were produced. These were fashioned in various materials: marble, alabaster, wax, plaster, terracotta, and especially in bronze—like the example we see here.

The lost Greek original by the sculptor Lysippos was also of bronze. The work shows the hero Hercules at repose leaning upon his club. The pelt of the Nemean lion draped over his club and the golden apples stolen from the Hesperides, which Hercules holds in his right hand, allude to the hero's labours.

Rubens closely studied the marble statue in Rome and executed several sketches. In his paintings he referred to the image repeatedly, though always changing it. By no means however did he make use of it solely for depictions of Hercules, as the painting displayed to the left shows.

## 8

Peter Paul Rubens

### ST CHRISTOPHER

c.1612/13  
Munich, Bayerische  
Staatsgemäldesammlung,  
Alte Pinakothek

In vain did the giant Offerus seek the most powerful ruler with the intention of entering his service. Following the advice of a hermit, he carried travellers over a raging river. One night a small child asked his help. The child was so heavy however that Offerus thought the weight of the world to be upon his shoulders. "More than the world have you borne", says the child revealing himself as Christ. Henceforth the giant was known as Christophorus, "Bearer of Christ".

Christopher was the patron saint of the marksmen's guild at Antwerp, which had commissioned a triptych altarpiece over three metres in height from Rubens. When closed the exterior panels reveal the figure which Rubens developed in this *modello*.

In his depiction of the powerful saint, Rubens cites Hercules, the mighty man of classical antiquity. However, he recasts the motif, depicting the figure in reverse and imbuing it with dynamism: Christopher treads on determinedly casting a concentrated gaze on the safety of the river's shore.

Thus was an evocative reference cleverly adapted: the art of transformation.

## 9

Anonymous, after  
Annibale Carracci,  
retouched by Rubens

### TWO NAKED YOUNG MEN AND A MEDALLION OF LEDA AND THE SWAN

c.1630  
London, Victoria and  
Albert Museum

Rubens did not just extensively modify this drawing he also undertook repairs to the lower left half. The unknown artist of this sheet reproduced a section of one of Annibale Carracci's major works in the Galleria Farnese in Rome. Carracci revitalised the art of the ancient world in a manner which must have greatly appealed to Rubens. That did not deter him however from making substantial changes to the drawing and replacing the flaying of Marsyas by Leda and the swan.

## 10

Anonymous, after  
Parmigianino, retouched  
by Rubens

### THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

c.1606/08  
Washington, D.C.,  
National Gallery of Art

No fewer than four artists were involved to varying degrees in the creation of this drawing. Rubens revised the drawing, the copy of a print by Parmigianino by an unknown draughtsman. Parmigianino in turn had reproduced a composition by Raphael from the latter's famous series of tapestries executed for the Sistine Chapel. During his years in Italy Rubens had acquired a large collection of drawings of the chief works of the Italian masters, to which he frequently referred in the course of his work.

## 11

Willem Danielsz. van  
Tetrode

### ÉCORCHÉ

c.1562/67  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Kunstammer

Rubens made sketches both of ancient statues and sculptures of the 16th century to develop figures of the male nude in positions of powerful movement. He likely possessed a cast of this muscleman, as more drawings of it than of any other sculpture have been preserved. The reproduction in his collection could probably have been fitted with different sets of extremities thus allowing for the display of a greater variety of expressive poses.

## 12

Paulus Pontius  
after Rubens

### ÉCORCHÉ

before 1640 (?)  
Dresden, Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen,  
Kupferstich-Kabinett

Rubens had a number of his drawings after Tetrode's muscleman (no. 11) engraved by Paulus Pontius and published. He regarded the statue thus not as merely a humble visual aid to be ashamedly hidden away. Instead he attributed great importance to these anatomical studies. Drawing on such prints as a reference, contemporaries could follow the use of the figure through many of the painter's chief works and appreciate both his creative economy and his imagination.

## 13

Peter Paul Rubens

### ANATOMICAL STUDIES OF A FOREARM IN THREE POSITIONS

c.1600/08  
New York, The  
Metropolitan Museum  
of Art

Rubens was skilled in making use of his cast of Tetrode's muscleman (no. 11) to achieve powerful effects. By sketching the left forearm twice from slightly differing perspectives with the right forearm almost concealed, Rubens created a highly complex spatial form. Concerned with more than accurate anatomical representation, Rubens explores and depicts the human body's capacity for motion, as well as its potential for expression and passion.

## 14

Johann Gregor van der  
Schardt

### LUNA

c.1570  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Kunstammer

The moon held like a mask is merging in a very original way with the face of the woman otherwise naked. The signal horn and the spear refer to the goddess of the moon and the hunt, Diana. The slender and elegant posture of the body complies with an ideal of beauty, which is still close to earlier versions of the Judgement of Paris by Rubens. To study sculptures like these from all sides and to draw them was a possibility to develop diverse nudes in these paintings.

## 15

Hans Rottenhammer

### THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

1597  
Paris, Petit Palais,  
Musée des Beaux-Arts  
de la Ville de Paris

Paris appears here in a curiously precarious posture as he bestows the apple on Venus. His glance is directed absent-mindedly into the void; has he a foreboding of the calamitous consequences of his decision?

The fame of Venetian painting attracted Hans Rottenhammer from Munich to Venice in 1589. In 1594, he spent a year in Rome in order to sketch works of ancient sculpture. Having returned to Venice, he established an extraordinarily successful atelier, which specialised in painting on small-format copper plates. The motifs, often of an erotic character, were masterfully coloured and must have impressed the young Rubens, who met Rottenhammer in Venice. It is likely that Rubens' exceptional use of a copper plate for the smaller painting now in Vienna (no. 17) was inspired by Rottenhammer.

## 16

Marcantonio Raimondi  
after Raphael

### THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

c.1511/20  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

Raphael created his extraordinarily influential depiction of the *Judgement of Paris* in Rome with the aim of disseminating it in the form of prints produced from a copperplate engraving by Raimondi. The work, which was based on the study of ancient sarcophagus reliefs, gained him great admiration among contemporaries. The cast of figures has inspired artists for centuries (up to Edouard Manet). Rottenhammer, Otto van Veen, and Rubens were of course acquainted with the print. The sitting Paris, the rear view of Minerva, the river gods resting on the right, and many other details were used in later works. Rubens however did not reproduce the figures slavishly, but transformed them creatively.

The epochal impact of the print is of course also related to the significance of the subject: Paris chose Venus, because she promised him the most beautiful of all women, Helena. By abducting Helena Paris provoked the Trojan War.

## 17

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

c.1601  
Vienna, Akademie  
der bildenden Künste,  
Gemäldegalerie

This *Judgement of Paris* is sometimes considered a preparatory study for the version in London (no. 20). In this picture, however, an entirely different atmosphere prevails. The enchanting lightness with which Rubens treats the subject owes much to the influence of Titian and Veronese. The slightly twisting posture of Minerva, whom a putto helps disrobe, is similar to the same figure in the Prado version (no. 18) but is entirely devoid of its comical aspect. In this small, lyrical painting, Rubens creates a distinctive atmosphere. Certainly the sketch-like execution and perhaps even the picture's mediocre state of preservation correspond to modern taste.

The rainbow, Juno's attribute, is an early instance of the artist's interest in this natural phenomenon, which plays a prominent role in his later *Stormy Landscape* (no. 110, Gallery XII).

The figure of Paris probably goes back to Rubens' interest in the *Belvedere Torso* (no. 25).

## 18

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

c.1606/08  
Madrid, Museo  
Nacional del Prado

Here Paris ponders which of the goddesses is to receive the apple. The decision seems imminent, for his glance is fixed upon the seductively smiling Venus. She presents herself self-confidently in the nude. Juno and Minerva, however, are still hurriedly trying to disrobe. The two appear in contorted poses, the putti who assist seem to be tearing the gowns from the goddesses' bodies.

The humour with which the scene is depicted is evidence of the artistic assurance that Rubens, then about 30 years old, had achieved. The figures of Paris and Mercury unmistakably betray the influence on Rubens of the works of ancient sculpture that he had seen in Italy. The bodies' energy and agility are rendered with clearly greater refinement compared to the version painted in Antwerp some ten years previously.

Rubens painted a *Judgement of Paris* again, for the last time, 30 years later; this painting can be seen in Gallery XII.

## 19

Otto van Veen

### AMAZONS AND SCYTHIANS

1597/99  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Otto van Veen, Rubens' teacher in Antwerp, depicts an extremely unusual subject: the union of Amazons and Scythians. The ancient historian Herodotus relates that while fleeing from the Greeks the Amazons encountered youthful Scythian warriors. The two groups united and married thus founding a new tribe, the Sauromatians.

Van Veen depicts the Amazons laying down their arms and undressing. In the background stands the Scythian army well-ordered and in joyful anticipation. The first pairs are already exiting the picture on the right.

The analogy to the *Judgement of Paris* is unmistakable. Nude women present themselves in a variety of poses. Curiously, the seated Amazon on the left resembles some representations of Paris.

The young Rubens, as can be seen from his painting to the left, was influenced by his teacher's image of the ideal woman: black eyes, cherry-red mouths, and small breasts. The fundamental transformation of Rubens' vision of female beauty becomes evident over the course of this exhibition.

## 20

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

before 1600  
London, The National  
Gallery

The decision has been made: Paris presents Venus with the golden apple as the most beautiful of the three goddesses. The story, retold frequently in ancient poetry since Homer's day, provided a welcome occasion to show three nude female figures at once. Rubens portrays Minerva turning her back in disappointment, and Juno with indignant expression and an imperious gesture of her right hand. The virtuoso foreshortening of Juno's hand is a masterful detail in this work by a very young Rubens. The ideal of female beauty reveals the yet pronounced influence of Rubens' teacher, Otto van Veen, as can be seen by comparing the latter's Amazons and Scythians. Rubens, however, also drew upon other sources, such as a famous engraving by Raphael (no. 16) and the statuette of a putto as boxer (no. 21). This shows that while still in Antwerp he was familiar with works of art from Italy. The *Judgement of Paris* was to become one of his favourite motifs; three other versions can be seen in this exhibition.

## 21

Northern Italian

### PUTTO AS A BOXER

c.1500  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Kunstammer

One of Rubens' friends in Antwerp, Nicolaas Rockox, owned the statuette of "a boy with leather straps preparing to begin a fight". At the time this was held to be an ancient work of art. Possibly it was a copy of the statue exhibited here. The nude putto is shown as a boxer with helmet-like cap and knee guards, and straps of leather and metal, the *caestus* of classical antiquity, on forearms and hands. That Rubens was acquainted with this figure is proved by the drawing displayed here.

## 22

Copy after Peter Paul  
Rubens

### JOHNSON MANUSCRIPT

end of 17th century  
London, Courtauld  
Gallery

This manuscript comprises more than 250 copies of drawings by Rubens. It apparently served younger artists as material for study. The original drawings were contained in one of the master's sketchbooks, which with the exception of two pages was lost in a fire in the Louvre in 1720. However, even these copies demonstrate how Rubens executed sketches of motifs drawn from classical antiquity and the Old Masters, on occasion adding quotations from ancient poetry and notes of his own.

