Peter Paul Rubens: Impressions of a Master from the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art

February 2-March 31, 2012
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INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION AND USING THIS PACKET

This exhibition showcases the work of the Flemish Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens through prints that reproduce his work. Reproducing his work in printed form allowed his works to be more widely circulated, contributing significantly to his fame. This exhibition features over fifty prints after compositions by Rubens along with one print by the master himself, all drawn from the permanent collection of the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. The included works explore both religious and secular themes and contain many mythological references.

This packet provides additional background information about each print, as well as about Rubens, printmaking, the printers responsible for the reproductions seen here, and the paintings that the prints reproduce. Underlined terms in the text will be more fully explained in the Glossary. Anyone seeking additional information should consult the References listed below each overview.
PETER PAUL RUBENS

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) was a Flemish diplomat and one of the most influential artists of all time. He was a member of the upper class in Antwerp and was an ambassador for the rulers of the southern Netherlands. He later became painter to the courts of Europe and produced many allegorical paintings that gloriﬁed his royal patrons. Rubens’ art is a blend of styles, incorporating aspects of the Italian High Renaissance, which includes artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, as well as northern realism and love of landscape, a hallmark of Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s style. He also knew a great deal about Classical art and literature and used many mythological references in his work. In addition to paintings, Rubens designed tapestries, book illustrations and small pieces of sculpture and metalwork.

Rubens maintained a studio that employed a large number of assistants to help him meet the demand for his work. Works would often be painted by assistants from a drawing or sketch by Rubens, who would add the ﬁnishing touches to the work. In order to disseminate his work more widely, Rubens also employed numerous printmakers to make copies of his paintings. After ﬁnding that many of his paintings were being reproduced without his permission, Rubens tried to secure exclusive rights to his work in order to protect himself against piracy.

Eventually, the States General of the Dutch United Provinces and the rulers of Spain, England, and France granted him “copyright.” He then began a vast printmaking project that resulted in close to a hundred plates executed under his direct supervision by talented engravers from which prints continued to be made long after his death. In the form of engravings, Rubens’s most famous compositions could be enjoyed by an international public, by those who could not travel to Antwerp, Paris, or Madrid, or have access to the royal palaces and religious houses where many of these works were originally displayed. It was in this way that Rubens’ inﬂuence came to be felt around the globe.
PRINTMAKING TECHNIQUES: INTAGLIO

The word intaglio is from the Italian meaning incised design. In the intaglio process, the printing surface is sunk beneath the areas that are to remain blank. Ink is applied to the plate with a dabber or roller, and forced into the grooves and pits of the incised image. The surface of the plate is then wiped clean. A sheet of paper is then laid on the inked plate and submitted to sufficient pressure to drive the paper into the grooves so that it picks up the ink. The printed image is the reverse of that on the plate. The intaglio processes can be subdivided into two categories: engraving, in which the grooves and pits are cut with a tool; and etching, in which they are bitten by acid. Engraved and etched lines have different characteristics and are often used in combination to portray those aspects of an image to which they are most suited. By the 1860s a great mixture of intaglio techniques were used together, especially in prints reproducing paintings so as to match the surface of the print with the complexity of the surface of the painting.

**Etching**

In etching the grooves and hollows are formed by the corroding action of acid, in a process known as biting. The plate is first coated with a wax-like substance, called the ground, which is impervious to acid. The ground is smoked with burning tapers to blacken it. Then the design is made through the ground with a needle, laying bare the metal where the artist wants lines to appear. The plate is placed in a bath of acid diluted with water. The strength and thickness of the lines is mainly determined by how deeply the plate is bitten, which in turn depends on the kind of acid used and the proportion of acid to water. Before printing, the ground is removed. Developed by armorers for decorating weapons, etching wasn’t used for printing on paper until shortly after 1500 in Germany. Etching has since been used as a means of reproduction as well as an expressive art in and of itself.

