

Rubens

Peter Paul Rubens (June 28, 1577 - May 30, 1640) was a Flemish baroque painter. He was born in Siegen, Westphalia, to a successful Protestant lawyer, who had fled Antwerp to escape religious persecution.

After his father's death, Rubens and his mother returned to Antwerp, where he had himself baptized a Catholic. Religion was to figure prominently in much of his later work. In Antwerp, his mother apprenticed Rubens to some of the leading painters of the time.

In 1600, he went to Italy, where he worked as a court painter to the duke of Mantua. He studied ancient Roman art and learned by copying the works of the great Italian masters. His mature style was profoundly influenced by Titian.

Upon the death of his mother in 1608, Rubens returned to Antwerp. A year later, he married Isabella Brant, the daughter of Jan Brant, a leading Antwerp humanist. His altar pieces The Raising of the Cross (1610) and The Descent of the Cross (1611-1614) for the Cathedral of Our Lady established Rubens as Flanders' leading religious painter.

He received numerous commissions from the French court, including a series of allegorical paintings on the life of Marie de' Medici (now in the Louvre). He and his workshop executed many monumental religious paintings, e.g. the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the Cathedral of Antwerp.

In the period between 1621 and 1630, Rubens was entrusted with a number of diplomatic missions by the Spanish Habsburg rulers. He was knighted by King Charles I of England for his diplomatic efforts to bring about a peace treaty between that country and Spain. He was also commissioned to paint the ceiling of the Banqueting House at the Palace of Whitehall.

In 1630, four years after the death of his first wife, the 53-year-old painter married the 16-year-old Helen Fourment. Rubens had three children with Isabella and five with Helen; his youngest child was born eight months after his death.

Helen's charms recur in later works such as The Garden of Love, The Three Graces and The Judgment of Paris, which he painted for the Spanish court and are now in the Prado.

Rubens died of gout, aged 63, and was interred in Saint James' church, Antwerp, Belgium. At a Sotheby's auction on July 10, 2002, Rubens' painting The Massacre of the Innocents was sold for £49.5million (US\$76.2 million) to Lord Thomson.

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