The page displayed here shows that Rubens must have been familiar with *Putto as Boxer* (no. 21). The boy places his right foot on the ball so that his heel casts a shadow. On closer examination we can see that Rubens also suggests the shinguard. In developing the figure of cupid in the *Judgement of Paris* (no. 20) Rubens referred to this study.

One of the two original drawings by Rubens to have been preserved is exhibited in this gallery. (no. 6, next to the *Farnese Hercules*)

## 23

Peter Paul Rubens

### OIL SKETCH FOR THE AUGUSTINIAN ALTARPIECE

c.1627/28  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

The nearly six-meter high altarpiece in the Church of the Augustinian Fathers in Antwerp that was dedicated to Mary and all the saints was an important commission. Rubens prepared this work in a number of oil sketches, called *modelli*. St Augustine points commandingly to the Virgin Mary, around whose throne numerous saints have gathered. St George looks at us from the steps while next to him St Sebastian gazes up at Mary. Here Rubens makes a striking change for the next step.

## 24

Peter Paul Rubens

### OIL SKETCH FOR THE AUGUSTINIAN ALTARPIECE

c.1627/28  
Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

In this preparatory sketch Rubens added St William of Gellone; he is shown ascending the steps. Rubens also moved St George to the left, St Sebastian turns to him as though in conversation. In this way a relationship was created to the four female saints, above and to the left. In the Frankfurt version (no. 23), there were only three female saints. Also new in this *modello* is St Joseph, who stands behind Mary.

These changes, the vibrant colours, and clearer spatial arrangement correspond to the altarpiece that was eventually unveiled in 1628.

## 25

### TORSO BELVEDERE (PLASTER CAST)

Original: Apollonios of Athens (attributed), 1st century BC  
Munich, Museum für Abgüsse Klassischer Bildwerke

Even before Rubens' time the *Belvedere Torso* was considered one of the most famous statues of the ancient world. Exactly when and where it was discovered is unknown, but it was documented in the Palazzo Colonna in Rome from about 1430. About a century later the torso was moved to the Vatican and installed in the open-air sculpture courtyard of the Belvedere. There it was that Rubens sketched the sculpture from different perspectives soon after his arrival in Rome in the summer of 1601. As early as 1500 however, we are acquainted with numerous drawings, engravings and statuettes of the torso, reflecting the powerful impression it made on artists. The fact that it was never "restored", never had missing pieces added or replaced, also bears witness to this.

At the time, the statue was thought to represent Hercules at rest. Today, it is believed to be Ajax in contemplation just before he falls upon his own sword. The heroic is thus combined with the tragic in this figure, which in various degrees of transformation found its way into Rubens' visual vocabulary.

## 26

Peter Paul Rubens

### STUDY OF THE BELVEDERE TORSO

c.1601/02  
Antwerpen, Rubenshuis

Two drawings of the *Belvedere Torso* (no. 25), which Rubens made in Rome, have been preserved. Both these works are to be seen in this exhibition. Three other drawings of the statue are believed to be copies made by his students. This demonstrates the degree to which Rubens took an interest in this important piece of sculpture. In this masterly drawing he also carefully records the signature in Greek of the sculptor, "Apollonios of Athens, Son of Nestor". (A later attribution of the drawing to Van Dyck is erroneous).

## 27

Peter Paul Rubens

### STUDY OF THE BELVEDERE TORSO (VERSO)

c.1601/02  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

In this red chalk drawing of extraordinary quality, Rubens depicts the *Belvedere Torso* (no. 25) diagonally from behind. Doubtless he chose red chalk as it permits the modelling of the body surface to be rendered in a particularly nuanced manner.

It was certainly no coincidence that Rubens also used red chalk for the drawings he made of Michelangelo's famous *ignudi* (nudes) on the ceiling fresco of the Sistine Chapel. In his portrayals of these youthful figures, Michelangelo devoted close attention to the torso.

## 28

Peter Paul Rubens

### STUDY FOR THE VIRGIN ADORED BY SAINTS (RECTO)

1627/28  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Reproduction

This spontaneous preliminary composition sketch for the altar of the Church of the Augustinian Fathers in Antwerp was drawn by Rubens on the reverse side of a drawing of the *Belvedere Torso* in red chalk (no. 27). The sketch was made a quarter-century after the drawing on the obverse, and the two are unrelated in content. Perhaps Rubens simply happened to have the sheet in his hand when the idea for the altar occurred to him. Such initial ideas for a picture are for outsiders scarcely readable and were solely working material. Consequently they have very rarely been preserved. At the time, these were called scribbles (*crabbelingen*).

## 29

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE FOUR RIVERS OF PARADISE

c.1615  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

The four river deities accompanied by the nymphs of their sources camp on a reed-lined shore. A tigress nursing her cubs is disturbed by an approaching crocodile. The two beasts permit identification of the two rivers in the foreground: to the left appears the Nile, to the right the Tigris. The source nymph of the Nile is an Ethiopian woman, for in Rubens' day the river's source was unknown, but held to be in Ethiopia. In the background, the Euphrates and Ganges may be seen on the left and right respectively. Ancient traditions identified these four great rivers of the orient as the four rivers of paradise. The monumental figures bespeak study of the nude combined with knowledge of ancient sculpture, as is revealed by a comparison of the personification of the Nile with the rear view of the *Belvedere Torso* (no. 25). The nymph that personifies the Euphrates' source suggests study of Michelangelo's depictions of women. Striking is the lively depiction of the two animals, which Rubens certainly never himself saw live.

## 30

Titian

### ECCE HOMO (CHRIST PRESENTED TO THE PEOPLE)

1543  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Rubens probably did not see Titian's *Ecce Homo* during his years in Italy (1600–08). At that time the painting hung in a location difficult of access in a private palace in Venice, and was therefore little known in the 16th century. In the 1620s, however, the painting entered the collection of the Duke of Buckingham. There Rubens was able to examine the work during his stay in London in 1629. He had arrived there from Madrid, where he had closely studied Titian's work in the royal collections. Rubens made sketches of this picture. Two of these detail studies have been preserved, one of which is exhibited here (no. 32). Whether Rubens knew that Titian had executed the painting for a compatriot, the Flemish merchant Jan van Haanen, is not known. Rubens, however, was certainly aware that in this composition with its many figures, Titian had taken as a model the work of Netherlandish artists, such as Lukas van Leyden.

## 31

Anonymous, after  
Titian, retouched by  
Rubens

### CHRIST PRESENTED TO THE PEOPLE

c.1600 or 1620s  
Paris, Musée du Louvre

This meticulous sketch after a composition by Titian was made by an artist, who today is unknown to us, but who may have belonged to Rubens' entourage. We know that Rubens commissioned others to make copies for him in Venice and elsewhere in Italy. Rubens retouched this sketch of a rather documentary character using a pointed brush, reworking faces both of people and animals. He apparently wished to heighten the intensity of expression.

## 32

Peter Paul Rubens after  
Titian

### A GROUP OF SPECTATORS FROM THE ECCE HOMO

late 1620s  
Washington, D.C.,  
National Gallery of Art

In this sketch, Rubens focuses on the central group in Titian's composition, the crowd that calls upon Pontius Pilate for Christ's crucifixion. In this copy, which is otherwise faithful to the original, Rubens makes two notable changes: the gestures of the two men to the right are reversed, so that the bearded figure excitedly points towards Christ. The second change was made to the two men on the left, whose arms in Titian's work cross in a complicated manner. Rubens clarifies this composition, transforming the hands' gestures into one emphatic demand.

## 33

Hendrick Goltzius

### THE SLEEPING DANAE BEING PREPARED TO RECEIVE JUPITER

1603  
Los Angeles, Los  
Angeles County  
Museum of Art

Hendrick Goltzius was active as painter and especially as a draughtsman and engraver of exceptional brilliance in Haarlem. Through the medium of the print his works were widely distributed. His *Danae* shows a different moment in the story than does Titian's treatment of the subject. In Goltzius' painting the golden rain has yet to reach the womb of the king's sleeping daughter. The erotic import is by no means attenuated. Danae's maid nudges her to waken her; Mercury, messenger of the gods, laughing points to the approaching eagle. Two putti open the curtain of her bed, whilst another presents a purse of unambiguously suggestive form. This frank motif in combination with the riches spread out on the floor alludes to the realm of love for sale. Dutch poets of the 17th century frequently warned of the deleterious effects of indecent pictures, explicitly referring to the example of Danae and the comedies of the Roman poet Terence, who describes how the sight of a depiction of Danae led a young man into sexual immorality.



## 34

Titian

### DANAE

c.1554  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Titian was probably the most important painter for Rubens from the time of his sojourn in Italy. Indeed, the Venetian painter's portrayals of female nudes were an important source of inspiration for Rubens.

Titian's painting of Danae was so successful that he produced at least five varying versions of this subject, in part with the participation of his workshop. Danae, daughter of Acrisius, king of Argos, was imprisoned by her father in a tower, because it had been prophesied that he would have no son and be slain by the hand of his grandson. Nevertheless, Jupiter seduced Danae, coming to her in the form of golden rain. This is the moment that Titian depicts: the act of coitus without the presence of the male partner, and hence an unobstructed view of the female body.

The child of this union, the hero Perseus, indeed unintentionally killed his grandfather many years later.

Rubens himself never treated the story of Danae.

## 35

Francesco Colonna

### LA HYPNEROTOMACHIA DI POLIPHILLO

1545  
Vienna, Österreichische  
Nationalbibliothek

Francesco Colonna's romance, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* which was first published in 1499 in Venice is considered one of the most elegant books ever printed owing to its impeccable Antiqua typeface and 172 woodblock prints created by an anonymous artist.

This illustration may have influenced Rubens' composition of the two paintings exhibited here. Sleeping innocently beneath a tree is a half-naked nymph, who is observed by a goat-footed satyr.

## 36

Jacob Matham

### CIMON AND EFIGENIA

c.1599–1603  
Vienna, Albertina

Jacob Matham, Goltzius' stepson and student, was a famous draughtsman and engraver in Haarlem. Matham's illustration of Cimon and Efigenia was probably known to Rubens, although its influence is not discernible in his own version of the same subject (no. 40). This composition with its two figures more likely played a role in Rubens' *Hermit and the Sleeping Angelica* (no. 39).

In later years Matham reproduced paintings by Rubens as engraved prints.

## 37

Agostino Carracci

### SATYR AND NYMPH (FROM THE "LASCIVIE" SERIES)

1590–95  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

The *Lascivie*, a series of explicitly erotic engravings by Agostino Carracci, includes a depiction of a goat-footed satyr who does not only observe the sleeping nude as in Rubens' rendering, but grabbing himself between the legs seems to be engaged in preparing his next step. Thus is an appeal made to the lust of the viewer, to whom the nude beauty turns. It is hardly surprising that these prints were much sought-after collectors' items, although their possession was a crime in Antwerp.

## 38

Giovanni da Bologna  
(Sculptor: Nymph),  
Adriaen de Vries  
(Sculptor: Satyr),  
Antonio Susini  
(Brass Founder)

### SLEEPING NYMPH WITH SATYR

Dresden, Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen,  
Grünes Gewölbe

The motif of a satyr observing a sleeping nude woman was also rendered as a small bronze statue. In this work, the caster Susini probably combined Adriaen de Vries' stealthily approaching satyr with a nymph by Giambologna, as the nymph exists in other copies as an individual figure.