**Engraving**

In engraving, the grooves and pits that collect ink are cut with a tool. This tool, called a burin, is pushed at an acute angle over the plate and the tip cuts into the metal to remove the surface in slivers. Ridges of rough metal left behind are removed with a scraper. Turning the plate during the process of engraving produces curved lines. This technique was first used in the fifteenth century, arising independently in Germany and shortly thereafter in Italy. Although the technique can be used for producing original works as well as for purposes of reproduction, by the middle of the sixteenth century it had become predominantly a means of reproduction. It was not until photographic methods of reproduction were developed towards the end of the nineteenth century that interest in line engraving as an original graphic medium revived.
TRIUMPH OF THE EUCHARIST SERIES

Peter Paul Rubens began his *Triumph of the Eucharist Series* around the year 1625 as a commission from Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, Spanish governess of the Southern Netherlands from 1599-1633. The Infanta commissioned the series of paintings as preparatory images, or *modellos*, for a set of tapestries she later had made for her convent, the Royal Discalced Nuns (*Las Descalzas Reales*) in Madrid, Spain. The sisters of the Infanta’s convent in Madrid were also known as the Poor Clares. This title references both the founder of their order, Clare of Assisi, and their dedication to lives of poverty and religious contemplation. In *The Defenders of the Eucharist*, the patron Isabella Clara Eugenia is portrayed in the guise of St. Clare.

Rubens’ *Triumph of the Eucharist Series* is an example of Counter-Reformation art that aimed to promote the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church in relation to the Eucharistic sacrament. The series features narrative, thematic, and allegorical works which all relate to the central theme of the *Eucharist*. Old Testament scenes, including *The Meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek* and *An Angel Gives Bread and Water to Elijah*, were viewed as pre-configurations of the *Eucharist* in the Catholic tradition. The thematic scenes include *The Four Evangelists* and *The Defenders of the Eucharist*, which feature New Testament and historical figures in the Catholic Church that serve to reinforce the Eucharistic message. The allegorical figures in *The Triumph of the Eucharist over Idolatry* and *The Triumph of the Catholic Truth* serve the same purpose.
This image depicts the Four Evangelists of Christian tradition who are credited with authoring the four Gospels of the New Testament: Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (in the print, this is the figural grouping to the left.) St. Luke is shown on the far left with an ox, which is his attribute and represents the values of sacrifice, service, and strength discussed in his Gospel account. St. Mark is shown next to Luke, bearing his Gospel under his arm and accompanied by a lion, which is his attribute, representative of courage and the idea of Christ as king. On the far right, St. John looks upward at an eagle, which is his attribute, representative of the idea of the Ascension and Christ’s divine nature. The eagle also represents his Gospel, which is regarded as addressing “higher” theological issues than the Gospels of the other three authors. In Christian narrative, the cup with the snake he bears refers to the poison he willingly drank in order to test his faith (tradition indicates John did not die.) St. Matthew and his attribute, the angel, are placed centrally within the work. Matthew gazes at the angel, who both points to Matthew’s Gospel and heavenward, representing the divine inspiration Matthew was said to receive in writing his Gospel. This painting is part of Rubens’ Triumph of the Eucharist Series, and fits thematically with the series because the Four Evangelists recorded the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper in their Gospels. Nicolas Bonnart (1646-1718) produced this print. Bonnart was a French engraver and draughtsman and his two brothers, Robert and Jean-Baptiste, were also prolific engravers.
This image features a group of important figures from the early history of the Christian church. On the right side of the print are St. Augustine, the Bishop-saint Ambrose, and Pope Gregory I “the Great,” all of whom wrote on various aspects of Eucharistic doctrine. On the left of the print is German Bishop-saint Norbert in a white monastic habit and St. Jerome, dressed in a cardinal’s robes reading his Vulgate, his translation of the Bible into Latin. The two central figures are St. Clare and St. Thomas Aquinas, who holds a book of his writings and points upward to a dove that represents the Holy Spirit. She holds a monstrance, the vessel used to display the Eucharistic host. The features of St. Clare were inspired by those of Isabella Clara Eugenia, the woman who commissioned the Eucharist Series. This painting fits thematically with the rest of the series because the figures depicted were influential Catholic authors and theologians, many of whom discussed the importance of the Eucharist in their writings.

