DOSSIER

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT ANDREW
PETER PAUL RUBENS

FUNDACIÓN
CARLOS DE AMBERES
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TECHNICAL DETAILS

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT ANDREW
PETER PAUL RUBENS

1638-1639
Oil on canvas

306 x 216 cm
With frame: 353 x 265 cm (depth: 26 cm)

Frame: Workshop of Abraham Lers and Julien Beymar 17th century
Wooden frame painted in cerulean blue with golden stucco
The painting was restored in **1977** by the Belgian National Ministry of National Education and Culture, when it was lent to the exhibition commemorating the IV centenary of Ruben’s birth.

In **1991**, the frame was restored by the Institute of Preservation of Cultural Goods in the Ministry of Culture in Spain.

In **2014**, Fundación Carlos de Amberes and María Jofre had the frame restored and the painting cleaned.
LOANS

Arte flamenco en las colecciones españolas, exhibition commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the death of emperor Charles V, Municipal Museum of Bruges, Belgium, 1958

Exhibition for the Fourth Centenary of the birth of Rubens, Antwerp, Belgium, 1977

Pedro Pablo Rubens (1577-1640), hommage exhibition, Velazquez Palace, Retiro Gardens, Madrid, Spain, 1978

Splendeur d’Espagne, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, Bélgica, 1985

Pavillion of Belgium, Universal Exhibition, Seville, Spain, 1992

Rubens, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France, March 6 – March 14, 2004

Rubens’ Return (Antwerp Baroque 2018). Rubenshuis, Antwerp, Belgium, 2018

Rubens and the Birth of the Baroque, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan, 2018.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain, 2019


Museo Nacional de Arte, Ciudad de México, México, 2019.
Fundación Carlos de Amberes

Casa de Rubens, Amberes, Bélgica, 2018.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, España, 2019.
Fundación Carlos de Amberes

Museo Nacional de Arte, Ciudad de México, México, 2019.

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE

This work, a longstanding possession of the Fundación Carlos de Amberes, was commissioned to Rubens by Jan van Vucht, a Flemish man living in Madrid as an agent for the famous Antwerp-based printer Balthasar Moretus. When he died, he bequeathed the painting to the Hospital of Saint Andrew of the Flemish, from which the Fundación Carlos de Amberes originated.

In his own will, he commissioned a frame for the painting, which is the same one we see today. The will, signed on the 24th April 1639, says:

"I declare that the painting of the glorious martyrdom of Saint Andrew, which has been brought from Flanders, be given to the said Hospital, and it is a painting by the famous hand of Master Peter Paul Rubens, and I order that a frame be made for the painting as Mr. Rubens himself desires: a frame carved to the highest quality possible to the orders of Abraham Lers and Julien Beymar, carpenters, servants to His Majesty. And its columns and ornamental top and anything else they wish will also be crafted, and it will be placed on the high altar of the said hospital and whatever the cost, it will be paid by the alms at my disposition." For the composition of the painting, Rubens follows the model of his master Otto Van Veen, who had produced a painting on the same theme for the high altar of the Church of Saint Andrew in Antwerp in the last decade of the sixteenth century.
This work is a masterpiece from Rubens' final period; he finished it only a year before his death. In it, Rubens, in complete control of his art, gives free rein to his greatest palette of colours, inspired by the free, loose and bright brushstrokes of the Venetian painter Titian; to his great mastery of composition, full of Baroque dynamism but also great narrative clarity; and to the interplay of expressions and gestures which made him famous throughout Europe.
Since Van Vucht's donation, The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew had remained in the hands of the Council of the Hospital of Saint Andrew, adorning the high altar of its church.

In 1848, due to the institution’s financial problems and the dangerous architectonic situation of the building, the work moved to the Monastery of San Lorenzo in El Escorial (with intervals at the Royal Tapestry Factory), where it remained until the inauguration of the Hospital's new venue 1891. In 1856, the Council decided to sell part of the sculptures, furniture and objects in the Hospital. Initially, Ruben’s painting was not among them, but on December 10, 1858, the Gaceta y Diario de Avisos de Madrid [gazette of announcements of Madrid], announced that the painting's public auction was to take place on December 18 of the same year. The eve of the auction, however, the Spanish Deputy Secretary of State informed the Minister of Interior that a document from Count Auguste van der Straten Ponthoz, Plenipotentiary Minister of Belgium in Madrid, had been received as a matter of urgency. In such document, the Plenipotentiary expressed his strong opposition to the tender. The aristocrat alleged that the painting was a donation to Madrid by a philanthropic subject of Belgium and that it was worthy only of Spain's Museums of the Crown and the Nation. His allegation was answered immediately, and that same day a Royal Order of the Ministry of Interior aborted the sale of the painting.
Due to the cancellation of the its sale, in 1865 a board of experts composed by painters José Casado del Alisal, Ignacio Suárez y Ceferino Araujo, examined the paintings and thus confirmed that it was a work executed by Rubens during his second stay in Madrid in 1628. According to the board, it was one of the most important by the painter and, to the painting’s quality, it had to be added the merit of Rubens having realized it while being in charge of an extraordinary diplomatic mission in the Spanish Court.