The small scale of the group invites the viewer to draw near like the satyr who slinks up to the object of his desire.

Rubens may have known the work; he certainly was familiar with the nymph, and adopted its pose for the sleeping figure in Cimon and Efigenia to the left. The manner in which the two women hold their left arm bent at an angle over their head, and the position of their legs is quite similar.

Francesco I de' Medici, grand duke of Tuscany, sent this bronze of exceptional quality together with two others to Dresden, to Elector Christian I of Saxony, in 1587.

## 39

Peter Paul Rubens

### ANGELICA AND THE HERMIT

1628/29  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Rubens took this small picture's subject, which is relatively rarely depicted, from *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto. The epic poem was highly esteemed in Rubens' day. The beautiful Angelica who fled from the raging Roland finds shelter with an aged hermit. With a magic potion, the hermit puts her to sleep so that he is able not only to observe, but also to touch the sleeping beauty at his pleasure. Rubens represents the magical forces by the demon in the upper right. The hermit as voyeur in the picture does the same as the onlooker in front of the picture. The viewer of Rubens' day was, of course, familiar with the story: Ariosto describes in detail how the ailments of old age thwart the hermit, inflamed by lust, from consummating his passions. Rubens developed the seductive nude figure of Angelica from that of the sleeping nymph in Titian's *Andrians* (Prado).

## 40

Peter Paul Rubens,  
Frans Snyders  
(Still life with Monkey)  
Jan Wildens  
(Landscape)

### CIMON AND EFIGENIA

c.1617  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Under Rubens' overall direction two other artists helped in creating this masterpiece: Frans Snyders, who executed the still life with apes, and Jan Wildens who painted the background landscape.

The subject, not often the subject of a painting, is taken from the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, a famous collection of novellas from the 14th century. The simple-minded prince Cimon prefers the simple life among farm folk to education, until one day he unexpectedly happens upon Efigenia and two of her companions asleep beneath the trees.

Profoundly affected by Efigenia's beauty, Cimon resolves to change his life and quickly makes up for the princely training he had neglected. After many adventures he succeeds in conquering Efigenia's heart. Rubens in his inimitable fashion suggests the tale's happy ending in the expression on the face of the waking beauty.

The reforming effect the encounter had upon Cimon justified to some extent the picture's sensuality, which was certainly dubious according to the moral standards of Rubens' day.

## 41

Antonio Agustín

### ANTONII AVGVSTINI ARCHIEPISC. TARRACON. ANTIQVITATVM ROMANARVM HISPANARVMQVE IN NVMMIS VETERVM DIALOGI XI [...]

1617  
Private collection

## 42

Jacob De Bie

### IMPERATORUM ROMANORUM NUMISMATA AUREA [...]

1615  
Private collection

## 43

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE HERO OF VIRTUE, CROWNED BY VICTORY

c.1615/16  
Dresden, Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen,  
Gemäldegalerie Alte  
Meister

This book with illustrations of ancient coins was published in Antwerp, Rubens' hometown, in 1617. Rubens could find inspiration in several of the coins' images for his depictions of the virtuous hero and goddess of victory crowning him (no. 43). Rubens combined poses and gestures and then enlivened them in his paintings spatially and with colour. With such borrowings he emulated much admired ancient models and demonstrated his humanistic learning.

Rubens sketched this allegory of numismatics for the frontispiece of a book about the coins of imperial Rome. He used the coins illustrated in the book as models. Cornucopia, scales, and the figure's pose are combinations of images that appear on various coins (no. 41). Rubens' portrayal conforms to the classical restraint of the ancient material. While citing the two-dimensional profile, he gives volume to the figure and spatial depth to the niche before which the goddess stands.

A composition similar to this was found in Rubens' estate; here we see a version executed by his atelier at a somewhat later date. A virtuous hero, perhaps Mars, god of war, is crowned with a laurel wreath by the goddess of victory. The triumph of virtue over immorality is symbolised by Mars' foot atop the drunken Silenus, companion of the god of wine. On the right, Venus watches the scene. Amor weeps, for Mars also forsakes the temptations of love. The snake-headed figure personifies envy.

For the goddess' pose Rubens used a mirror image of that in Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* (no. 51). The figures of Victory and the heroes remain faithful to ancient models. Rubens possessed in his library editions of two books on ancient coins (nos. 41, 42), which are also exhibited here. From these works he drew ideas, which he amplified to achieve a monumental appearance.

## 44

Roman

### CROUCHING VENUS

1st century AD  
Naples, Museo  
Archeologico Nazionale

The *Crouching Venus* is one of the most famous works of the Greek sculptor Doidalses of Bithynia. It was created in the third century BC in what is today north-western Turkey. The statue of Aphrodite/Venus appears to show the goddess of love, youth and fertility as she bathes. This Roman copy of the lost Greek original, like numerous similar examples, adorned Roman fountains and baths. The number of Roman versions of the statue found in Italy and France documents the popularity of this portrayal of Venus. Various versions of Venus crouching that belonged to prominent collections influenced Renaissance sculptors, and were frequently sketched by painters. Rubens too was able to view and sketch this figure. For a number of the paintings displayed here (nos. 45, 46, 47) the antique sculpture served as model, for the pose of a nude woman in a crouching position was an appealing pose for painters.

## 45

Peter Paul Rubens

### VENUS FRIGIDA

1614  
Antwerp, Koninklijk  
Museum voor Schone  
Kunsten

Rubens translates a well-known adage from classical antiquity into painting: “without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus freezes”, meaning that without bread and wine love has a trying time. Dejected and listless the goddess of love cowers. Even Amor, who brings love with his arrows and usually is so lively, seeks shelter from the cold. The hot-blooded satyr, lust personified, bears a cornucopia of grain and grapes, to reawaken joy in life and love. For Rubens the female nude was the epitome of beauty. The goddess Venus embodies this in an ideal manner. Ancient statues of the goddess were considered important models for poses and emotions. The nearby statue (no. 44), a work of the ancient sculptor Doidalses, was the model for this portrayal. Rubens succeeds through his technique in imparting feelings of cold and warmth. The lifelike skin shimmers bluish thus heightening this perception. So does Rubens surpass the possibilities of the ancient sculpture.

## 46

Peter Paul Rubens

### VENUS MOURNING ADONIS

c.1614  
London, Dulwich  
Picture Gallery

This is a preparatory sketch in oil for Rubens' painting of the subject (no. 47). It shows a tragic love story: the goddess Venus falls in love with a mortal, the tireless hunter Adonis. One day, Adonis in spite of Venus' warning goes off to hunt wild boar and is mortally injured. The figure of Venus was inspired by the ancient statue, *Crouching Venus* (no. 44). As in his portrayals of the Lamentation of Christ (no. 65), Rubens employed this pose to express grief upon the death of a beloved person.

## 47

Peter Paul Rubens

### VENUS MOURNING ADONIS

c.1614  
Jerusalem, Israel  
Museum

Venus mourns Adonis. She bends over the corpse of her beloved and gently strokes his head. The goddess is tearful but restrained. The true depth of her pain is expressed by the twisting figures of the graces. Amor gazes at his mother with a tortured expression. Angrily he removes the quiver that contains the arrows which had inflamed Venus' love, and so are responsible for the tragedy. In this way Amor declares that love itself has died. Baroque artists considered the works of art of classical antiquity to be the most forceful communicators of emotions. Here and in other paintings Rubens makes use of the ancient model of the *Crouching Venus* by the Greek Doidalses (no. 44). A single underlying form thus becomes a framework for a range of emotions, including vulnerability, despair and hopelessness. In his paintings, Rubens by his power of imagination reinterprets the model, which remains recognizable, and imbues the motif with fresh connotations.

Virgil Solis

PUB. OVIDII  
NASONIS  
METAMORPHO-  
SEON  
LIBRI XV

c.1587  
Private collection

Virgil Solis was a Renaissance draughtsman and engraver. He produced approximately two thousand prints illustrating Biblical and mythological subjects, so for example Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (183 woodcuts). For his depictions Solis borrowed compositions of well-known contemporaries. His publications thus represented a rich source of figures, compositions and gestures from which other artists could seek inspiration. The dramatic gesture of the grieving Venus may have reappeared in altered form in Rubens' figure of Amor. The position of the hunting dogs, Adonis' faithful companions, was the model for Rubens' own version of the subject (nos. 46, 47). In Rubens' version, one of the dogs shows an interest in the lamentation of the graces. The other hound sniffs at Adonis' blood, as if he were about to lick at it. With this, as in choosing graceful greyhounds, Rubens further develops and heightens the model with his portrayal of the dogs' delight in the blood and stark depiction of violent death.

Titian

VENUS AND  
ADONIS

1555–60  
Los Angeles, The J. Paul  
Getty Museum

Venus attempts to dissuade her lover Adonis from departing for the dangerous hunt. Embracing him firmly she begs him not to go, but Adonis is just leaving. His dogs strain at their leashes. In the background Amor slumbers, his arrows hanging in the tree. These symbolise Adonis' resistance to the goddess' desires and promise of love. The story has a tragic denouement as during the hunt Adonis, a mortal, is killed by a wild boar. Titian's perceptible brushstrokes lend the painting force and dynamism. Here and there the painter also used his finger, as for the arms of Adonis. The vigour of the composition is derived from Venus' twisting position that was inspired by an ancient relief. Titian was the first painter to portray Adonis taking leave of Venus. This innovation and the sensuality of his technique rivet the viewer's attention and made it a stimulating model for Rubens' painting (no. 50).

Peter Paul Rubens

VENUS AND  
ADONIS

c.1630  
New York, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art

Rubens derived important inspiration from the works of Titian in particular. They served as models for his compositional creations. During a visit to Madrid, Rubens saw and copied Titian's work of the same name (no. 49). This copy no longer exists, but the later version seen here, a mirror image of the original composition has been preserved. The nude goddess is shown in frontal view. Here Amor does not slumber, but tries to prevent Adonis from leaving for the hunt. Rubens altered Titian's model, but the latter was meant to remain recognisable. The changes create something new that vies with, and indeed surpasses, the original model. Rubens imbues the moment with greater immediacy. Facial expressions and body language express inner passions more intensely. The depiction of nature too heightens the drama of the scene. In place of Titian's opaque colouration, Rubens' forms shimmer transparent and light. Here oscillating motion dissolves hard contours.

Peter Paul Rubens after  
Titian

VENUS AND  
CUPID

c.1628  
Madrid, Museo Thyssen-  
Bornemisza

The Venetian Renaissance painter Titian was an important source of inspiration for Rubens. In 1555 Titian created a popular painting of Venus in a mirror. For the pose Titian translated a well-known ancient statue into painting. During his stay in Italy or Spain Rubens saw and made a copy of such a painting by Titian. Venus regards herself in a mirror held by Amor. Quiver and bow lie at his feet. The goddess covers herself with a white gown and luxurious, fur-lined velvet cloak. Venus displays as much of her body as she conceals. The beauty gazing at her own image self in a mirror was a frequent motif in love poetry; the author would express envy for the mirror that was able to delight in his lady's enchanting visage. Rubens did not merely imitate, instead he made use of the much admired model to portray a sensual, life-like Venus whose flesh radiates vibrant warmth and softness.

