

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **RUBENS. THE POWER OF TRANSFORMATION**

**8 FEBRUARY – 21 MAY 2018**

**Städel Museum, Exhibition House**

**Press preview: Wednesday, 7 February 2018, 11:00 a.m.**

**Frankfurt am Main, 7 February 2018.** Almost no other artist exercised such a decisive influence on European Baroque painting as Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) did. The Städel Museum in Frankfurt dedicates a comprehensive special exhibition to the world-renowned artist, which will be on show from 8 February to 21 May 2018:

*Rubens. The Power of Transformation* comprises about one hundred items—including thirty-one paintings and twenty-three drawings by the master—and explores a hitherto little-regarded aspect in his creative process. The presentation reveals how profound the dialogue was into which Rubens entered with his predecessors' and contemporaries' achievements and fathoms the scope of their impact on the five decades of his production. Rubens's extensive oeuvre reflects the influences of ancient sculpture as well as that of the later art from Italy and north of the Alps, from the masters towards the close of the fifteenth century to the artists of his own day. Frequently, only a closer look will reveal how Rubens drew on the work of artists of different epochs: the exhibition offers an opportunity to comprehend the sometimes astonishing correlations in detail. The cross-genre presentation brings together paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, and objets d'art. In addition to original sculptures dating from classical antiquity to the Renaissance, the show also encompasses paintings and prints by Rubens's precursors and contemporaries, among them key works by Titian and Tintoretto, by Goltzius, Rottenhammer, and Elsheimer, as well as by Giambologna, Van Tetrode, and Van der Schardt.

The exhibition has been made possible through the financial support of Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH and Städtelscher Museums-Verein e. V. It has also been sponsored by the Savings Banks Finance Group represented by Sparkassen-Kulturfonds of the German Savings Banks Association, Deutsche Leasing, Helaba Landesbank Hessen-Thüringen, and Frankfurter Sparkasse.

Städel Director Philipp Demandt: "We are able to present an extraordinary artist's genius in all its facets to our public with this large-scale exhibition project. The

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comprehensive show offers a fascinating view of Baroque masterpieces that have never ceased to spellbind the viewer.”

“Rubens was one of the most prolific and fascinating artists of the Baroque age who not only influenced numerous subsequent generations in the field but also literally drank in various sources for his pictorial solutions himself. Our exhibition offers the unique opportunity to directly re-enact this creative process in our minds”, says Jochen Sander, curator of the exhibition and Head of German, Dutch and Flemish Paintings before 1800 at the Städel Museum.

### The Exhibition

Structured after pictorial motifs and themes, the tour takes visitors along well-known mythological subjects such as Venus and Adonis, the Judgement of Paris or Prometheus chained to a rock but also confronts them with crucial topics of the Old and the New Testament such as the beheading of Holofernes or the Entombment of Christ. Rubens’s rendering of Christ in *Crown of Thorns (Ecce Homo)* (c. 1612) already exemplifies the artist’s creative process in the first room of the show: Three exhibits strikingly visualise Rubens’s transformation of an ancient sculpture depicting a centaur into Christ presented to the people. Rubens first made several drawings exploring the ancient sculpture before the motif was developed into his extraordinary representation of Christ in the painting. Completely redefining the subject iconographically, he converted his ancient model of an unbridled, brutish centaur into an image of the suffering Christ calling for the viewer’s empathy. The return to antiquity ensures an extremely astounding representation of Christ’s body, whose athletic upper part is veritably exposed, put on display.

The ancient Roman sculpture of a crouching Venus preparing to take a bath provides another impressive example: Showing the same pose but conveying a completely different frame of mind, she has not merely been transmuted into a freezing Venus, the *Venus Frigida* (1614) but also into the goddess of Love lamenting her lover’s death (*Venus mourning Adonis*, c. 1614). A similarly arresting chain of motifs unravels from a work by the Flemish painter Michiel Coxcie depicting Cain’s murder of his brother (*The Death of Abel*, c. 1539). Rubens had acquired the study of the slain Abel by Coxcie in the form of a drawing, which he reworked in accordance with his understanding (*Abel Slain by Cain*, c. 1609). A short time after, the artist altered his solution to describe a tragically failing hero who has fallen backwards to the ground in an impressive drawing (*Study of a falling man*, c. 1610/11). It was this study on which he directly modelled two further paintings on display in the exhibition: the brilliantly executed representation of the *Death of Hippolytus* (1611–1613) and his monumental *Prometheus* (1611/12–1618). Some years later, no lesser artist than

