



Cover image: Jan Fijt, “The Deer Hunt” (detail)

MASTERS OF THE ANTWERP BAROQUE

February 7 - 21, 2020
Galerie Lowet de Wotrenge

From the early sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, Antwerp was one of the main centres of artistic production in the world. Although today perhaps few people will have heard of the great masters of Antwerp mannerism, such as Maarten de Vos or Frans Floris, almost everyone knows the giants of the Antwerp baroque period, such as Jacques Jordaens, Anthony van Dyck and, of course, Peter Paul Rubens. As these artists were principally active in the first half of the seventeenth century, it is often assumed that as far as artistic production is concerned, Antwerp brought forth very little of note from the 1650's onwards.

While this is indeed largely true for paintings, a case can be made that in the field of sculpture, that is when things were only just starting to get interesting. Great masters such as Lucas Faydherbe, Artus I and Artus II Quellinus and many others continued working in the baroque tradition started by François Duquesnoy. Fanning out from their native Antwerp to go on to work at royal and imperial courts around Europe, they kept the baroque legacy of Rubens alive until the definitive breakthrough of classicism in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This exhibition does not intend to show an exhaustive overview of the Antwerp baroque from the early 1600's to the late 1700's, as even a large museum would regard such an undertaking a challenge - let alone a small gallery! Indeed, it would be neigh-on impossible to find works by many of the greats mentioned above. Instead, we are aiming to illustrate the development of the Antwerp baroque style over the course of two centuries by showcasing a few selected works. Some of these are old friends of the gallery; others are recent discoveries. All, however, have provided us with much pleasure, which we now hope to share with you.

I

PAVING THE WAY

Before Rubens' return from Italy in 1608, which has traditionally been identified as the beginning of baroque art in Antwerp, other artists had already paved the way in the preceding decades, as they visited Italy and returned much impressed and inspired by the art of the great masters of the renaissance and, later on, of mannerist schools. For instance, looking at Frans Floris' *Head of an Old Man*, much inspired by Michelangelo, one cannot help but feel that this work foreshadows the later head studies by Peter Paul Rubens. Similarly, the *Italianate Landscape with the Ruins of a Roman Villa* by Rubens' first teacher, Tobias Verhaecht, while still mannerist in style, clearly displays the enthusiasm for classical antiquity his pupil would also embrace later on.



Frans I Floris

Head of an Old Man

oil on oak panel

48 x 34 cm

ca. 1560

Tobias Verhaecht

An Italianate Landscape

pen and ink, washes

197 x 276 mm

ca. 1595





Hendrick de Clerck

A Prophet

pen and brown ink

247 x 123 mm

ca. 1600

Hieronymus I Francken

The Adoration of the Magi

pen and brown ink, washes

240 x 405 mm, signed

ca. 1600



II

FOLLOWING RUBENS

It is hard to overstate the importance of Rubens' role in the development of the Antwerp baroque. Among the many influences he had picked up in Spain and Italy were the luminosity and colouring of Venetian masters like Tintoretto and Titian, the naturalism of Carracci, the bold compositions and use of light by Caravaggio and of course the myriad examples of classical sculpture and architecture he encountered on his travels. From all this, Rubens forged his own dynamic and sensuous style, which would continue to inspire artists for centuries to come. The works exhibited here, by artists such as Cornelis Schut, Victor Wolfvoet and Abraham van Diepenbeeck, reveal how strongly he influenced his contemporaries as well, whether or not they had been active in his studio and irrespective of their specialty, be it landscape, portraiture or religious and mythological compositions.