References:
The Eucharist Overcoming Pagan Sacrifices  
After Peter Paul Rubens  
1648-1652  
Engraving on paper

The Triumph of the Eucharist over Idolatry  
Peter Paul Rubens  
1626  
Oil on canvas

This scene is a representation of the Catholic Eucharist’s victory over pagan idolatry, and more generally, it symbolizes Christianity’s triumph over paganism. The scene is not based on any particular biblical story; instead, it is an allegory, a representation of an idea or concept using figures or events. In the center of the scene, a group has gathered in a pagan temple and is preparing to sacrifice an ox. An angel appears above bearing a cup of wine and the wafer consumed during the Eucharist, also known as the Host. The figures in the central group shrink away from the angel in surprise or amazement with their arms raised over their heads or held in front of their faces, shielding them from the angel and the rays of light surrounding him. This painting is part of Rubens’ Triumph of the Eucharist Series, and fits thematically with the series because it depicts the delivery to the people of the Eucharist as a Catholic sacrament.

References:
This image portrays a biblical scene taken from 1 Kings 19:1-8, in which the prophet Elijah is visited in the wilderness by an angel who provides him with bread and water, telling Elijah to eat and drink because he has a long journey ahead of him; Elijah later travels to Mount Horeb where, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, Moses had received the Ten Commandments. The biblical scene with Elijah and the Angel which inspired this image can be interpreted as typology, a theory in which Old Testament events are seen as pre-configurations of events which occur in the New Testament and the life of Christ. Here, the Angel's giving of bread and water to Elijah is regarded as a pre-cursor to Christ's giving of bread and wine to his disciples at the Last Supper and thus to the clergy's distribution of the sacrament to Catholics during Holy Communion. In this painting Rubens visually reinforces the importance of the Eucharist in Catholic doctrine and asserts the religious beliefs of the patron.

References:
After Peter Paul Rubens
1660
Engraving on paper

This scene is dominated by allegorical representations of Truth, Time, and the triumph of the “Catholic Truth”—the Eucharist. In the center of the painting an elderly, winged figure bearing a scythe represents Time. With one arm, Time raises up a classicized female figure whose halo of light labels her as “VERITAS”—a symbolic representation of Truth. Veritas raises her arm above her head, pointing to a scroll hanging over the scene that reads “HOC EST CORPVS MEUM”—“this is my body.” These are the Latin words that are said during Catholic mass that, according to Catholic tradition, transform the Eucharistic bread or wafer into the body of Christ. Above the text in a scrolled frame is an image of the Host. Below the figures of Time and Truth is a group of people who may represent pagans or heretics, people who did not adhere to Catholic beliefs. The spatial placement of this group below Time and Truth suggests their submission to the two figures, or at the very least their unorthodoxy. The figure of Truth reveals the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist to the viewer and is meant to visually suggest the legitimacy of the sacrament, an important goal of the Counter-Reformation during which this painting was produced. This painting is part of Rubens’ Triumph of the Eucharist Series and fits thematically with the series because it triumphantly depicts the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist as “truth.”

References:
This image portrays a biblical scene taken from Genesis 14:17-24, in which Abraham returns victorious from battle and is received by Melchizedek, high priest and king of the city which would later be known as Jerusalem. Melchizedek, the elderly figure in the center of both the painting and the print, offers bread, wine, and his blessing to Abraham, who is still in his armor. This painting is part of Rubens’ *Triumph of the Eucharist Series*, and fits thematically because this scene, in Catholic theology, is considered to prefigure the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, at which Christ offers his disciples bread and wine as his own body and blood.

References:


CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES SERIES

Rubens painted his *Apostles Series* between 1611 and 1612 after it was commissioned by the Duke of Lerma, a minister of king Philip III of Spain. The series consists of twelve portraits of the *apostles* of Jesus accompanied by a portrait of Jesus himself, although the portrait of Jesus has been lost. Rubens included Paul among the twelve *apostles* but not Jude, who is more commonly counted among their ranks. Within this group of prints, however, we have a portrait of Jude as well as Paul, making the total number of prints fourteen (13 *apostles* and Jesus.) It is possible that the printer used another portrait by Rubens as the basis for the portrait of Saint Jude that has been included with this group of prints. It may also be the case that a portrait of Jude was included in the original series but it has been lost. That, however, seems less likely as there are no references to more than twelve *apostles* in any extant sources. Each portrait shows the *apostle* with one or more of the *attributes* most commonly associated with him. These *attributes* often refer to the manner of the *apostle*’s death. The series is currently located in the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain.