## 52

### GADDI TORSO (PLASTER COPY)

Original: Hellenistic,  
2nd century BC  
Munich, Museum für  
Abgüsse Klassischer  
Bildwerke

This is the cast of a fragment of a Greek statue from the 2nd century BC. The original is to be found in the collections of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The figure was probably a centaur, a creature half-man, half-horse, who fiercely resists his bonds. Since its discovery in Rome during the Renaissance, this statue, like that of *Laocoön* (no. 55), has been one of the most admired ancient sculptures. Artists especially appreciated the dynamic twisting movement of the body and fine rendering of physical details. The powerful musculature frozen in an unusual position was an achievement to be emulated. Rubens used this example in his portrayals of Christ resurrected and triumphant (nos. 53, 54). His use of the ancient model in a different context would have been the object of discussion among knowledgeable viewers, who would not have failed to remark the borrowing from a well-known ancient work.

## 53

Peter Paul Rubens

### ST AUGUSTINE WITH CHRIST AND THE VIRGIN INTERCEDING

c.1615  
Madrid, Real Academia  
de Bellas Artes de San  
Fernando

During his eight years in Italy Rubens studied the works of Italian masters and famous statues of classical antiquity. It was during this time too that he saw the *Gaddi Torso* (no. 52), whose interesting posture and detailed modelling of body features especially attracted the artist's interest. Through the plasticity of his technique Rubens transformed the fragment of ancient statuary into the vigorous stature of the resurrected and triumphant Christ.

The painting illustrates a passage from the Soliloquies of St Augustine (354–430), one of the four Latin Church Fathers. In this text he expresses his love for Christ and Mary, the origin of all his teachings. The boundlessness of divine love is symbolised by nourishment by the blood of the Saviour and milk of the Mother of God, and is depicted by Rubens as a visionary encounter. Augustine kneels upon books which allude to his authorship of numerous theological writings and the Rule of St Augustine. Mitre and crosier are the attributes of a bishop.

## 54

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE RESUR- RECTED AND TRIUMPHANT CHRIST

c.1615  
Florence, Palazzo Pitti,  
Galleria Palatina

In Italy Rubens studied the art of the antiquity. Large works of sculpture in particular were for him as for his contemporaries ideal representations of the human form. The external movement of the figures was admired as the perfect manifestation of emotional expression.

As in the Christ risen from Madrid (no. 53), Rubens here translates the *Gaddi Torso* (no. 52) into painting. Self-confidently he seeks to compete with the masters of antiquity. Rubens offers a reply to the smooth stone surface of the statue with his sweeping style and the vibrant sensuality of his painting.

Christ rises from his deathbed of stone. The resurrection has just taken place. Angels assist the Saviour by holding the crown of thorns and removing his shroud. The stalks of grain suggest the Eucharist. The shining rays of light make Christ resemble Apollo, employing thus another adaptation of ancient models.

## 55

### LAOCOÖN GROUP (PLASTER COPY)

Original: 40–20 BC  
Munich, Museum für  
Abgüsse Klassischer  
Bildwerke

This is a cast made from one of the most renowned sculptures of the ancient world. The lost bronze original, a work of Agesander, Polydorus and Athenodoros of Rhodes, was made around 200 BC. Only a single copy of the sculpture in marble, which dates from the time of Christ's birth, has been preserved. The priest Laocoön warned the Trojans that their city would fall, should they accept the horse that was the gift of the Greeks. Athena who favoured the Greeks thereupon had Laocoön and both his sons slain by two serpents. The unsurpassed representation of the death struggle made the work one of the most important models for the depiction of agony and despair ever since its sensational discovery in Rome in 1506. Rubens too studied and sketched the famed statue (nos. 56, 57). In many of his portrayals of dramatic suffering he cites the figure's tense strain and face distorted by pain (nos. 58, 59).

# 56

Peter Paul Rubens

## STUDY OF THE LAOCOÖN GROUP

c.1601/02  
Cologne, Wallraf-  
Richartz-Museum &  
Fondation Corboud

Passion, an expressive representation of straining muscles, pain and fear of death are much admired features of the *Laocoön Group*. These characteristics made the group one of the models used most frequently by post-Medieval artists. Rubens studied the sculpture and made sketches of details as in the neighbouring sheet (no. 57). Both for his Samson (no. 58) and two figures of the Ignatius altar (nos. 59, 60) Rubens drew on the dramatic gestures and pathos-laden facial expression of the classical work.

# 57

Peter Paul Rubens

## TORSO OF LAOCOÖN IN THREE-QUARTER VIEW

c.1601/02  
Dresden, Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen,  
Kupferstich-Kabinett

Rubens sketched the *Laocoön Group* in the Vatican from a number of different perspectives (no. 55). A comparison with the plaster copy shows that Laocoön's arm, which at the time was still lost, had been replaced by the almost straight, diagonally outstretched arm recorded in Rubens sketches. Rubens chose this perspective so as to study the foreshortening of torso and head of the writhing Laocoön, as well as the striking composition of the figure's muscles.

# 58

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE BLINDING OF SAMSON

c.1609/10  
Madrid, Museo Thyssen-  
Bornemisza

In this oil sketch Rubens lays the groundwork for a vigorous composition depicting a story from the Old Testament. The Book of Judges tells of Samson and his extraordinary physical strength, who was overcome only by a ruse of his beloved, the treacherous Delilah. Soldiers of the Philistines, Delilah's people, subdued the Biblical hero. Delilah had previously shorn Samson's hair thus causing him to lose his power. At the vertex of the composition, and thus the focal point of the forces depicted, Samson's eyes are being put out with a dagger. The posture of the nude body of the two central figures reveals the influence of the famous *Laocoön Group*, the prototype of agony and pathos-laden movement (no. 55). However, Rubens varies the obvious citations by making changes to grouping and composition. By his artistic resolve Rubens created something new even as he drew on the famous model.

# 59

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE MIRACLES OF ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

c.1617/18  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuit order. In this painting he stands at the head of an orderly queue of Jesuit priests. His inspired gaze is directed upwards with calm concentration even as he turns to the gathering. At the foot of the altar, the "possessed" writhe in wild ecstasy. Through the intervention of the man of God they are freed by divine action from their earthly torment. The figures distorted by pain are variants of Laocoön (no. 55). In particular, the figure lying on its back is a spectacularly staged version of the classical model. The distinctively new conception of the figures makes clear that Rubens was not interested in merely imitating, but in improving on and surpassing his famous models.

Rubens completed this monumental painting for the altar of the Jesuits' new church in Antwerp just a few years before Ignatius was canonised. This work could be displayed interchangeably on the same altar with the Francis Xavier (no. 77) opposite, as well as with other works.

# 60

Peter Paul Rubens

## OIL SKETCH FOR THE MIRACLES OF ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

c.1615/16  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

This sketch in oil was made to lay the groundwork for the large altarpiece (no. 59). A close examination reveals significant differences to the altarpiece as finally executed. Rubens thus eliminated the dead child and grieving mother in the lower portion of the sketch's centre. Similarly, the staff of the young man, who kneels on the choir screen to the mother's left, disappears. In this way the figure of the "possessed", which was inspired by Laocoön, is made clearer and given a monumental quality, to the advantage of the composition as a whole.

## 61

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE LAMENTATION

1614/15  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Mary and John mourn Jesus' death. In the seclusion of the cave-like tomb Mary does her dead son a final service. Carefully she extracts thorns from his wounded skin. This act of love directs our attention to the still half-open eyes of the corpse. The open mouth illustrates death unsparingly. Blood emerges from Jesus' nose, the wound on the side of his chest, and from those on his hands. Thus does the last vestige of life depart his mortal remains. The faces of the living are moist with tears. Two of Mary's tears fall on Jesus' arm. Even the smallest detail, the plasticity of the freshly fallen tears, demonstrates Rubens' supreme mastery.

A comparison of *Venus Mourning Adonis* (no. 63), this *Lamentation*, and the *Entombment* (no. 62) reveals the interesting transformation of a mythological to a Christian theme and vice versa. Rubens here also composes a new recognisable models and gives them different meanings.

## 62

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE ENTOMBMENT

c.1612  
Los Angeles, The J. Paul  
Getty Museum

In his sketch *Venus Mourning Adonis* (no. 63) Rubens developed a basic formula for scenes of lamentation and entombment. The bent corpse of Christ corresponds to this formula. Rubens' artistic concept of grief was so pronounced as to permit it to be directly transferred to other compositions. His ideas for pictures were conceived as movable. Artistic creation took place by transformation. Rubens borrowed the figure from a dead man from a picture by Tobias Stimmer (no. 64). In this depiction the outspread and elongated limbs anticipate the position of Christ. However, differently than in Stimmer's crude rendering, Rubens endows the lifeless body, which is supported by Mary and John, with monumentality and grandeur. The action seems to stand virtually still. Christ's body despite its terrible wounds is portrayed as a perfect, idealised nude. The stalks of grain, symbol of the Eucharist, refer to the Christian hope of resurrection.

## 63

Peter Paul Rubens

### VENUS MOURNING ADONIS

c.1608/12  
Washington, D.C.,  
National Gallery of  
Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce  
Fund

Venus mourns the dead Adonis. Above the pair Rubens sketched two heads. With the inscription "she inhales the dying man's spirit with her mouth" Rubens recalls Latin literary models. This quickly executed sketch shows the transformation of the motif of a loved one's death in classical mythology to a Christian theme. A comparison with the *Lamentation* (no. 61) and *Entombment of Christ* (no. 62) makes the resemblance apparent. Adonis and Christ were long associated with another owing to their divine origin and resurrection.

## 64

Peter Paul Rubens after  
Tobias Stimmer

### STUDY OF FIVE MALE FIGURES

c.1597/98  
Rotterdam, Museum  
Boijmans van  
Beuningen

Making copies of the works of earlier artists was part of a painter's training. Later, this exercise stimulated an artist's own creative imagination by providing new impulses. Tobias Stimmer (1539–84) was a Swiss painter and draughtsman. His book *Neue künstliche Figuren biblischer Historien* was published in Basel in 1576. Rubens copied individual figures and motifs from the woodcut prints distributing them over this sheet. The scene in which these originally appeared was no longer of importance. Stimmer's figure of a dead man, as seen here in Rubens' sketch, served as inspiration for a series of depictions of mourning by Rubens. Only the core motif, the corpse which sprawls precipitously in the direction of the viewer, is used whilst legs and head are modified (no. 65).

## 65

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE LAMENTATION

1614  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

This small, very finely executed painting was for use in private devotion, and was intended to allow the faithful to contemplate at close hand Christ's suffering. At the centre of the composition is the stiff corpse of Christ. Rubens sharpens death's bleakness through the unusual position of the body and emphatic light. One source of inspiration for the image of the lifeless body were Tobias Stimmer's figures, of which Rubens had made sketches (no. 64). The figures around Jesus display various stages of grief. John, silent in sorrow, supports Maria. Ashen-faced and gaze void of tears she bends over her dead son and gently shuts his eyes. Mary Magdalene, on the left in a grey shimmering robe, pulls at her long open hair. The deathly pale arm of the dead Christ already stiff lies in her lap, and contrasts starkly with her rosy skin. The three mourning women on the right display different gestures of anguish.

