

Massacre of the
innocents by sir peter
paul rubens essay
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Quietly hanging in the Art Gallery of Ontario is Sir Peter Paul Rubens' masterpiece. Painted several centuries ago, the theme of the painting is as relevant today as it was during the biblical times. It is a protest against wars and the heinous crimes associated with them. Its name, Massacre of the Innocents could not have been more blatant. Wars create chaos and lead to deaths of innocent people, mostly women and children.

About the Artist

Peter Paul Rubens was born on 28th June 1577 in Germany. His father was a successful lawyer, while his mother was a cultured woman. They relocated to Antwerp (Belgium) when his father died, where the young Rubens got education. In his early twenties, he moved to Italy, where he was mesmerized by the work of Renaissance art masters, such as Michelangelo and Raphael in Rome and, Tintoretto and Titian in Venice. He was then hired as a painter by the Duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga.

Vincenzo commissioned Rubens to paint portraits in various European cities at the time. He later branched out to private practice and began painting portraits for private clientele and religious artworks for churches. He later returned to Antwerp in 1608, where he set up his studio and married Isabella Brant. He was appointed the court painter by Archduke Albert. It is during this period that he painted some of his notable works for the Antwerp Cathedral. They include, The Raising of the Cross and the Descent from the Cross.

Rubens became a favorite for both churches and royal clients. It was due to his artistic relation with the royal families that he was nicknamed ' the prince of painters and the painter of princes'. Examples of his work on royal clients <https://assignbuster.com/massacre-of-the-innocents-by-sir-peter-paul-rubens-essay-sample/>

include portraits for King Louis XIII and Marie de Medici of France and the 'Peace and War' painting for Charles I of England.

After remarrying his second wife Helena Fourment following the death of Isabella, he shifted from his royal portraits and religious works. He started creating art that celebrated themes of love, such as 'the Garden of Love' and a self-portrait of him and his new wife, Isabella. He passed away in 1640 and left behind eight children. One of his many assistants, Anthony van Dyck went on to have a successful career as a painter. His ability to combine Renaissance idealism with complex themes saw him rise above his peers. His obvious fascination with nude, curvaceous female anatomy led to the rise of the term "Rubenesque" in the artistic circles.

Rubens perfected the Flemish Baroque painting style that was very popular in the 17th century. One such painting was the Massacres of the Innocent, which took him two years to complete (from 1611-'12). This is actually the first version of the painting. He redid it again later. The painting is a visual depiction of King Herod's edict to kill all male infants of the Israelites to stop the prophecy of a Jewish king who would redeem Israelites from the roman rule. While the bible does not go into vivid details as to how the massacre was carried, Rubens gives us a clue and the effect is just too much to handle.

This artwork gives mixed reactions. Although we admire his excellent use of the paintbrush, we are horrified by what actually transpires in the oil canvas. Rubens achieves his goal with this painting, which makes him an excellent artist. He easily invokes anger and at the same time pity for the women and their children as they undergo one of the worst massacres in human history.

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We can see women desperately trying to wade off soldiers unsuccessfully, while at the same time trying to protect their sons. But, the soldiers overpower them with daggers.

As with all artists, Rubens borrows heavily from his surroundings. He grew up during the Spanish war against protestant rebels in 1576 that lasted eight years. He became an advocate of peace through his work after watching his city getting laid to waste by the war. The Massacre of the Innocents clearly depicts his antiwar sentiments.

Misrepresentation of the painting

There were earlier developments as to who really made the painting. In 1767, Vincenzo Fanti characterized it as a Franciscus de Neve's art. Jan van den Hoecke, one of Sir Ruben's assistants was also mistaken to be the painter. These misattributions were rendered false by David Jaffe, who cross examined the Massacre of the Innocents and found close resemblance to Sir Ruben's earlier work- Samson and Delilah. They both had the same artistic handwriting and were biblically influenced.

Ownership and Distributions

Together with Samson and Delilah, the Massacre of the Innocents was first sold to Hans-Adam, the prince of Liechtenstein at the onset of the 18th century by the Forchondt Brothers. For the next two centuries, the two portraits remained in the Liechtenstein family's possession. It was then purchased by an Austrian family in 1920 and three years later, loaned to Austrian monastery, known as the Reichersberg Abbey. It then landed in London at the National Gallery, where David Jaffe helped identify it as a

Rubens' masterpiece. In 2002, it was purchased by Kenneth Thomson, a Canadian billionaire, who later donated it to its current owners the Art Gallery in Ontario.

Mind Blowing Facts

The Massacre of the Innocents is among the most expensive items ever sold in history. Its value increased tremendously when the painting was traced back to Sir Rubens by David Jaffe. At the Sotheby's auction in 2002, it was sold for a whopping £49.5 million making it the most expensive painting in the UK and in Europe to date. It is only surpassed by Van Gogh's painting of Dr. Gachet, which fetched \$82.5 million in 1990 and Pierre-Auguste Renoir's portrait, Au Moulin de la Galette, which was sold for \$78.1 million.

References:

- Massacre of the Innocents (Rubens) – Wikipedia
- Massacre of the Innocents, 1612 by Peter Paul Rubens
- The Massacre of the Innocents | National Review

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