Rembrandt (1606 – ca. 1669) would vie with Rubens's masterpiece that excited wide admiration: His *Blinding of Samson* (1636), one of the Städel's capital works, which can only be understood against the background of the artist's study of Rubens, has, therefore, been included in the exhibition.

The direct comparison between works by Rubens and their models offers fascinating insights into the ingenious development of the master's solutions and surprising motific metamorphoses, as well as his intense endeavours for an adequate format and the right form. The peculiarly modern, dynamic appearance of Rubens's creations is frequently indebted to the very deliberate return to identifiable models, which the artist—in the understanding of the concept of 'aemulatio' crucial within his era's theory of art—even tried to outdo. Each of the transformation processes resulted in a work that immediately enthralled the contemporary viewer and still fascinates us today.

The special exhibition is a joint project of the Städel Museum and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, five examples from whose rich holdings of works by Rubens have travelled to Frankfurt. Works by Rubens from the Städel's collection have also been incorporated into the presentation, among them the oil sketch *The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* (1628, draft for the high altarpiece of the Church of St Augustine in Antwerp) as well as several important items from its Department of Prints and Drawings.

It features works from numerous international lenders including the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the National Gallery in London, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Prado and the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, the Louvre in Paris, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, the Vatican Museums, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

### **The Artist**

Peter Paul Rubens was born the sixth of seven children in the city of Siegen, Westphalia, in 1577 and died in Antwerp on May 30, 1640. When still a young man, Rubens won international renown as an extraordinarily innovative artist. Yet Rubens was not only a painter but also an art theorist and collector, a respected discussion partner of European scholars and princes, and a diplomat in European employ—all this with Antwerp, the centre of his life, as a starting point. With more than fifty works in churches and museums and the Rubenshuis with its living quarters and adjacent studio, the artist and his work are still present in his hometown in an exceptional

manner today. Rubens studied under three teachers, among them the Antwerp painter Otto van Veen (1556–1629). At the age of only twenty-one, he entered the Guild of St Luke, the city's guild of painters, as a master in 1598, getting to know Antwerp's intellectual circles. In 1600, he travelled to Italy, where he stayed for eight years. This time—and especially the ancient sculptures he became familiar with then—had a lasting effect on his work. After his return to Antwerp in 1608, Rubens was appointed court painter to Albert, Archduke of Austria, and his wife Isabella Clara Eugenia, Catholic sovereigns of the Southern Netherlands, and married Isabella Brant, the city clerk's daughter. Rubens had become one of Europe's most sought-after painters, who created paintings for kings and princes, political leaders and diplomats. He decided to buy a house in 1610 for his workshop and his family, which he had converted into a small Italian-style city palace. After his first wife had passed away in 1626 and the Archduke of Austria's death, Rubens became Isabella's adviser, travelling through Europe in diplomatic mission from 1625 to 1628 to negotiate a possible peace between Spain and England and to campaign for ending the conflicts between the United Provinces in the north and the Southern Netherlands. It was not least thanks to his skill at negotiating that the Treaty of Madrid between England and Spain could be signed in 1630. In 1630, the artist married again: Hélène Fourment, a young woman from a middle-class family, with whom he had five children. Together with his family, Rubens found his last resting place in the memorial chapel of Antwerp's Saint James' Church.

### **Exhibition catalogue and conference**

The comprehensive exhibition catalogue, published by Hirmer Verlag, Munich, deals with all works presented in the two exhibitions in Frankfurt and Vienna and comprises essays by international Rubens experts who familiarise the reader with the widely varied field of subjects.

Accompanying the exhibition, an international conference dedicated to the issue *Art & Catholicism in the Dutch Republic* focuses on examinations of Rubens and his art.

