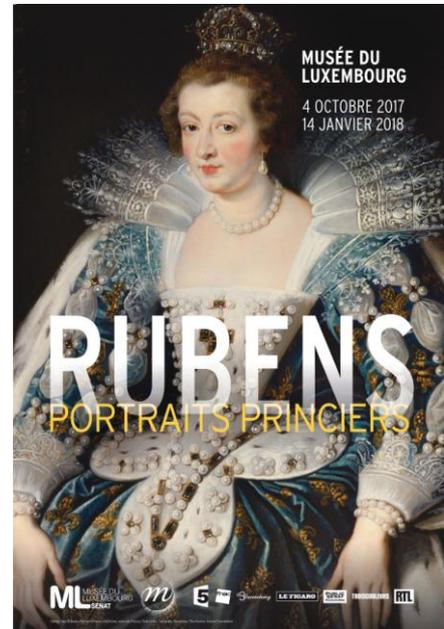


"Rubens. Royal Portraits", at the Musée du Luxembourg from the 4st of October 2017 to the 14st of January 2018

"Even if, by his birth, he couldn't claim privileges from among the old and former nobility who made him feel his position, he was regarded with high esteem by sovereigns. Rubens lives and contributes to the enhancement of the art of painting.¹".

Until the 14th of January 2018, the Musée du Luxembourg presents a part of the European works of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Through about sixty paintings and eighty-nine items in total, the painter's work is viewed from the perspective of portraits for the monarchs of the great royal courts, made during his journeys or in his workshop, during the first half of the 17th century. From Italy to France, via Brussels or Spain, the artist was commissioned by the greatest Kings represented in this display through the pictorial technique of portraiture, a genre constantly evolving at this period, due in part to Ruben's influence.

Picture: Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Anne d'Autriche, Queen of France*, about 1622-1625, oil on canvas, 120 x 98.6 cm, Pasadena (California), The Norton Simon Foundation [© Poster of the Réunion des musées nationaux – Grand Palais, 2017]



Journeys through a Europe ruled by Princes



Picture: Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Ferdinand de Gonzague*, about 1602-1603, oil on canvas, 81,2 x 56,5 cm, Priv. Coll., courtesy of Nicholas Hall (© courtesy of Christie's)

Italy: Patronage of Duke of Mantou

Rubens came from a family of Antwerp merchants who fled the town for religious reasons before returning during the late 1580s. He was trained by Otto van Veen, known as Vaenius (1557-1629)², a philosopher and mannerist painter marked by Italian influences and who encouraged his pupil to follow his training there. Rubens arrived in Italy in 1600 and stayed there until 1608. Speaking several languages including Latin, and having received a humanist education, the young painter showed a great ease in the learning of his art and was soon hired by Vincent I de Gonzague, Duke of Mantou and Montferrat (1562-1612).

¹ Personal translation. Dominique Jacquot, "Peintre des princes et prince des peintres", *Rubens. Portraits princiers*, [exhibition from the 4th October 2017 to the 14th January 2018, Paris, Musée du Luxembourg], Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2017, p.49 : "Même si de par sa naissance il ne pouvait prétendre aux privilèges de l'ancienne et haute noblesse qui lui fit bien sentir sa position, il fut considéré par les souverains comme digne d'estime. Rubens vit et participe à l'anoblissement de l'art de peindre".

² Daniel Arasse, Andreas Tönnemann *La Renaissance maniériste*, transl. by Claudia Schinkiewicz, Paris, Gallimard/ L'Univers des Formes, 1997, p.369.

The art of portraiture was not unknown to the artist whose first signed and dated work is known as *Portrait of a man* (1597, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art): to obtain numerous commissions, this pictorial genre offered Rubens the opportunity to make himself known to influential patrons on the one hand and, on the other hand, to quickly give free rein to his brush (*Self-portrait with a circle of friends from Mantou*, 1602-1604, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum). The portraits of the Duke of Mantou's family displayed during the exhibition at the Musée du Luxembourg are prime examples : they still indicate the Nordic heritage with great precision of details, as well as a light giving the impression of almost translucent complexions (Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Ferdinand de Gonzague*, about 1602-1603, Priv. Coll.). However Rubens incorporated spontaneity of the touch and a warmer color, thanks to his travels in Venice and his contact with the ducal collections. We regret, however, that the portraits of the Genoese aristocracy painted by the artist between 1604 and 1608 are not included in the exhibition, for they allowed him to establish his reputation as a great portrait painter in European courts.