# 66

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN

c.1612/16  
Vienna, Albertina

In the only known preparatory drawing by Rubens for an Assumption of Mary changes, or *pentimenti*, made by the artist in the course of sketching can be seen. These were made in the area around the putti to achieve a more satisfying result. The composition appears to represent a further development of the oil sketch in the Hermitage (no. 68) that was made in preparation for the large altarpiece (no. 69). In depicting the putti Rubens was guided by his sketch of Pordenone's fresco (no. 70).

# 67

Peter Paul Rubens

## STUDY OF A MALE NUDE BENDING FORWARD

c.1613  
Vienna, Albertina

Rubens made this study for the figure of the apostle in the left foreground of his *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (no. 69). The same figure appears virtually unaltered in the *modello* (no. 68) which was executed somewhat earlier. Alongside the man, Rubens drew the right arm again so as to develop the image of a hand grasping a heavy load. In the end, he did not make use of these studies in the paintings: the left edge of all these pictures ends, almost identically, before the man's wrist, as in this half-length sketch.

# 68

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ASSUMPTION AND CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

c.1609/11  
St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum

This loan was made possible by the support of



Some dozen large-format paintings and sketches in oil by Rubens represent the Assumption of Mary. Rubens executed no fewer than seven altarpieces treating the subject, highlighting its importance for the Catholic church of the day. This oil sketch was likely presented to the Antwerp cathedral chapter as a proposal for the commission for the main altar. Although Rubens was awarded the commission, the work was never executed. In the event, Rubens later used this *modello* for a revised version of the subject for the Jesuits (no. 69). The lower area of the picture in particular, showing figures of women and apostles, he changed only slightly. Rubens did however dispense with the coronation of Mary by Christ and angels playing musical instruments in the upper area of the painting. Rubens made his sketch after Pordenone (no. 70) about ten years before executing this *modello*. Important for this and other depictions of the Assumption was the model of lively putti soaring skyward.

# 69

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN

1611–1614/21  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery

Rubens probably painted this picture as early as 1611 for Antwerp Cathedral, where however it was never displayed. Instead he used the painting several years later—having changed it—for the Jesuit church. In the lower portion of the picture the artist reused a group of figures from the oil sketch (no. 68). Rubens was thus the first painter to include in an Assumption of Mary women standing at an empty tomb, a circumstance not reported in the Bible. In the tomb they find not a corpse, but fragrant roses. It was only in the final version that Rubens separated the figures in the lower field into two groups. In the oil sketch the figures still occupy the entire breadth of the picture. Rubens then overpainted the cypresses and the middle apostle in the background. The foot revealed about 60 years ago in the course of cleaning belongs to this eliminated figure. During his sojourn in Italy Rubens made a sketch of a work by Pordenone (no. 70).

# 70

Peter Paul Rubens after Giovanni Antonio Pordenone

## GOD THE FATHER SUPPORTED BY ANGELS

c.1600/03  
London, The Courtauld Gallery

It was only from the time of his stay in Italy (1600–08) that Rubens began to use colour in his sketches. One of the earliest and most forceful examples is this large sheet. He probably made the sketch shortly after his arrival in Italy, inspired by a fresco by Antonio Pordenone (1482/83–1539) in Treviso cathedral. Rubens employed black chalk for the outlines of the drawing and red chalk for the figures' skin. Over this he used a brush to apply watercolour, which he used only in this sketch.



## 71

Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders (Fruit and Snipe)

### THE CHRIST CHILD AND THE INFANT ST JOHN WITH TWO ANGELS

c.1615/20  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Picture Gallery

Jesus reclines upon a red cloak, a symbol of his dominion and his Passion. The wine and apples are references both to this and to divine love. The fruit and birds were painted by Frans Snyders, a specialist in the field. Jesus' gentle touch is directed at John the Baptist, to whom the lamb and fur belong. Two putti complete the group of children. The posture of the young John matches that of a putto in the Assumption (no. 69), but altered to assume a relaxed, reclining position. An unusual change can be discerned on comparing both Jesus and the putto on the left with man in the drawing (no. 67), which was executed to develop the bent posture of the apostle in the left foreground of the *Assumption of the Virgin Mary* (no. 69). Jesus' left arm corresponds to the study of the arm in the drawing, but is transformed, like the putto, from the powerful and masculine to the child-like and idyllic. Rubens thus demonstrates his skill in reusing and adapting standard poses in different contexts.

## 72

Peter Paul Rubens

### A BLIND MAN WITH OUT-STRETCHED ARMS

c.1617/18  
Vienna, Albertina

Rubens drew detailed studies from live models, who would pose in specific positions according to his instructions. He needed these drawings in order to determine accurately the correct pose of a work's principal figures. Facial expression, musculature, and folds of clothing could be studied and drawn with precision. Whilst in the earlier *modello* (no. 78) this man appears holding a staff, the position of his arms in this study emphasises his blindness yet more powerfully.

## 73

Peter Paul Rubens

### VARIOUS STUDIES FOR FIGURES IN »THE MIRACLES OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER«

c.1617/18  
London, Victoria and Albert Museum

This study is of the young man who in the painting's foreground is raised from the dead by Francis Xavier. As in the case of the blind man (no. 72), this figure was altered from that in the *modello* (no. 78) and included in this revised form in the altarpiece. The legs were probably cut out of a different study and pasted onto this sheet. They are similar to the legs of the suffering figure in the lower right corner of the painting, but do not appear in exactly the same form in the altarpiece.

## 74

Peter Paul Rubens

### MAN IN KOREAN COSTUME

1617  
Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum

This portrait of a Korean official replaced the man with turban in the *modello* (no. 78), and was the basis for the figure in the centre of the altarpiece (no. 77). Another interpretation considers this figure to be the Chinese merchant Yppong, who had made an entry in the family album of the Dutchman Nicolaas de Vrise. For this purpose he had a small portrait of himself drawn. Rubens may have used this small drawing as a model for his own, for which he reconstructed the original pose with the help of a model.

## 75

Johann Theodor de Bry and Johann Israel De Bry

### INDIA ORIENTALIS

1599–1601  
Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

In the background of the altarpiece (no. 77) an idol is cast down by divine power from the altar of a colossal temple. Rubens' inspiration for the image can be attributed to an edition of this book, which he had purchased in 1613. It is the relation of a journey to East Asia. People bring sacrifices to a statue of Narasimha, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. The stomach is the head of a demon that the deity had subdued. In Europe such creatures were traditionally associated with the devil.

## 76

Tintoretto

### THE FORGE OF VULCAN

c.1576/77  
Venice, Fondazione Musei Civici, Palazzo Ducale, Sala dell'Anticollegio

Vulcan is the god of fire and metalworking. As the gods' skilful blacksmith he fashions arms and armour both for them and also for some mortals. These were polished objects of supreme craftsmanship like those seen lying at the blacksmiths' feet. These are the cyclopes, Vulcan's servants, who live in the depths of a volcano. Such a fire-spitting mountain and a ruin are pictured in the background. Both the fertility of the earth, which yields the raw materials for Vulcan's works, and fire with its capacity for both civilization and destruction, are thus also subjects of the painting.

Venice was one of the first cities in Italy that Rubens visited. He studied Tintoretto's painting for its depiction of vigorous physical activity, movement and exertion. Rubens placed the model into a completely different context. The unusual pose of the blacksmith, who is portrayed from the rear, provided the inspiration for the figure of the pauper in the lower right section of the altarpiece (no. 77).

## 77

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE MIRACLES OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER

c.1617/18  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

St Francis Xavier was a Jesuit missionary in Asia. Through his intervention the sick were said to have been cured and the dead raised to life. The painting shows divine force, the symbol of faith, smashing an idol. Notable here are the figures of the foreground that were developed in preparatory studies (nos. 72, 73, 74). Among these are some that Rubens derived from Italian artists, for example, Tintoretto (no. 76). To lend some of the figures an Oriental appearance he used costumes drawn from a variety of sources (no. 75). Precursor of the figure attired in yellow gown and high hat at the picture's centre is an impressive study of a man in Asian costume (no. 74). Rubens intentionally guides us rapidly from one group of figures to the next, so taking us through the entire scene. The composition is rounded out by the architectural elements in the background. The skilfully arranged room appears at once compressed and spacious, and fulfils the demands of legibility. Rubens planned the painting in an oil sketch (no. 78).

## 78

Peter Paul Rubens

### OIL SKETCH FOR THE MIRACLES OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER

c.1616/17  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

With this sketch in oil Rubens prepared the execution of the large altarpiece in the Jesuit church in Antwerp. It also allowed his Jesuit patrons to review his plan. Next he defined the individual figures by making detailed studies. His method of proceeding becomes clear when the preparatory study of the blind man (no. 72) is compared to the same figure in the finished work: the latter bears a greater resemblance to the detailed study than to the *modello*. The position of the hand differs, and the figure in the *modello* appears also to hold a rod. The drawing of the man raised from the dead (no. 73) also corresponds more closely to the figure in the completed altarpiece. So too does that of the Oriental (no. 74) at the centre of the picture, who here is shown wearing a turban.

## 79

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE DEFEAT OF SENNACHERIB

c.1617  
Vienna, Albertina

When the Assyrian king Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem the city seemed destined to fall. Only through the apparition of an angel could the host be dispersed. Typical of Rubens' battle scenes is the animated interaction of man and beast, which here draws on Leonardo's depiction of the *Battle of Anghiari*. The drawing resembles in structure that of the *Last Battle of the Consul Decius Mus*. Here too, the protagonist is depicted atop a rearing horse at the centre of the fray while terrified soldiers struggle for their lives, or take flight.

## 80

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE DEATH OF DECIUS MUS

1616/17  
Madrid, Museo  
Nacional del Prado

Livy in his *History of Rome* tells the story of Consul Publius Decius Mus' self-abnegation. Following a vision seen in a dream, he vowed to sacrifice his own life to secure the victory of Roman forces in their battle with the Latins. Rubens chose this historical event as the subject of a cycle of paintings, which today is in the collections of the Prince of Liechtenstein.

Decius Mus' valiant death provided Rubens the opportunity to execute a dramatic battle scene. In the preparatory sketch in oil from the Prado, we encounter man and beast in close interaction. Rubens joins riders and horses in a seemingly inseparable jumble. The focus of attention is less on the epic violence of battle than on a more profound meaning. The consul is at the centre of the scene. Struck by a lance, he falls from his rearing horse. His glance is directed above to a genius of victory in the heavens, recalling Christian portrayals of martyrdom. The consul's willingness to sacrifice himself is thus given a religious interpretation that conforms to Counterreformation dogma.

