

Peter paul rubens

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Peter Paul Rubens was the painter of the first part of the Seventeenth Century in Catholic Europe. How he became so is an interesting story.

Rubens was educated to be a humanist but like all great artists choose his profession for himself. The combination of first rate classical education with innate visual genius made for an unprecedented combination in an artist, which is what made him so great. It has been said that no artist has ever been as well educated as Rubens. After training with three minor artists in Antwerp.

Rubens set off for Italy to complete his education; a position at the court of the Duke of Mantua was quickly accepted and he stayed in Italy for eight years. His job was to travel to all the major artistic collections, especially Rome and Venice painting copies of famous works of art, especially paintings of beautiful women, for the Duke's collection. He was also sent to Spain where he had an opportunity to study the enormous collection of Titian masterworks in the Royal Collection in Madrid.

Copying the masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance especially and the recently unearthed sculptures of classical antiquity, Rubens sketched and painted and encompassed all that was best in Italian and Classical art. Rubens combined the lessons of Antique Sculpture with the vaunting ambition of the High Renaissance giants in an unprecedented way. He used the lessons of sculpture as a composition model but insisted that flesh should look like flesh in a painting thus developing his breakthrough approach to the naked body.

In this he never forgot the earthy luminous realism of the old Netherlandish tradition of the fifteenth and sixteenth century used by Van Eyck, Van

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Weyden, and Breughel. You won't appreciate Rubens, the master of the female nude, until you consider that he was the greatest influence on French painting from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The fact that Watteau, Fragonard, Delacroix, and Renoir were among Rubens' loyal followers attests to his great influence.

Rubens was to develop a phenomenal ability to analyze the different styles of painting and sculpture and then synthesize them into whatever his clients and patrons wanted. His clients included just about every Catholic monarch, as well as Catholic leaning Protestants like King Charles I of England, and every major religious order in Western Europe. Not to mention every wealthy connoisseur of painting in Europe at the time. To satisfy an ever growing demand, Rubens opened the largest art workshop Europe has ever seen.

He would paint an small initial oil sketch which, when approved and contracted, would be given over to one or more of his students to paint the full length canvas. Finally, Rubens would add the finishing touches to the works and sign them. Thus he became both a teacher and a hugely successful businessman. Fame was for Rubens something that went beyond material worldly success; he sought above all to bring the blessings of humanistic reason to bear on the Europe riven by religious and dynastic wars.

In 1609, because he spoke several languages and was so well educated, Rubens was appointed court painter to the Archduke Albert and his wife the Infanta of Spain named Isabella, the Spanish Viceroy in the Netherlands. Isabella later became his close confidant and sent him on important diplomatic missions to Spain, Holland, and England. Rubens went to England to negotiate a peace treaty with the King of England and Spain and while he

was there he became a favorite of the court of King Charles I, as did his most brilliant student, Anthony Van Dyck, in the next decade.

When Rubens retired from public life he wrote about ripping off the golden chain that had bound him to the courts of Europe. In his last years he remarried to a young beautiful wife, retired to his estate, and he painted some of the most astonishing paintings he had ever painted. Peace, harmony, abundance, and love these are the great themes of Rubens and his age. His works exhibit and illustrate these qualities so well. I have not begun to express to you the brilliance of Peter Paul Rubens; he is just such a great artist that there is too much to say about him.