Brussels: The Archdukes of the Spanish Netherlands

Back in Antwerp at the end of the year 1608 following the death of his mother, the painter established his studio. Appointed in 1609, as court painter of the Archdukes of Austria Albert and the Spanish Infanta Claire Isabelle Eugenie, Rubens obtained to not reside in the court of Brussels, capital of the Spanish Netherlands. The exhibition highlights the many portraits of these two sovereigns, original and workshop versions, as well as copies, engravings and adaptations. These portraits raise a number of questions: did Rubens preserve the original portraits in the studio and then make copies of them? Do these works come from his studio? Were the engravings of these portraits made from the originals or from the copies? Whether they are original paintings or later versions, these works are in any case marked by a Rubenesque chromatic palette which is followed and spread, ranging from increased austerity in the representations of the traits of the Infanta Isabella, affirming the political role of his portraits, representing triumphant military successor, Archduke Ferdinand, for example staged against a background of red curtain (*Portrait of Archduke Ferdinand*, about 1635, Sarasota, Florida State University, State Art Museum of Florida).

Spain: the Equestrian Portrait and the Prince

Although the effigies of the Archdukes of Austria, who were depicted standing or sitting and cropped at the knees, appear as somewhat rigid representations, Rubens participated once again in the renewal of the genre of portraiture. He treated the landscape background by positioning the mounted rulers in a three-quarter view (*Equestrian Portrait of Cardinal Infant Ferdinand at the Battle of Nördlingen*, 1634-1635, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado), as he had previously in 1603 traveling to Spain for the Duke of Mantou in the Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Lerma (1603, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado), adapting the equestrian posture traditionally reserved for sovereigns. Twenty-five years later, Rubens was again entrusted with a diplomatic mission³ and returned to Madrid, where Philip IV had been King since 1621. On the recommendation of Archduchess Isabel, his talent was again noticed by the Habsburgs in the field of portraiture in 1628 and 1629 by creating a series of representations of the family of the Spanish ruler (Peter Paul Rubens' Workshop, *Portrait of Philip IV, King of Spain and Portrait of Elizabeth (also known as) Isabella of Bourbon*, about 1630, Munich, Staatsgemäldsammlungen - Staatsgalerie Neuburg). If this status of diplomatic painter later brought the artist to England (*The Apotheosis of James I*, 1629-1630, London, Whitehall, Banqueting House), Rubens also excelled in the making of allegorical portraits.

³ The artist was then on a mission to establish links with the England of Charles I.



France: Allegorical Political Portrait

Invited to France for the first time in 1621, Rubens first declined the offer before coming to Paris from January to September 1622. He painted several portraits of the royal couple, including a small portrait of Louis XIII made from a live model, as was rarely the case (*Portrait of Louis XIII, King of France*, 1622, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria). This later served the artist in his studio to officially depict the king in larger formats. If Rubens gave his sketches a vigor that seems to breathe life, it is through the painting of the well-known "Cycle of the Medici Gallery" that he shined during this period⁴. The twenty-four paintings ordered had to represent the history of Marie de' Medici as well as the battles and victories of Henry IV, in order to decorate the West Gallery of the Luxembourg Palace, built on the orders of the queen-mother. The sketch of *Marie de' Medici in Bellone* (1622, Worms, Museum Heylshof) expresses the same energy conferred in all the paintings: the use of mythology and allegory to justify the political role of the former Queen of France by portraying her as a triumphant warrior queen in a baroque style.

Picture: Peter Paul Rubens, *Marie de' Medici in Bellone (Allegorical Portrait of Marie de' Medici)*, 1622, oil on canvas, 42.2 x 29.5 cm, Worms, Museum Heylshof (© Museum Heylshof/Worms, Reproduction: Stefan Blume).

A Europe of Artistic Exchanges



Picture: Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder, *Infanta Claire Eugénie*, about 1615 (or 1618-1620?), oil on canvas, 113 x 178.5 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado (© RMN-GP).

Picture: Peter Paul Rubens, *Vincent II de Gonzague, seventh Duke of Mantou*, between 1604 and 1615, oil on canvas glued on wood, 67.3 x 52.2 cm, Saltram, The Morley Collection (© National Trust Images/Rob Matheson)

⁴ About this subject, see : Jacques Thuillier, Jacques Foucart, *Rubens, la Galerie Médicis au Palais du Luxembourg*, Paris, Laffont, 1969.