# 81

Michiel Coxcie

## THE DEATH OF ABEL

after 1539  
Madrid, Museo  
Nacional del Prado

Michiel Coxcie, who today has almost been forgotten, was one of the leading painters of the late 16th century. As court painter in Brussels he was considered Rubens' precursor in the southern Netherlands. His portrayal of the Biblical fratricide probably served at once as inspiration and challenge for Rubens. While Cain is punished by God for the murder of his brother, the foreground is dominated by Abel's lifeless body lying back down. With the head located hard on the lower edge of the canvas, the body seems almost to fall out of the frame. The unusual position of the body is a consequence of the picture's format. Coxcie has here turned Michelangelo's Christ of the *Last Judgement* by 180 degrees, changing the standing figure into a reclining one. Rubens appreciated the difficulties of perspective that resulted and further developed the posture of the male figure. The new figure later appeared in a number of his paintings as the bound Prometheus (no. 85), Hippolytus falling from his chariot (no. 84), and the Biblical commander Holofernes (no. 82), who is slain by Judith with his own sword.

# 82

Peter Paul Rubens

## JUDITH BEHEADING HOLOFERNES

1609/10  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

This study for a painting, which has since been lost, depicts the dramatic climax of the Biblical story. The Jewish heroine Judith seduces and slays the general Holofernes to free her people from enemy oppression. By the victim's posture Rubens heightens the violent intensity of the episode. The precariously downward-bent torso has its origin in Michiel Coxcie's painting of the murdered Abel (no. 81), and can be found in modified form in later works portraying the death of Hippolytus (no. 84) and Prometheus (no. 85) chained.

# 83

Michiel Coxcie, re-touched by Peter Paul Rubens

## ABEL SLAIN BY CAIN

c.1609  
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam  
Museum

Rubens possessed five drawings by or after Michiel Coxcie, which he partially re-touched according to his own notions. Thus he underscores with just a few masterful brushstrokes parts of the musculature of Abel, who is shown lying upon the ground. Michiel Coxcie executed this sketch in preparation for his painting of the Biblical fratricide. The unusual posture of the male nude served Rubens as a basis for other reclining figures. Portrayals of the mythological heroes Prometheus (no. 85) and Hippolytus (no. 84), as well as of the Biblical general Holofernes (no. 82), can be traced to this model.

# 84

Peter Paul Rubens

## DEATH OF HIPPOLYTUS

1611-13  
Cambridge, Fitzwilliam  
Museum

Theseus held his son Hippolytus responsible for the death of Phaedra, his wife. Having entreated Poseidon for revenge, the god sent a sea monster to hound Hippolytus. Rubens places the irresistible force of the horses rearing in panic at the centre of the event. They heave Hippolytus' chariot dragging him to his death. The twisting muscular torso of the nude male figure is closely related to Rubens' depiction of Prometheus (no. 85), which he had completed shortly before. Rubens borrowed the idea for the figure's unusual position from Michiel Coxcie's reclining Abel (no. 82), but executed the fall more convincingly. He drew especially on Michelangelo's drawing of Tityos. Corresponding to this model, the head is shown upright and the body lying on its side. Despite this pronounced similarity, the original source should not be ignored. The upwards outstretched arm and bent legs of the athletic figure recall the ancient *Laocoön* (no. 55), which may be considered the origin of the portrayal.

# 85

Peter Paul Rubens,  
Frans Snyders (eagle)

## PROMETHEUS

1611/12-18  
Philadelphia, Museum  
of Art

Prometheus, bringer of fire and benefactor of mankind, is punished by Jupiter for his deed. Chained to a rock he endures terrible suffering as an eagle daily feeds on his liver. Rubens impressively renders the agony of the titan, upon whom the bird—the work of Frans Snyder—pounces with violent force. The male figure is typical of Rubens' method of appropriating existing models. The basis was Michiel Coxcie's somewhat stiff depiction of the murdered Abel (no. 81), which Rubens endeavours to reinterpret more convincingly. To this end, he enhances the portrayal of the reclining figure with the artistic achievements of the Italian Renaissance. The unusual posture and definition of musculature hark back to Michelangelo's drawing of Tityos. The asymmetrical composition recalls Titian's version of the same subject. Origin of all these formal features is the ancient *Laocoön* (no. 55), which was the basis for the study of pain and suffering. Here Rubens combines the northern model with Michelangelo's heroic nude, the palette and atmosphere of Titian, and the ideal physique of antiquity to create an intensely individual portrayal.

Milan

## MEDUSA SHIELD

c.1535 or 1541  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Imperial  
Armoury

The richly decorated *Medusa Shield* did not merely protect its owner from a foe's attack, it endowed him with invincibility. With eyes wide open Medusa glares at the onlooker, who thereupon would be turned to stone according to Ovid's version of the myth. The monster with its lethal gaze was subdued by Perseus with the aid of the mirrored shield of Pallas Athena. The head of Medusa thereafter adorned the shield, and according to Homer made the hero Agamemnon unconquerable. Emperor Karl V, who received this shield from his brother Ferdinand I in commemoration of his campaign in Africa, thus became part of this tradition and could direct Medusa's protective stare against his enemies. In painting too, Medusa's head is generally portrayed on a round shield. Leonardo and Caravaggio had previously chosen a tondo as the form, in order to show the snake-framed face in its original function. Rubens decided in favour of an entirely new approach (no. 89). Without detracting from the focus on the horrific head, he dispenses with the frontal portrayal and places the head in a narrative context.

Padua

## CRAWLING VIPER

1st half 16th century  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Kunstammer

Casts made from nature, which were especially popular in northern Italy, are fashioned by a simple process. The animals were coated with clay, fired and the incinerated remains washed out. The resulting form could then be cast with bronze. These much sought-after collector's objects permitted a close study of the animals and were also greatly favoured by painters. Rubens may have made use of such a model for Medusa's crown of serpents (no. 89). The winding snake may be seen in the right foreground of the painting.

Joachim Camerarius

SYMBOLORUM ET  
EMBLEMATUM EX  
AQUATILIBUS ET  
REPTILIBUS  
DESUMPTORUM  
CENTURIA  
QUARTA

1654  
Vienna, Österreichische  
Nationalbibliothek

The emblem with the descriptive title "Venus Improba" (Wicked Venus) shows two closely entwined vipers engaged in copulation. As Pliny explains in his *Naturalis Historia*, the male lays his head in that of the female which bites it off after mating has been consummated. This behaviour is imputed to humans in the emblem's caption: the "calculating woman" ensnares the man and lures him into a mortal trap. However, Rubens' attention was probably more attracted by the unusual position of two entwined vipers, which he later used in the *Head of Medusa* (no. 89).

Peter Paul Rubens,  
Frans Synders

THE HEAD OF  
MEDUSA

1617–18  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

As Ovid relates in the *Metamorphoses*, Neptune raped the beautiful Medusa in the temple of Minerva. In punishment the goddess transformed Medusa's magnificent hair into snakes and caused her glance to turn the viewer to stone. Finally, Perseus succeeded with the aid of a mirrored shield in approaching and slaying her. Rubens' contemporaries saw in the Medusa more than a horrifying creature. It was interpreted both as a triumph of stoic reason over the foes of virtue, and as the possibility of controlling passions and exercising stoical equanimity through implacable realism. The snakes were likely executed by a specialist, Frans Snyders, but the idea was Rubens'. Whilst the comportment of the two intertwined animals to the right was likely drawn from contemporary emblems (no. 88), their zoologically accurate rendering is based on Rubens' own close study of nature. For some examples, such as the winding snake in the right foreground, Rubens probably also used casts made from nature (no. 87), which were particularly popular in northern Italy.

Peter Paul Rubens

THE TRIPTYCH  
OF ST ILDEFONSO1630–32  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Isabella Clara Eugenia, viceroy in the Netherlands, commissioned this triptych for the Ildefonso Brotherhood in Brussels. The fraternity took its name from a Spanish Benedictine monk and later archbishop of Toledo, who was known especially for his veneration of the Virgin Mary. The altarpiece depicts an incident from the saint's life: while at prayer in church the Madonna appeared in otherworldly splendour and seated herself on the bishop's throne. She bestowed upon him a chasuble she had herself fashioned and which the saint received humbly. Rubens here links the sublime and holy with the emotional, human element in an impressive manner. The side panels portray Archduke Albrecht and his consort accompanied by their patron saints, St Albert de Louvain and St Elisabeth of Hungary. Conforming to Jesuit conventions they are not pictured in the central panel of the altarpiece, but clearly separate from the image of the saintly miracle. Rubens nonetheless attempts to integrate the figures into the central event by approximating colour and composition of the three panels.

Peter Paul Rubens

THE TRIPTYCH  
OF ST ILDEFONSO1630/31  
St Petersburg, The State  
Hermitage Museum

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The first sketch for the *Triptych of St Ildefonso* depicts the spiritual event—subsequently executed as a triptych—as a single composition against the backdrop of a church interior. This sketch makes clear Rubens' intention to integrate more closely the patrons in the saint's wonder. St Ildefonso is pictured as he receives the sumptuous chasuble that Mary herself had crafted while the donors of the altar, Archduke Albrecht and his wife in the company of their patron saints, witness the miracle. The later division of the painting into three was probably already envisaged. The imposing columns around which green drapes lie and the prie-dieux at which the patrons kneel suggest the compositional separation into heavenly and earthly spheres. In comparison to the later painting a number of dissimilarities in the repertory of figures may be noted: the female saints in the centre are arrayed differently, whilst St Ildefonso's followers near the column on the right are startled by the appearance of the Virgin and flee in fright from the church.

Peter Paul Rubens

THE HOLY  
FAMILY UNDER  
THE APPLE TREE  
(OUTER WINGS  
OF THE  
TRIPTYCH OF  
ST ILDEFONSO)1630–1632  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum,  
Picture Gallery

Originally these two panels (now connected) were the two outer side panels of the *Triptych of St Ildefonso* (no. 90). It is unusual as the two panels have not been separated from one another by a frame, but instead have been combined as a cohesive composition. The trunk of the apple tree roughly forms the composition's central axis and the juncture of the two panels. It divides the event into two parts: Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus are depicted on the right half; John with his parents, Zechariah and Elisabeth on the left. The figures are so positioned above one another that they remain completely contained within the panels. Differently than the festive atmosphere on the interior of the triptych, the scene here is idyllic and peaceful. Symbolic elements are not absent: the apple tree is both the tree of knowledge and an allusion to the Cross. It shows Mary as the second Eve who together with her son overcomes original sin. As the Ildefonso Chapel was originally consecrated to Mary, Rubens probably decided to employ the theme for the altarpiece's exterior.

Peter Paul Rubens

THE VIRGIN  
ADORED BY  
ANGELS (SKETCH  
FOR THE ALTAR-  
PIECE IN THE  
ROMAN CHURCH  
OF SANTA MARIA  
IN VALLICELLA)1608  
Vienna, Albertina

Towards the end of his sojourn in Italy Rubens received what was certainly the most sought-after commission in all of Rome: the decoration of the main altar in the Chiesa Nuova. In this precisely structured sketch, the final pictorial solution—definition of two levels—may already be seen. The angel kneeling at the lower right occupied Rubens' attention even after the altarpiece had been completed. The characteristic position of the arm and flowing gowns, as well as the gaze directed upwards, anticipate the archangel Gabriel in the *Annunciation* (no. 94), which Rubens was to execute shortly after his return from Italy.