The majority of the prints from this series that we have in this exhibition were executed by the German artist Peter Isselburg (1568-1630). Isselburg was a German draughtsman, engraver, and printer active in Cologne, Nuremberg, and Bamberg, and was a contemporary of Rubens. During his career, he produced more than 400 engravings and was considered to be one of the most skilled engravers of his time. He was known for his religious scenes and scenes of nature. His work subsequently encompassed a broader spectrum of subjects, including religious works of modest significance but also portraits of scholars, generals and secular and clerical princes.
This print was made after a lost painting by Peter Paul Rubens of the same title and depicting the same subject matter: Christ as “salvator mundi,” or savior of the world. Rubens’ painting was part of his Christ and the Apostles Series, which featured individualized portraits of Christ and each of his apostles, each depicted with their most representative attributes that call to mind incidents from the stories surrounding their lives. Here, Christ is shown with his cross, his wounds, and a halo of light. Rubens’ Salvator Mundi painting is lost today, but the complete print series by Isselburg, made after Rubens’ series, includes a presumably faithful print version of the painting.

References:

http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/benezit/B00092602?q=peter+isselburg&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit
The subject of this engraving is St. Paul—with a landscape in the background. The figure is represented holding a book in one hand and a sword in the other, attributes commonly associated with St. Paul. The book is meant to represent the teachings of Jesus, which Christian narrative indicates he helped to spread, while the sword may be a reference to the story of his death, which tells us that he was beheaded. As a Roman citizen, he was entitled to a quick death by decapitation rather than one of the many more painful options. This print is a reproduction of the Rubens painting of Saint Paul and, like his reproductions of the other paintings in Rubens' Christ and the Apostles Series, it reproduces the figure quite faithfully but adds some details and a background setting that were not present in the painting.

References:

The British Museum Online Collection Database
   http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database
Isselburg based his print of Saint James the Greater on Rubens’ portrait of the saint. Saint James was one of the Twelve Apostles. He is called James The Greater to distinguish him from another James, son of Alphaeus, who is known as James the Less. According to Christian narrative, Saint James was one of three apostles whom Jesus selected to bear witness to his Transfiguration, an event in the Christian story in which Jesus miraculously emanates radiance. *St James the Elder* is part of Rubens’ *Apostles Series*, a series of life-sized half-portraits. They were depicted as strong men, with impressive old faces. In this painting and the print reproduced after the painting, Saint James is identified by his pilgrim’s attributes: the hat and the staff.

Resources:

Peter Paul Rubens: St. James the Elder. Art and the Bible.
http://www.artbible.info/art/large/705.html

This print is based on a painting of Saint James the Lesser by Peter Paul Rubens in his *Christ and the Apostles Series*. Saint James the Lesser, also known as “the Less” and “the Minor,” was one of Christ’s twelve apostles said to be present at the *Pentecost*. He was known for his life of prayer and his devotion to the poor. Both the painting by Rubens and the later print by Peter Isselburg depict James wearing a voluminous cloak and bearing an angular fuller’s tool, which was used by cloth makers and was the tool with which he was clubbed and martyred.

References:

This print is based on a painting of Saint Peter by Peter Paul Rubens in his *Christ and the Apostles Series*. Saint Peter, also known as Simon Peter, was one of Christ’s twelve apostles and an early Christian leader. Christ told Peter that he would be the “rock” upon which his church would be built (Matthew 16:13-20); the Catholic Church thus regards Saint Peter as the first pope. Peter is also the author of two Epistles, known as the First and Second Epistles of Peter, that are part of the New Testament. Both the painting by Rubens and the later print by Peter Isselburg depict Peter wearing a draped cloak and holding two keys which symbolize his receipt of the keys of the kingdom of heaven from Christ, an event cited in the same biblical passage mentioned above (Matthew 16).