Italy of Titian and Caravaggio

Journeys in the Europe of the Habsburgs led Rubens to discover many artists, deceased or alive, but all of them major. The exhibition of the Luxembourg Museum highlights the importance of the artistic exchanges in Rubens' work, beginning with the richness he derived from the observation of Titian's paintings in the collections of the Duke of Mantua, or traveling to Venice or in the collections of Philip IV. Indeed, fascinated by this artist Rubens was eager to discover in Italy, as Titian was one of the main sources of the evolution of the brushwork of the painter of Antwerp as shown by the equestrian *Portrait of the Duke of Lerma*, a modernized reflection of the *Portrait of Emperor Charles V* (about 1547, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado) by Titian. It should also be noted that in Rome, a city that Rubens visited several times between 1601 and 1608, a painter such as Caravaggio, another great portraitist, brought him another vision of this pictorial genre. The Rubenesque portrait then became more intense, even internalized, as in the *Portrait of Vincent II de Gonzague* (between 1604 and 1615, Saltram, The Morley Collection).

Works with Jan Brueghel the Elder and Cornelis de Vos

If Rubens copied the early masters in his early days, he also worked with the masters who were his contemporaries. When he worked as a court painter of the Archdukes of Austria for example, he participated in the renewal of the princely portrait with his friend Jan Brueghel the Elder⁵ by proposing a renewed vision of the traditional "topographic portrait", according to a collaboration where each of painters works in his favorite field: Rubens - and his studio it seems - worked on the portraits and "Velvet" Brueghel on the landscapes (*The Infanta Claire Eugenie*, about 1615, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado). Rubens has also achieved this type of collaboration, called "equal"⁶ or "horizontal"⁷, with many other painters. Another type of collaborative work put in the spotlight during the exhibition of the Luxembourg Museum, is the art of retouching. If one often approaches Rubens' paintings from a material point of view because of their complexity⁸, because sometimes composed of several wooden planks, and if Rubens is well known as an artist-painter, he is however less often described for repairing works, sometimes restoring damaged canvases⁹, sometimes retouching them¹⁰. Thus the *Portraits of the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Isabelle Claire Eugenie* (1635, Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium) by Cornelis de Vos appears to have been retouched by Rubens or one of his students, especially in the details after the paintings were cut to be transformed into portraits.

⁵ Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the first Edition of the Schilder-boeck*, 1603-1604.

⁶ *Le Siècle de Rubens dans les collections publiques françaises*, [exhibition from the 17th of November 1977 to the 13th of March 1978, Paris, Grand Palais], Paris, Éditions des Musées nationaux, p.179.

⁷ *Rubens. Portraits princiers, Op. cit.*, p.106.

⁸ London, the National Gallery, Curatorial file: NG66 – Peter Paul Rubens, *An Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning*. On this subject, see: Christopher Brown, Anthony Reeve and Martin Wylid, "Rubens' 'The Watering Place'" in *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, volume 6, 1982, pp.26-39.

⁹ Armand Baschet, "Pierre-Paul Rubens – Peintre de Vincent I^{er} de Gonzague, duc de Mantoue", in *Gazette des beaux-arts*, Paris, 1866, January-June, pp.402-452.

¹⁰ *Id.*, p.419 : "On a de lui des dessins d'après tel ou tel maître que l'on peut dire être Rubenisés, il ne les copiait pas avec exactitude, il se plaisait à laisser en eux la trace de son passage. Il a porté cet instinct plus loin, je ne veux point dire ce goût, car le mot ne serait point ici à sa place, il a retouché souvent des dessins originaux, des pièces même capitales."

Links with the young Velázquez

During his second stay in Spain, the master marked a young artist. When he arrived in 1628, Rubens returned to Madrid by being called the "second Titian!"¹¹. At this time, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez has been at the court of Philip IV since 1623. Trained by Francisco Pacheco, a painter witness to the art of his time (*Arte de la pintura*, 1649) and who will become his father-in-law, Velázquez observes the mixture of genres in Rubens in the style of the princely portrait. Indeed, his *Equestrian Portrait of Philip IV of Spain* (about 1644-1649, Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi), resumes an equestrian portrait of the ruler painted by Rubens in 1628, which burned in the fire that ravaged the Royal Alcazar, the family residence of the sovereign, in 1734. Hybridization of portraiture, allegory and historical painting, if the influence of Titian is still perceptible, Rubens has now endorsed the modernization of the genre, taken over by Velazquez in a reprise where he adapts the features of Philip IV and certain details.



