

Curating Baroque Art in the 21st Century (York, 9 Jul 25)

Philip Rahtz Lecture Theatre, Kings Manor, University of York, UK, Jul 09, 2025

Adam Sammut

The period of Western art history known as “the Baroque” has traditionally been interpreted as a stylistic phenomenon, the result of shifts in elite taste between classical decorum and rococo exuberance. Yet artistic production in Europe c. 1600–1750 was enabled by a proto-industrial world system dominated by Spain and Portugal, the Netherlands and later Britain, entangling material culture in networks of trade and colonial rule that stretched from Naples to Nagasaki. As scholars and curators have been keener to emphasise than ever before, the cultural politics of early modern art are, in many ways, akin to those of our own globalised and media-saturated present. This roundtable event seeks to broaden perspectives on the Baroque in a museum context. Curators from London and Dublin will discuss issues of public engagement, contemporary artistic response, and historical interpretation, with a particular focus on Dutch and Flemish art.

Convenors:

Adam Sammut, University of York

Tomasz Grusiecki, Boise State University

Richard McClary, University of York

Cordula van Wyhe, University of York

Organised in tandem with The Global Baroque: European Material Culture between Conquest, Trade and Mission, 1600–1750, 10–11 July 2025.

Supported by York Art History Collaborations, Association for Low Countries Studies, and Association for Art Historians.

PROGRAMME

4–6pm. All welcome, no ticket required.

Lizzie Marx: Turning Heads: Rubens, Rembrandt and Vermeer

In spring 2024, the National Gallery of Ireland hosted the exhibition, Turning Heads: Rubens, Rembrandt and Vermeer, in collaboration with the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp. The exhibition explored the lesser-known genre of the 'tronie', a depiction of character head that was influential in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. This presentation will discuss the challenges of introducing a relatively unknown genre to the public, the curatorial considerations of dedicating an exhibition to tronies and study heads, and the approaches taken to make works of art - produced some four centuries ago - resonate with the Gallery's visitors.

Helen Hillyard: The Contemporary Appeal of Rubens' Venus, Mars and Cupid (c. 1635)

Peter Paul Rubens has always been an 'artist's artist'. This talk considers the Flemish master's painting Venus, Mars and Cupid (c. 1635) within the context of Dulwich Picture Gallery's programme 'Unlocking Paintings', a display series through which contemporary painters are invited to respond to works in the Gallery's collection. Strikingly, multiple artists have been drawn to this particular work, and this talk considers both the original context of the painting as well as its relevance for artists working today.

Timothy Revell: Why is History Important? Two exhibition reviews as case studies

Exhibitions often seek to make strong historical arguments about art and artists. Large and expensive catalogues are produced for public and scholarly consumption. An exhibition and its theme can benchmark the public imagination of an artist or art movement for years to come. Thus, it is of the upmost importance what curators and historians say, write, and present to the public. This short talk will examine two recent exhibitions Rubens & Women (Dulwich Picture Gallery) and Careers by Design: Hendrick Goltzius & Peter Paul Rubens (Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich). These will serve as points of discussion in the use (and misuse) of biographical readings of artworks, the importance of multidisciplinary work, reviewing source material, and ultimately the principal ability of looking.

Reference:

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