References:

*Saint Matthias*

Peter Isselburg  
c. 1623-1625  
Engraving on paper

Peter Isselburg's print is a reproduction of Rubens' portrait of St. Matthias. In the Christian story, St. Matthias is the apostle chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, after Judas' betrayal of Jesus and his suicide. An unconfirmed narrative indicates Matthias was eventually stoned and then beheaded in Jerusalem. Rubens' *St. Matthias* is also from his *Apostles Series*. Rubens depicted these figures with their most representative attributes in order to facilitate their identification. The attributes are drawn from a variety of iconographic and literary traditions, which has sometimes led to confusion about their identities. The axe held in the hand is an attribute of St. Matthias. It refers to St. Matthias' death by beheading. St. Matthias was also depicted as a strong man, with an impressive old face.

Resources:

Peter Paul Rubens: St. Matthias. Art and the Bible.  
http://www.artbible.info/art/large/735.html

This print is a portrait of Saint Matthew, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus and one of the Four Evangelists. Saint Matthew holds a weapon, a reference to the martyrdom the Christian Church teaches he suffered. In the oil painting made by Rubens, the figure of Saint Matthew is large and of forceful appearance, contrasting with the dark background. The use of this type of human form and the intensely directed light is the result of the painter's trip to Italy, where he was influenced by the art of Michelangelo and Caravaggio.

Resources:
Saint Matthew. ZINZ. http://artist.artmuseum.com.cn/hisArtworkDetail.htm?id=3815
Saint Simon
Peter Isselburg
1623-1625
Engraving on paper

This portrait depicts Saint Simon and is part of the series by Peter Paul Rubens entitled *Christ and the Twelve Apostles*. Saint Simon was not often mentioned in the Bible but he was given the title Simon the Zealot in order to distinguish him from Peter who was also known as Simon. The name *Zealot* was given in reference to his “zeal” for his religion. He was crucified as the Bishop of Jerusalem. Each portrait in the series was made to be life size. In this painting Saint Simon is depicted holding a saw underneath a book, the pages of which he turns with his right hand. The saw is Saint Simon’s most common attribute because he was said to have died after being sawed to pieces. His burial place remains unknown. The engraving is a close copy of Rubens’ painting.

References:
**Saint Philip**

After Peter Paul Rubens

1623-25

Engraving on paper

This print is based on the painting of Saint Philip by Peter Paul Rubens in his *Christ and the Apostles Series*. Saint Philip was one of Christ’s twelve apostles and was present at the Feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6:4-15), an event in which Christ is said to feed five thousand people with just a few small loaves of bread and fish. Both the painting by Rubens and the later print after Rubens depict Philip bearing the cross on which he was martyred. Rubens’ painting is characteristic of his style of depicting powerful emotion in individualized figures and of contrasting between areas of light and darkness. The print conveys the figure’s emotion in Rubens’ painting and creates a similar contrast in value through the use of dense crosshatching and engraving techniques.

References:


Peter Paul Rubens: St. Philip. Art and the Bible.

http://www.artbible.info/art/large/774.html
Not much is known about Saint Thomas, otherwise known as “Didymus” or twin. He was included in Rubens’ series of portraits of the apostles. According to Christian tradition, one of the few things known about St. Thomas was his devotion to Jesus, expressed in his statement, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” St. Thomas, however, is primarily known within Christian narrative for his disbelief in Jesus’ return from the dead. The phrase “doubting Thomas” comes from his request for physical proof of Jesus’ resurrection. For Christians, Thomas’ later life is uncertain. He is commonly believed to have traveled to India. He is depicted holding a spear in both images because it is thought that after being condemned four soldiers speared him to death. His burial place is commonly accepted to be St. Thomas Mount or San Thomé Cathedral, located in Mylapore, India, although it is also hypothesized that his relics were moved to Italy. Though some details have been added to the print, the pose, along with his attributes, a book and a spear, are present.