Picture: Exhibition view *Rubens, royal portraits* (3) Scenography Veronique Dollfus
(© Rmn-Grand Palais / Photo Didier Plowy)

The reuse of Ruben's work in the 18th and 19th centuries

The diffusion of the works of Rubens

If Rubens becomes known in Europe by engraving, "in particular thanks to a strategy of diffusion of his works by means of engravings protected from the copy and privileges obtained in the Spanish Netherlands, in France and in the United Netherlands between 1619 and 1629"¹², it will nevertheless be necessary to wait until the beginning of the eighteenth century to see the work of the painter from Antwerp reproduced and widely disseminated. It is to Jean-Baptiste and Jean-Marc Nattier that we owe the prints of the *Marie de' Medici cycle canvases*. In 1702, the painter Marc Nattier obtained from the king permission for twenty years to reproduce the series of paintings of the Luxembourg Palace which were deposited in the Louvre almost a century later, in 1816.

¹¹ Personal translation. Marc Fumaroli, "Rubens entre deux Europes", in Blaise Ducos (dir.) *L'Europe de Rubens*, [exhibition from the 22nd of May au 23rd of September 2013, Lens, Musée du Louvre-Lens], Lens, Musée du Louvre and Paris, Éditions Hazan, 2013, p.17.

¹² *Rubens. Portraits princiers, Op. cit.*, p.222

Presented in their entirety in the exhibition, the prints were published between 1704 and 1710 under the title *The Gallery of the Palace of Luxembourg* painted by Rubens, designed by Masters Nattier and engraved by the most famous engravers of the Time. Faithful to the large formats painted and put in color, these prints did not fail to provoke the criticism of Pierre-Jean Mariette.

Improving the image of Marie de' Medici



Picture: Claudius Jacquand, *Marie de' Medici visiting the Rubens Studio*, 1839, oil on canvas, 46.2 x 62 cm, Nantes, musée des Beaux-Arts (© Alain Guillard/Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes).

Despite the few criticisms of the eighteenth century, the reproductions and inspirations of the works of Rubens at this period were still faithful to the original paintings, which was not quite the case a century later. The success of the portraits made by Rubens was such that the painters of history of the first half of the nineteenth century reused these images to produce new ones, in a much more romantic version. Is it necessary to restore the image of Marie de' Medici in this *Histoire de France* rediscovered and reinterpreted at the beginning of the century? Like a *Ménageot* representing the death of Leonardo da Vinci in the arms of Francis I at Fontainebleau, the images of Marie de' Medici posing in front of the artist or visiting her workshop overflowing with admiration were passed on to the public by painters like Mathieu Ignace Van Brée or Claudius Jacquand. The exhibition opens its first room with these works that could be more related to the collective imagination than to history, immediately placing the spectator in a position of reflection on the preconceived images that they may have in mind when visiting *Rubens royal portraits*.

Tapestry and painting of historical portraits

After engraving, it is the art of tapestry that is now in the spotlight. If this artistic medium is commonly described in the work of Rubens for his wall tapestry projects¹³, here are the paintings of the master later reproduced in tapestry are presented. The portraits and paintings intended for the rulers painted by Rubens not only served to be reproduced in engraving, but were also used to produce larger formats than originally in painting. The Marie de' Medici cycle was admired in the nineteenth century and was the subject in the 1830s of a weaving campaign carried out by the Manufacture des Gobelins. The advantage of this medium was to allow a reproduction of the work on a scale similar or even higher for large formats. The *Marriage of Marie de' Medici*, which measures for example on canvas 394 by 295 cm (1622-1625, Paris, Musée du Louvre), takes in tapestry the dimensions of 405 by 308 cm (19th century, Paris, National Furniture and National Manufactures of Gobelins,

¹³ "Rubens et la tapisserie", in *Rubens*, [exhibition from 6th of March to the 14th of June 2004, Lille, palais des Beaux-Arts], Paris, Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004, pp.267-302.

Beauvais and Savonnerie). The reproduction thus takes precedence even in monumental formats.



Thus, through a series of exceptional works, both in terms of quality and format, the exhibition of the Musée du Luxembourg transports the visitor through the eyes of the artistic genius of Rubens in Habsburgian Europe in the first half of the 17th century through to the interpretations and reinterpretations of the 19th century.

The most curious visitors will also be able to complete their visit by attending conferences organized at the Palais du Luxembourg on the main themes tackled by the exhibition: the portrait, the costume and, more particularly, the Marie de' Medici cycle ([Self Guiding Booklet](#)).

Picture: Peter Paul Rubens, *Self-portrait*, 1623, oil on canvas, 85.7 x 62.2 cm, London, The Royal Collection / HM Queen Elizabeth II (Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 2017)

Barbara Jouvès