During the First Republic (1873-74), Joris, a businessman from Belgium, became a great supporter of the Council of the Hospital of Saint Andrews of the Flemish. Thanks to his aid and money, Rubens’ painting returned to the Hospital. Not after long, however, the painting moved again to the Royal Tapestry Factory, where it remained until the inauguration of a yet new location.

During the general meeting of November 21, 1877, the Council decided to celebrate, on November 30, festivity of Saint Andrew, the opening of the new church at Claudio Coello street. On November 23, they requested from Ms. Eloísa Dulongval, widow of Mr. Gabino Stuyck, and owner, at that time, of the Royal Tapestry Factory, that she gave back Ruben’s painting along with the ornaments and objects which had been under the custody of the Factory.

At the beginning of 1936, a shell fell on the vault of the church, right on the high altar, and left it to shambles. Fortunately, the painting remained intact and was moved to the side chapels. In March 1937, an envoy of the Spanish Council for the Artistic Treasury, which was responsible for the preservation of art objects, advised the Belgian to take the painting to a safer place, more specifically to the Museum of El Prado. The Museum restored the small damage suffered by the shell and took the painting under its custody.
In 1958, the painting was lent to the International Exhibition in Brussels. It caught the attention of an American dealer working for the Metropolitan Museum in New York, who bid fifteen million pesetas for the painting. It was a great temptation for the Hospital's Council, for its funds were scarce. They concluded that the Spanish Government would show no opposition due to the abundance of Rubens paintings in Spanish museums. However, before settling the deal, the Council decided to inform the Ambassador of Belgium, just in case Belgian government would like to bid for the painting as well. In 1960, ambassador Berryer, in representation of his country, alleged before the Spanish Congress, his opposition to the sale of the painting, for it was a symbol of the union between Spain and Belgium when both were governed by the same monarch. Once again, the sale was cancelled.

In 1975, ambassador Robert Vaes requested the painting to the Council for an exhibition in Antwerp (July - September, 1977) commemorating the IV Centenary of Rubens’ birth. Before its exhibition, Rubens’ painting was restored by the Belgian Ministry of National Education and Culture. In 1978, the painting was requested again for an exhibition in the Velazquez Palace, in the Retiro gardens (Madrid). When it closed, the Council decided to put it under the custody of the Museum of El Prado, where it remained until 1989.

In 1992, the venue of the Fundación Carlos de Amberes in Claudio Coello was restored and inaugurated by the King and Queen of Spain and King and Queen of Belgium. Until now, the painting occupies the high altar of the former church of the Foundation. In 1992, too, the Foundation changed its mission to contributing to the city both socially and culturally.
Jacob de Voragine tells the story of the martyrdom of Saint Andrew in The Golden Legend, a collection of stories from the thirteenth century. Almost completely about the lives of saints, it constitutes one of the bases of Christian iconography.

It tells that when the apostle Saint Andrew was in Acaya, Greece, he founded several churches and converted many people to the Christian faith. Among them was the wife of the Proconsul Egeas. When Egeas found out, he was furious, and attempted to force Christians to offer sacrifice to the idols. Saint Andrew came before the Proconsul and tried to convince him to halt his undertaking and convert to Christianity. But the Proconsul ordered him to be imprisoned. He was whipped and attached to the cross like the God of whom he spoke so much, but tied only with his feet and hands, with no nails, so that it would take longer for him to die and draw out his suffering.

Over the two days he took to die, Saint Andrew did not cease to preach, bringing several people to him to listen. Since his words showed him to be a holy and just man, the crowd did not hesitate to rebel against Egeas, who believed his own life to be in danger. Faced with such threats, Egeas came to where Andrew was in order to pardon the martyr, but he refused all help. He said:

"Why have you come? If it is to ask for pardon, you will receive it; but if it is to untie me and leave me free, do not worry: it is too late already. I will not come down alive from here; I can already see my King waiting for me."
Rubens’ painting appears to represent this exact moment, when the saint, in great pain, looks up to the sky. At his feet are the executioners, who are following Egeas' orders and trying to untie him. Egeas is seen on horseback. As soon as the executioners touch the ropes, they are left paralysed. Some of the apostle's followers are also trying to untie him, but Andrew stops them, crying the following words:

"Lord, do not let me down from here alive. It is time for my body to be put into the ground."

After saying these words, the crucified man was surrounded by a mysterious light from the sky, "which clouded the view of all those present and did not let them fix their eyes on him." When he finished his speech, the apostle died.

Maximila, the wife of Egeas, took responsibility for his body, burying it piously. Despite this, Egeas, while he was returning home, was attacked by the Devil in the middle of the street, surrounded by the public, and died a sudden death. The Flemish was founded in 1594 by Carlos de Amberes, a Flemish man living in Madrid, who donated some land for the construction of a building which would serve as a hospice for the poor and pilgrims from the Netherlands. Therefore, the Hospital and Church were founded in at the beginning of the seventeenth century, dedicated to Saint Andrew, patron saint of Burgundy and the Knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece, who wore an X-shaped cross as their emblem. It enjoyed royal protection from the time of Philip III.

After the Hospital was closed, the canvas was deposited in the monastery of El Escorial in 1844. In 1891, after the Hospital was renovated, it was put back at the front of the chapel, now situated in the new district of Salamanca. In 1978 it entered the Prado Museum as a temporary deposit, and since 1989 it has been kept in the Fundación Carlos de Amberes.
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