References:

Peter Paul Rubens: Saint Thomas. Art and the Bible.  
http://www.artbible.info/art/large/777.html

St. Thomas. Encyclopedia Britannica.  
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/592851/Saint-Thomas

http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14658b.htm
According to Christian tradition Saint Andrew, the brother of Saint Simon, was a fisherman who began following Jesus as a disciple. He is most often listed among the first four apostles and in the Book of John he was listed as the first. In Christian stories, he is said to have been present for the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the Last Supper, and is said to have witnessed the Ascension. His occupation as a preacher of the Christian faith is generally accepted by Christian scholars but has not been proven or documented. We are told that he was crucified and bound to a cross in order to intensify his suffering and because of this the cross has become his attribute. He was supposedly martyred during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero (37AD - 68AD). Although the printmaker has added details to the background of the print the subject matter is still a single figure of Saint Andrew in the same pose, gazing towards the left as in the painting that this print reproduces.

References:
"Nero." BBC News. BBC. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/nero.shtml
Peter Paul Rubens: Saint Andrew. Art and the Bible.
http://www.artbible.info/art/large/779.html
St. Andrew. Encyclopedia Britannica.
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/23960/Saint-Andrew
Saint Jude
After Peter Paul Rubens
c. 1700-1750
Engraving on paper

This print, often identified improperly as Saint James the Less, actually represents Saint Jude. Saint Jude, also referred to as Judas Thaddaeus, Lebbaeus, or Jude of James, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. Saint Jude’s attribute is a club because according to Christian tradition he was clubbed to death. However, he is also usually shown holding an image of Christ in his hand and with a flame above his head, indicating his receipt of the Holy Spirit with the other apostles. As far as we know, there is no painting of Jude in Rubens’ Apostle Series. It may be that the engraver based this portrait, included among reproductions of Rubens’ Apostle Series, on another portrait by Rubens that was not part of the series. It is also possible that there was originally a portrait of St. Jude in the series that has now been lost.

Reference:
Each of the Twelve Apostles in the *Apostles Series* has been painted in life-sized half-portraits. In *The Golden Legend*, a precise description is given of Saint Bartholomew, “His hair is black and crisped, his skin fair, his eyes wide, his nose even and straight, his beard thick and with a few gray hairs....” Although this description of the saint might be too broad or alternatively too specific to use in identifying him, he can be recognized by the knife he holds in his hand, an attribute associated with him. Saint Bartholomew is often depicted holding this knife because one story of his death indicates he was flayed alive; the knife he holds represents the knife with which he was flayed.

Reference:


In Rubens’ series of paintings depicting the apostles, Saint John the Evangelist can be identified by his attribute, the goblet. According to Christian stories he was given poison from a goblet after refusing to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods but the poison did not kill him. The name of Evangelist, which refers to the author of a Gospel, also recalls his attribute of a pen, shown in artworks of the Middle Ages. Christian tradition states that Saint John wrote the most spiritual and contemplative Gospel. As a result, the eagle, a soaring bird, became another of his attributes. As one of the apostles, probably the youngest, Saint John is often portrayed as a young, beardless man, unlike others who are shown as bearded older men.

Reference:
MARIE DE’ MEDICI CYCLE

The Marie de’ Medici Cycle is a series of twenty-four paintings that Marie, the queen of France and wife of Henry IV, commissioned from Peter Paul Rubens in 1621. They were commissioned to decorate her Luxembourg Palace in Paris and were hung in one large room so that the entire cycle could be viewed as a whole. They now hang in the Louvre in Paris. Marie and her advisors were part of the artistic process and dictated to Rubens the subject of each painting, and to a certain extent had control over the composition as well. Records of letters between the artist and the queen’s advisors, dictating compositional details and subject matter, survive in the historical record. For some paintings in the cycle we can see the way the original idea evolved and became a final product.