# 94

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ANNUNCIATION

c.1609  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture Gallery

Gowns fluttering, the angel Gabriel enters the confines of Mary's small bedroom. Startled from her prayers, she recoils. In line with Counterreformation doctrines, Rubens underscores the spiritual character of the scene. The event is illuminated by the rays of the dove symbolising the Holy Spirit while putti descend from heaven. Only the prie-dieu and bed in the background allude to the intimate location of the occasion. Rubens emphasises the two protagonists and their interaction. For the figure of Gabriel, Rubens drew upon an angel in his sketch for the altarpiece in the Chiesa Nuova in Rome (no. 93). Both posture and intimate gestures recall Federico Barocci's *Annunciation*, which has a similar arrangement of figures (no. 97). In both paintings Mary kneels at her prie-dieu in an elevated position on the left. The angel entering the scene from the right glances gently upwards to Mary and points at her with his right hand. As in Barocci's version, the hands of the two seem almost to touch. Although Gabriel and Mary react to the spiritual moment with animated movement, an impression of intimacy and familiarity prevails.

# 95

Schelte Adamsz.  
Bolswert

## THE ANNUNCIATION

after 1620  
Vienna, Albertina

Rubens probably started around 1610 to reproduce his paintings in the form of copperplate engravings. Whilst these prints were intended to augment the master's fame, they represent today a valuable source of information about the earlier condition of his paintings. So Schelte à Bolswert's copy of the *Annunciation* indicates that the work has been reduced on all four sides. The engraving makes a lighter impression; the scene is less crowded. The heavens too, populated by putti, occupy a larger area.

# 96

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ANNUNCIATION

1627  
Vienna, Albertina

Rubens produced this drawing as the basis for an engraving that appeared in an edition of *Breviarum Romanum* in 1627. Differently than in the Vienna *Annunciation* (no. 94), the arrangement of the figures has been significantly altered. The angel pictured in flight is enveloped in flowing draperies. Its energetic gesture of outspread arms stands in pronounced contrast to the contemplative Virgin in a posture of repose, respectfully bowing her head. She seems to have recovered from her initial shock. Her reluctance is transformed to humble acceptance.

# 97

Federico Barocci

## THE ANNUNCIATION

1582–84  
Rome, Vatican,  
Pinacoteca Vaticana

At the pinnacle of his career Federico Barocci created a work that was to give evidence of his artistic abilities. The *Annunciation* that Barocci painted for his most important patron, Francesco Maria II della Rovere, reflects his innovative handling of colour, space and light. Thirty years later, Rubens probably took the work as the point of departure for his own version of the subject (no. 94). The work, now at the Kunsthistorisches Museum, shows a similar arrangement of figures. He adopts the intimate gestures and relationship of the protagonists to one another present in Barocci's work and infuses them with Baroque pathos. The scene is flooded with light that accentuates the energetic movement of the divine messenger. Gabriel's gold-entwined locks and his gown's vivid, shining colours contrast with the blue and white of the Virgin's dress. The iridescent colouration of the figures harks back to Barocci. Whilst the Madonna, clad in a dark blue mantle, is cast in a brightly shining light that falls from above, the angel attired in robes interwoven with gold appears animated by an inner light.

Peter Paul Rubens after  
Caravaggio

## THE ENTOMBMENT

c.1612–14  
Ottawa, National  
Gallery of Canada

Towards the end of his first stay in Italy, Rubens received an important commission: the decoration of the main altar of the Chiesa Nuova in Rome. Five years earlier, Caravaggio had produced an *Entombment* for one of the church's side chapels, which now attracted Rubens' interest. In Antwerp, Rubens executed this reworked version of the painting based on a sketch. Whilst he remained relatively faithful to the original, he nonetheless made a number of significant changes: John, who embraces Christ's upper torso in an intimate gesture, descends from the stone plate towards the open tomb. Joseph of Arimathea bows low under the weight of the corpse and gazes, along the axis of the composition's movement, into the tomb's void. Rubens also rearranged the group of figures in the background. He dispensed on the far right with Mary's dramatic gesture, and integrated Jesus's mother more closely into the group. Caravaggio's theatrical farewell scene, which focuses on Mary's grief, thus became in Rubens' treatment a true entombment.

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE ENTOMBMENT

1615/16  
London,  
The Courtauld Gallery

Here Rubens develops Caravaggio's *Entombment* yet further. The location and most of the protagonists remain unchanged. The colour palette also corresponds to that of the model. However, the representations are given added dynamism. Rubens breaks with the original spatial concept, instead accentuating movement towards the here clearly discernible tomb. Nicodemus, John, and Joseph of Arimathea try to slide Christ's body carefully down to the tomb, which is yet closed. While Nicodemus rests his right leg on the tomb to better support the upper part of the torso, Joseph of Arimathea attempts to stabilise the corpse from above. He holds two ends of the shroud with both hands and a third between his teeth to prevent the heavy corpse from slipping from his grasp. From the grave slab Mary watches the scene with a look of concern. Head facing down, the dead Christ lies upon the white shroud at a precarious angle. His deathly pallor and elongated body dominate the scene and communicate powerfully the physical torment of the Passion.

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE DISCOVERY OF CALLISTO'S PREGNANCY

1601/02  
Berlin, Staatliche  
Museen zu Berlin,  
Kupferstichkabinett

The nymph Callisto was seduced by Jupiter thereby infringing the goddess Diana's requirement of chastity. Rubens here shows the moment in which Callisto's pregnancy is revealed. As in the scenes of the *Entombment*, he concentrates on framing a feeble body with a series of assisting figures. He experiments with depicting the drapery tautened to provide a sensual contrast to the enfeebled body. The sheet is an example of Rubens' free use of formal solutions that are repeatedly employed in the most varied contexts.

Hendrick Goltzius

## THE ENTOMBMENT

1596  
Frankfurt am Main,  
Städel Museum

Hendrick Goltzius worked two years on a twelve-part series of engravings depicting the Passion of Christ, one of which is this scene of the Entombment of Christ. Soon after the series' publication Rubens copied four of the twelve images. At the time he was still an apprentice in the workshop of Otto van Veen. Goltzius' series with its extraordinary variety of grotesque gestures, facial expressions and draperies presented excellent material for Rubens both to practice and to enlarge his repertoire of figures.

Peter Paul Rubens  
after Goltzius

## THE ENTOMBMENT

1597/98  
Paris, Musée du Louvre

Rubens executed this drawing based on an engraving by Hendrick Goltzius shortly after the illustration first appeared in 1597. Rubens restricted himself to just a small section of the original. Rubens suggests Christ's body only schematically, concentrating instead on the figure, shown from the rear, who is lowering the legs of the corpse into the grave. His interest was probably attracted not only by the motif of the figure carrying the body, but also by the early sixteenth-century costume. The figure's head covering, bag and boots are rendered in detail.

# 103

Hellenistic

## TORSO OF A CENTAUR

2nd–1st century BC  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Collection  
of Greek and Roman  
Antiquities

Half human, half horse, centaurs symbolised the unrestrained, the libidinous, and the barbaric. Motivated by lasciviousness and their combative nature they are viewed as the antithesis to human order. However, like every being they too are defenceless against the power and caprice of love. A sculptural group from Ancient Rome shows an old and a youthful centaur who are tamed by their riders, two *erotes*. The subject is the effect of love on young and old. Whilst the older centaur suffers under its rider by whom he has been bound and tied, the younger centaur takes visible pleasure in the ministrations of the *erote*. The torso shown here is a replica of the younger centaur. Despite the very fragmentary character of the sculpture, the interplay of bone structure and musculature is remarkable. The impressive and detailed shaping of the torso leaning slightly backwards doubtless attracted Rubens' interest; he not only sketched the older centaur in Palazzo Borghese (no. 104), but also transformed him into the figure of Christ in the St Petersburg *Ecce Homo* (no. 105).

# 104

Peter Paul Rubens

## CENTAUR TAMED BY CUPID

1601/02  
Cologne, Wallraf-  
Richartz-Museum &  
Fondation Corboud

The marble statue of an elderly centaur being subdued by an *erote* was discovered in Rome in the 17th century. It was placed in the Palazzo Borghese, where Rubens made several drawings of it. An *erote* grabs the centaur, whose hands are bound to its back, by its ear. Rubens gives special emphasis to the centaur's dramatically rearing torso and tortured facial expression, thus preparing its adaption for the figure of Christ in the *Ecce Homo* in the St Petersburg Hermitage (no. 105).

# 105

Peter Paul Rubens

## CROWN OF THORNS (ECCE HOMO)

no later than 1612  
St Petersburg, The State  
Hermitage Museum

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“Ecce homo—behold the man” proclaims Pontius Pilate as Christ bearing the crown of thorns is brought before the crowd. Rubens shows us Jesus' abused body closely and directly. Mistreated by his tormentors, Jesus casts his glance directly towards the viewer. We are drawn into the event in an almost disconcerting way. Rubens here draws on both Flemish and Northern Italian models. The exceptional closeness can probably be traced to influences in Rubens' milieu. The dramatic light effects, however, suggest his study of Caravaggio. Regardless of what influences may be implied, the unusual posture of the idealized upper torso is a surprising reference: Rubens here draws on a statue from classical antiquity that portrays a centaur tamed by Cupid. This can be seen in the hands tied to the back and the upper body bent backwards. This portrayal gives Christ a triumphant appearance, though weals and traces of blood convey the torment of the flagellation, which in this masterpiece is brought home with unusual immediacy.

# 106

Peter Paul Rubens

## THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

c.1639  
Madrid, Museo  
Nacional del Prado

The decision is visibly difficult for the young shepherd Paris. He is to judge who is the most beautiful from among the goddesses Juno, Minerva and Venus. Finally it is Venus, the goddess of love, who receives the golden apple that distinguishes the winner. In return, Venus promises Paris the favour of the beauty Helena. For his portrayal of the goddess of love Rubens drew on a very special model: his second wife, Helene Fourment, is depicted here as Venus Pudica of antiquity, who covers her nakedness with her left hand. The similarity to the probably best-known portrait of the young Helena in *The Fur* (no. 107) is unmistakable. She had already been cast in this work as the incarnation of the goddess of love. Differently than that picture of great intimacy, this painting was not a personal declaration of love but an official commission. Rubens executed the work for King Philip IV of Spain. As the revealing representations of the goddesses, and especially that of Rubens' wife, infringed the strict protocol of the Spanish court, the painting was eventually hung not in the royal residence but in the king's summer retreat Buen Retiro.



## 107

Peter Paul Rubens

### HELENA FOURMENT ("HET PELSKEN")

1636/38  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture  
Gallery

Clad in nothing but a fur throw Rubens' second wife Helena Fourment gazes at us. Her posture recalls the type Venus Pudica, who conceals her nakedness with both hands. Probably both this model from the ancient world and Titian's *Girl in Fur* (no. 108) served as inspiration. Rubens copied the painting in London in 1629. In both works the contrast of dark fur and luminous white skin is represented with great sensitivity. The painting was originally planned as a half-length figure and thus still closer to the model. Only later did Rubens change the picture by additions, turning it into a full-length portrait. Together with the supplements to the wooden panel he included an elegant fountain as an architectural element, which was crowned by a *puer mingens*, a urinating boy. This figure, which owed its origin to an antique statue, made the beautiful

Helena, Rubens' personal fountain of youth. As the fountain proved too great a distraction from Helena's beauty, Rubens eventually decided to paint the addition over and substitute a neutral, dark background.