## **RUBENS. THE TOWER OF TRANSFORMATION**

**Press preview:** Wednesday, February 7, 2018, 11:00 a.m.

**Exhibition dates:** February 8 – May 21, 2018

**Curators:** Prof. Dr. Jochen Sander (exhibition in the Städel Museum Frankfurt), Dr. Gerlinde Gruber (exhibition in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna), and Dr. Stefan Weppelmann (exhibition in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna)

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**Venue:** Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

**Opening hours:** Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun + holidays 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m., Thur + Fri 10:00 a.m.–

9:00 p.m., closed on Mondays

**Special opening hours (10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.):** Good Friday, March 30; Easter Sunday, April 1; Easter Monday, April 2; Tue, May 1; Thur, May 10; Whit Sunday, May 20; Whit Monday, May 21.

**Admission:** 14 euros, reduced 12 euros; Sat, Sun, holidays: 16 euros, reduced 14 euros; family ticket 24 euros; free admission for children under twelve years of age; groups of at least ten regularly paying persons: reduced admission per person. Groups are required to make previous arrangements for their visit: phone +49(0)69-605098-200 or [info@staedelmuseum.de](mailto:info@staedelmuseum.de).

Advance booking: [tickets.staedelmuseum.de](http://tickets.staedelmuseum.de).

Admission to the special exhibition is free for members of the Städel'sche Museums-Verein.

**Survey tours through the exhibition:** Tue, 3:00 p.m.; Wed, 1:00 p.m.; Thur, 6:00 p.m.; Fri, 7:00 p.m.; Sat, 4:00 p.m., Sun, 12:00 noon. Tours for the holidays on March 30, April 2, May 10, and May 21 have been scheduled for 4:00 p.m.

The number of participants is limited.

Tour tickets will be available starting two hours before each tour for 5 euros each at the cash desk of the Städel Museum.

**Early Bird Special:** 10 euros (limited offer)

**Advance booking:** [tickets.staedelmuseum.de](http://tickets.staedelmuseum.de)

**Catalogue:** A catalogue (312 pages, 304 color illustrations) will be published by Hirmer Verlag to accompany the exhibition. Ed. on behalf of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt, by Jochen Sander and on behalf of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna by Gerlinde Gruber, Sabine Haag, and Stefan Weppelmann, and. Contributions by G. Bisacca, N. Büttner, A. Georgievsk-Shine, G. Gruber, F. Healy, N. van Hout, D. Jaffé, E. Oberthaler, G. Prast, J. Sander, I. Slama, A. Vergara, S. Weppelmann, and J. Wood, as well as a preface by Sabine Haag and Philipp Demandt. German and English edition, 39.90 euros (museum edition).

**Exhibition booklet:** A booklet in German will be forthcoming to accompany the exhibition; 7.50 euros.

**Städel App and audio tour:** A German and English audio tour will be available. The German version is spoken by the German theatre and film actor Thomas Wlaschiha, who made an international name for himself in his role as Jaqen H'ghar in *Game of Thrones*. The tour may be comfortably downloaded to the Städel App at home. The Städel App is offered by the Android and Apple stores free of charge; in-app purchases for regular IOS and Android smartphones are 0,99 cent each: [app.staedelmuseum.de/en](http://app.staedelmuseum.de/en).

Visitors may rent an audio guide for 4 euros (two audio guides for 7 euros) in the museum. The production of the audio tour was supported by the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

**Digitorial:** The digitorial will be available to be downloaded from mid-January at [rubens.staedelmuseum.de](http://rubens.staedelmuseum.de).

**Social Media:** The Städel Museum communicates the exhibition in the social media with the hashtags #Rubens und #Staedel.

**Sponsors and partners of the exhibition**

**Supported by:** Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain gGmbH, Städelischer Museums-Vereins e. V. and Savings Banks Finance Group (represented by Sparkassen-Kulturfonds of the German Savings Banks Association, Deutsche Leasing, Helaba Landesbank Hessen-Thüringen, and Frankfurter Sparkasse)

**With additional support from:** Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung, the Government of Flanders

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