

Rubens and the World (Antwerp, 5–6 May 25)

Antwerp, Belgium, May 5–06, 2025

Deadline: Jul 31, 2024

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Tout le monde pour ma patrie: Rubens and the World.

Rubenshuis, Kolveniersstraat 20, Antwerp, May 5–6, 2025

Peter Paul Rubens's visual ideas spread astoundingly far from his home in Antwerp both during and after his lifetime. In the seventeenth century his paintings arrived at destinations throughout Europe, and dealers shipped painted copies and titanic quantities of engravings after his designs even farther afield, reaching Cuzco, Isfahan, Jingdezhen, and many other places. He saw himself as a man of the world, as he wrote in a letter to a friend in 1625: "I regard the whole world as my country, and I believe that I should be very welcome everywhere." The world also came to Rubens, whether in the form of models of African descent who feature in his head studies and finished compositions; Asian costume and dress that appear in his drawings and paintings; or Indian architecture and sculpture for which he showed a keen interest. An impressive swath of the world also passed through Antwerp, both people and things, and Rubens took note.

His staggering output has elicited a tremendous amount of scholarship, which has often sought to identify original works by Rubens's hand and/or workshop, working outward from these to trace "copies." The Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard (CRLB), currently approaching completion, has offered a paradigm for this approach. Recently, Aaron M. Hyman's *Rubens in Repeat: The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America* (Getty, 2021) envisioned a new approach that investigates the centrality of Rubens's imagery in histories in which his artistic persona may remain entirely central for artists working an ocean away or, alternatively, hover entirely at the margins. Indeed, in the field of early modern art more broadly, recent attention has been paid to how the canonical giants of the period, when pushed to the side, may offer useful lenses through which to view understudied historical actors and objects. Such was the case, for example, in Stephanie Archangel and Elmer Kolfin's *Black in Rembrandt's Time* (Museum Het Rembrandthuis/WBooks, 2020). Numerous exhibitions and thematic volumes in the past few decades have focused on intersections between Low Countries art and particular regions.

As the CRLB draws to a close and as Antwerp's Royal Museum of Fine Arts (KMSKA) prepares for a Global Rubens exhibition in 2027, the moment is ripe to convene a group of scholars whose subjects intersect with Rubens's art and/or career and who engage this material in methodologically diverse and innovative ways. The Rubenshuis, in partnership with the KMSKA, invites proposals for papers that situate Rubens on a global stage: Rubens as artistic personality and generator of images and ideas but also as foil, historiographical roadblock, and at times incidental character in narratives focused elsewhere and on other matters. In scope and framework, this conference

aspires to achieve diversity, in terms of the kinds of objects of study, the sources employed, the methodologies and writing styles deployed, and indeed the extent to which Rubens himself and his oeuvre figure in any given aspect of the project. Participants may choose to address not only particular material but also the complicated historiographical dynamics that Rubens and his oeuvre pose, as viewed from a range of disparate contexts and perspectives. We welcome studies that examine source material from around the world that, in one way or another, touches on Rubens's oeuvre. The hope is that the conference – while bringing together a broad range of material, methods, and perspectives – will add to the discourse on the early modern global but with a sustained thematic focus on its intersection with one artist's career and oeuvre.

A paper might have a central thematic question guiding it or a theoretical focus alongside its geographical base: for example, the status of copies and related questions of authorship; how investigations of provenance can illuminate aspects of cultural exchange; the status of Rubens's imagery within a particular foreign art market or political context; transpositions of Rubens's imagery from one medium to another; the role of particular historical structures, organizations (e.g. the Jesuits) or individuals in spreading Rubens's imagery; technical considerations of art produced in Flanders versus elsewhere; questions of style and its fluidity, etc. Not all papers need be intellectually grounded in foreign locales. Some might alternatively address Rubens's engagement with other cultures: for example, his representation of people or objects from other regions; his discussion thereof in his correspondence and other writing; the representation of other cultures in his library and/or collection; or intercultural interactions he had that infused his work.

Methodologically, one goal is exploratory: to open up the field of Rubens studies and see what new insights can be gained about Rubens's art when scholars de-center so central a figure as Rubens. Empirically, the study of artistic cultures distantly removed from Rubens but which engaged his oeuvre can reinvigorate Rubens studies by bringing new and relevant material to the fore.

Please send an abstract of no more than 500 words, along with a CV, to Abigail Newman (Abigail.Newman@Antwerpen.be) by July 31, 2024. Further questions are also welcome. Speakers will be asked to send full drafts of their talks by March 15, 2025.

Reference:

CFP: Rubens and the World (Antwerp, 5-6 May 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 16, 2024 (accessed Jan 19, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42139>>.