## 108

Titian

### GIRL IN A FUR

c.1535  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture  
Gallery

The unknown girl, half clothed, half nude corresponds to the Venus Pudica of classical antiquity. Titian's erotically charged painting is no longer considered a portrait, but an idealized depiction of feminine beauty. During his visit to England Rubens had seen the painting in the collection of Charles I and copied it. He first thought it not the image of the ideal woman, but that of a prostitute, an interpretation widespread at the time. The contrast of dark fur upon luminously white skin inspired him to new works. The motif of the nude beauty clad in a fur appears in the 1630s in scenes from the Old Testament, such as Susanna or Bathsheba bathing. The reference is most obvious in the intimate portrait of the artist's second wife, Helena Fourment (no. 107). Originally conceived as a half-length portrait Rubens made additions to the panel in the course of painting to create a full-length portrayal. Titian's idealised vision of femininity became in Rubens' hands a celebration of the beauty of his Helena.

## 109

Schelte Adamsz.  
Bolswert

### STORMY LANDSCAPE

before 1640  
Vienna, Albertina

The engraving after a painting since lost is one of a series of 20 small landscapes issued by the Antwerp publisher Van Enden. The landscape with dramatically rising mountains at its centre served as a model for the Vienna *Stormy Landscape* (no. 110) and shows how the painting, which later was enlarged by additions, may originally have looked. Rubens subsequently painted the steep massif over in order to give more space to the portrayal of the unleashed forces of nature. The engraving also recalls the hill on the peninsula in Rubens' depiction of St Paul's shipwreck on Malta (no. 112).

## 110

Peter Paul Rubens

### STORMY LANDSCAPE WITH PHILEMON, JUPITER, MERCURY, AND BAUCIS

c.1620/25–36  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture  
Gallery

Rubens here stages a dramatic natural spectacle. Only upon closer examination does the viewer note the four onlookers, who are the only mortals to be spared from the blustering deluge. Jupiter appears together with Mercury, messenger of the gods, as judge and master of the elements. The two mortals, Philemon and Baucis, alone offer shelter to the gods on their earthly sojourn and are thus spared their wrath. The painting, which was originally conceived simply as a landscape in a thunderstorm, was reworked and enlarged several times by Rubens. Originally a giant rocky massif loomed in the background, recalling the landscape in the painting of Paul's shipwreck at Malta (no. 112). Another model was a painting unfortunately since lost, but preserved as a print by Schelte à Bolswert (no. 109); this was similarly dominated by a stony outcropping. In the Vienna *Stormy Landscape* Rubens finally decided to overpaint this feature in order to give greater prominence to the unshackled forces of nature. These allude to the triumph of divine will and the powerlessness of earthly mortals.

Schelte Adamsz.  
Bolswert

### LANDSCAPE WITH PHILEMON AND BAUCIS

c.1638  
Vienna, Albertina

Jupiter and Mercury descended to earth disguised as lowly wanderers. Only an elderly couple, Philemon and Baucis, welcomed them. Thus were they spared the ire of Jupiter, who drowned their inhospitable fellow mortals in an epic flood. The print by Schelte à Bolswert after the Vienna landscape during a thunderstorm was published together with four verses by Ovid, which describe the effects of unleashed natural forces rather than the mythological motif. In this manner Bolswert emphasises the importance of the natural spectacle, which was probably also Rubens' principal focus.

Peter Paul Rubens

### LANDSCAPE WITH THE SHIPWRECK OF ST PAUL

1620/25  
Berlin, Staatliche  
Museen zu Berlin,  
Gemäldegalerie

Atop a hill on a rocky peninsula the fire of a lonely lighthouse stands fast against nature's might. On the left, the fringes of a raging storm pass, even as on the right the first rays of sun struggle to pierce the clouds. In the darkness of the foreground the wreckage of a ship is washed ashore. The survivors have already gathered around a campfire into which a kneeling man appears about to cast a snake. This is St Paul who on his way to Rome has been shipwrecked on Malta, and there miraculously survived the bite of a serpent. The subject of the picture however is overshadowed by the drama of nature's force and the impressive landscape. The composition with an enormous stone outcropping dominating the left half of the picture likely served as inspiration for the *Stormy Landscape with Philemon and Baucis* (no. 110) in Vienna. In the latter work, however, Rubens shifted the hill to the right of the centre. Only in the process of executing the painting did he decide to overpaint the topographical feature so as to give natural phenomena greater prominence.

Peter Paul Rubens

### THE FEAST OF VENUS

1636/37  
Kunsthistorisches  
Museum, Picture  
Gallery

This painting celebrates the power of love. At the centre of the tumultuous proceedings stands the statue of Venus, goddess of love. As Venus Pudica she conceals her nakedness with both hands. From the left, couples of satyrs and nymphs in close embrace dance their way into the throng. Women in contemporary attire run from the right onto the scene to bring gifts of dolls to Venus. Rubens reworked the composition several times and enlarged it by making additions to the canvas. The model was Titian's *Worship of Venus*, which Rubens further developed both in content and form. He drew on Ovid's description of the feast of Venus celebrated in April at which mothers, brides, and even prostitutes gathered to pay homage to the goddess. Sensual pleasure is here related to courtship, marriage, and procreation. Rubens thus joins together the different faces of the goddess of love. Venus Verticordia, averter of desires, turns women's hearts from licentiousness to chastity. The laughing Venus Erycina represents physical love and was believed to promote brides' fertility.

Peter Paul Rubens after  
Titian

### THE WORSHIP OF VENUS

c.1635  
Stockholm,  
Nationalmuseum

Whether Rubens saw Titian's *Worship of Venus* in Rome, or merely one of the copies that were relatively widespread in Antwerp remains unclear. In this work Titian draws upon the Greek philosopher Philostratus, who in his *Eikones* describes an ancient painting in which putti gather around a statue of the goddess of love. They frolic high-spiritedly or pounce upon the apples which are Venus' attribute. Instead of reproducing the model in its original format, Rubens decided in favour of considerably larger dimensions. He also depicts the goddess herself in the heavens above, who gazes down upon the goings-on around her statue. The painting was the inspiration for Rubens' own version of *The Feast of Venus* (no. 113), which he reworked and enlarged several times. He made use of individual motifs such as the impetuous flock of putti and shifted the statue of Venus to the centre of the scene. Rubens enlarged the picture both in subject matter and form achieving a more complex and harmonious composition, in which the original model echoes but faintly.

**EXHIBITION TOURS**

*Duration: c.60 minutes*  
*Meeting point: entrance hall*  
*Cost: €3*

Tuesday–Friday: 4.30 p.m.  
Thursdays also 7.00 p.m.  
Saturdays and Sundays: 11.00 a.m. and  
3.00 p.m.

**CURATOR TOURS**

Wednesdays, 4.00 p.m.  
Meeting point: entrance hall

8 November  
*Prometheus: Rubens' alter ego*  
Stefan Weppelmann

22 November  
*Rubens' image of women*  
Gerlinde Gruber

13 December  
*Venus: different aspects of the goddess  
of love*  
Gerlinde Gruber

17 January  
*Rubens' special effects*  
Stefan Weppelmann

**LECTURES**

*Old masters in discussion*  
In cooperation with Dorotheum  
The number of participants is limited;  
advance registration required:  
altmeister@khm.at  
*Cupola Hall*

Monday, 23 October, 7.00 p.m.  
*On bearded men, Rubens and  
handsaws*  
Nico van Hout, Royal Museum of  
Fine Arts, Antwerp

Monday, 13 November, 7.00 p.m.  
*Peter Paul Rubens: symbolism and  
voyeurism*  
Professor Nils Büttner, State Academy  
of Art and Design, Stuttgart

**SYMPOSIUM**

18.1. Evening lecture  
19.1. Symposium  
For more details, visit [khm.at](http://khm.at)

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**CHILDREN'S  
PROGRAMME**

*Atelier*  
Sundays  
2.00–4.30 p.m.  
For children 6–12  
Cost: children €4  
Accompanying adult: €11  
Material costs, as needed: €4

Advance registration requested  
[kunstvermittlung@khm.at](mailto:kunstvermittlung@khm.at)  
T +43 1 525 24 – 5202  
Monday–Friday, 9.00 a.m.–4.00 p.m.  
Limited number of participants

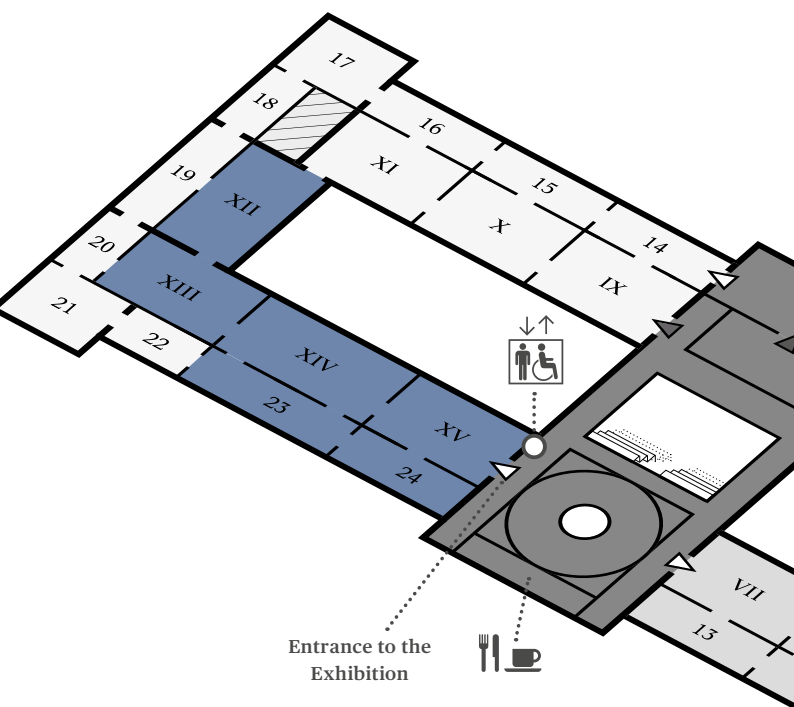
*Cloud burst and thunder storm*  
22.10., 12.11., 10.12., 14.1.

*Peeking allowed!*  
5.11., 3.12., 21.1.

*Tours for kids*  
*A glance into Peter Paul's box of tricks*  
18.11., 16.12., 13.1., 20.1.  
3.00 p.m.: for children 5–8  
4.00 p.m.: for children 9–12

# 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR

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- **Special Exhibition »Rubens«**
- **Picture Gallery**  
Dutch, Flemish and German Painting
- **Picture Gallery**  
Italian, Spanish and French Painting

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## OPENING HOURS

Tue–Sun, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.  
Thu, 10 a.m.–9 p.m.  
Open daily in December!

Cover:  
Peter Paul Rubens, *Crown of Thorns (Ecce Homo)*  
no later than 1612  
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