Cornelis Schut

Cimon & Iphigenia

oil on paper, laid on panel

19 x 29 cm

ca. 1635

Abraham van Diepenbeeck

The Assumption of Mary

pen and ink

170 x 140 mm

ca. 1640



Anthony van Dyck (workshop)

Portrait of Artus Wolffaert

oil on oak panel
25 x 19,5 cm
ca. 1645



Jan Fijt

The Deer Hunt

oil on canvas
58,5 x 82 cm, signed
ca. 1655



Victor Wolfvoet

The Adoration of the Shepherds

oil on oak panel
64 x 49,5 cm
ca. 1635



Abraham van Diepenbeeck

The Assumption of Christ

pen and ink, washes
147 x 170 mm
ca. 1635



Frans Wouters

A Satyr and a Nymph

oil on oak panel

36 x 40,5 cm

ca. 1640

Anthony van Dyck (workshop)

Portrait of Pieter de Jode

oil on oak panel

24,5 x 19 cm

ca. 1645



III

TRADITION / INNOVATION

Not all Antwerp painters from the first half of the seventeenth century were quick to adopt the new style idiom; various artists continued working in the mannerist tradition they were trained in, while others took up only some of the innovations that had come from Italy. The one-armed landscape painter Marten Ryckaert, for example, continued painting in the style of Paul Bril and Jan Brueghel the Elder, even though he had been to Italy and knew Rubens and van Dyck - the latter had painted his portrait - well. Frans Francken the Younger also kept working in the mannerist style of his uncle Hieronymus, though he did start using a freer, more painterly touch in the 1630's. Andries van Eertvelt, finally, clearly evolved as he gradually exchanged his bright mannerist style for a much softer and subtler palette after his return from Italy to Antwerp in 1630.



Andries van Eertvelt

A Fleet Presentation in front of the Bay of Naples

oil on oak panel

45 x 70 cm

ca. 1630



Frans II Francken

David & Abigail

oil on oak panel

41,5 x 58,5 cm, signed

ca. 1630



Marten Ryckaert

An Italianate Landscape

oil on oak panel
26 x 36,5 cm, signed
dated 1622

Jan II Brueghel & Frans II Francken

An Allegory of Air and Fire

oil on oak panel
53 x 74 cm
ca. 1635



IV

A SCULPTURAL LEGACY

By the 1650's, the heyday of the Antwerp school of painting was over, and, economically as well as culturally, a period of slow decline awaited the city. Still, Antwerp did produce many excellent sculptors in that era, who worked all over the Low Countries as well as further afield and who continued working in the high and late baroque style right up to the end of the eighteenth century. Putti in the style of François Duquesnoy, the godfather of Flemish baroque sculpture, remained a very popular Flemish topos, as is evidenced by the works by Quellinus, Xavery and Verelst, while van Beveren's Saint Sebastian was clearly influenced by Rubens and van Dyck. From the 1750's onwards, more classicist tendencies were in evidence, though sculptors such as Jan-Frans van Geel continued to reveal baroque influences and inspiration in their work.



François Duquesnoy (after)

Bust of a Child

bronze
height 19 cm
ca. 1650

Mattheus van Beveren

Saint Sebastian

terracotta
height 42 cm
ca. 1660





Jan-Baptist Xavery

An Allegory of Autumn

terracotta

height 29 cm

ca. 1720

Flemish school

Amor vincit Omnia

terracotta

height 27 cm

ca. 1700





Artus II Quellinus

An Allegory of Earth

terracotta
height 54 cm
ca. 1675



Aegidius Verelst

A Putto with a Fishing Net

terracotta
height 64 cm
ca. 1720



Walter Pompe

Romulus and Remus

terracotta, patination
height 8 cm
ca. 1750



Jan-Frans van Geel

Ganymede

terracotta
height 28 cm
ca. 1790

Text and layout by Tyr Baudouin

Printed in an edition of 500 to accompany the exhibition

Masters of the Antwerp Baroque

held at Galerie Lowet de Wotrenge from February 7 - 21, 2020.

For more information on any of the works
in this catalogue, please contact:

Galerie Lowet de Wotrenge

Vleminckveld 74
B-2000 Antwerp

tyr@kd-art.be | www.kd-art.be | +32 498 46 81 68

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