In the cycle, Marie’s major life events and struggles are depicted using a great deal of allegory. Most of the paintings are filled with mythological and allegorical figures. Three of the paintings in the cycle are portraits, but the remaining 21 picture events from Marie’s life. Throughout the cycle, attempts to lend legitimacy to Marie’s power and justify past actions can be identified. A major theme throughout the cycle is her conflict with her son Louis XIII. Following the death of her husband Henry IV, Marie acted as regent for her son who was not yet of age. The people of France considered her to be an effective ruler, but shortly after her son took over full power of the state, their conflict of interest began. The conflict primarily surrounded issues of policy. The fire beneath the conflict seems to have been kindled by numerous advisors within Louis’ court who were enemies of Marie. By the time Marie commissioned this cycle she and her son had reconciled but that came only after years of personal as well as military conflict. The peace between them was short-lived. In 1631, Louis exiled his mother for good and in 1642 she died in Germany without ever returning to France. The cycle can be read as an attempt to paint Marie as a benevolent mother who has been wronged by an ill-advised son. By using allegory and symbolism, however, Rubens was able to touch on subjects that were still sensitive.
This engraving reproduces a portrait by Rubens of Francesco I de Medici, father of Marie de’ Medici, queen of France and the second wife of Henry IV of France. Both this portrait and the accompanying one of his wife Johanna were painted from prototypes rather than from life and they were displayed on either side of the portrait of their daughter Marie de’ Medici at her Luxembourg Palace in Paris. Scholars have argued that these portraits of Marie de’ Medici’s parents are out of place among the other paintings in the cycle. Stylistically, they are at odds. The figures are rigid, the composition is unimaginative, and there are no mythological references present. This could be explained by the simple fact that Rubens was copying earlier portraits of the Duke and Duchess rather than inventing his own compositions. Alternately, they have also been read as a baseline of reality in an otherwise grandiose series of paintings, a way of reminding the viewer that the scenes depicted in the cycle are in fact drawn from reality.

References:
Jeanne d’Autriche Grande Duchesse de Toscane
Jean-Marc Nattier
1710
Engraving

This print was produced by Jean-Marc Nattier, a French painter born in 1685, and is based upon a portrait of Johanna of Austria, Marie de’ Medici’s mother, painted by Rubens. Although Jean-Marc Nattier was a well-known painter in his own right, he gained notoriety by copying Rubens’ Marie de’ Medici cycle. The Medici name was not particularly old or noble, but Johanna was of Imperial blood and a member of the Bourbon line, a European royal family. Johanna died young, at the age of 31, and led a rather unhappy life as wife to a husband who had no love for her. She fulfilled her childbearing duties but was so neglected by her husband that her imperial relatives had to threaten to intervene on her behalf. In the room where the Marie de’ Medici cycle was displayed, her portrait was hung on the side that held the paintings dealing with Marie’s many duties, griefs, and conflicts during her time as regent and dowager whereas the portrait of her husband is hung on the side of the room focusing on the happy years of Marie’s young life. These associations can be seen as intentional, with the sorrows of Marie’s life being likened to the hard life of her mother who died young after enduring a loveless marriage.

References:
This image portrays a scene of the three Fates spinning the life-thread of Marie de’ Medici. Jupiter, the king of the gods in Roman mythology, and his wife Juno are seated above, presiding over the destiny of the unborn queen. Their concern over her fate suggests that the queen enjoyed a close relationship with the gods. Next to Jupiter is an eagle, a symbol of his power. The inclusion of Juno in this scene is not only an attempt to compliment the queen and convey divine goodwill, but also to indicate that Marie and Juno are on an equal level. Juno is seen as an alter ego of Marie in her role as royal consort. The association made between Marie and Juno is, perhaps unintentionally, especially fitting since both women were married to arrogantly philandering husbands who gave little concern to their wedding vows and took many mistresses. While the two paintings of her parents are often seen as the first two in this cycle, this is the first that deals with Marie’s life.

References:


This scene of the birth of Marie de’ Medici shows a personification of Florence, Marie’s Italian home city, accepting the baby Marie from Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth. But Rubens’ image shows something more than Marie’s birth. It conveys the political assertion that Marie was destined from birth to wield power in France. In addition to Florence and Lucina, two of the Hours shower the baby with flowers from above. A protective spirit holds a cornucopia suggesting Marie’s future greatness. A personification of the Arno river, a river in Florence, lounges in the bottom left corner, and the zodiac sign Sagittarius illuminates the whole scene at the top center. The presence of Sagittarius suggests her connection with France from birth. Sagittarius was not Marie de’ Medici’s sign, it was the sign of her future husband, Henry. With the inclusion of Sagittarius, Marie, who commissioned the painting, seems to assert that she was predestined to be queen and that her life from the beginning was illuminated by the light of her future king and husband.

References:
L’Education de la Reine
After Peter Paul Rubens
1710
Engraving

The education of Marie de’ Medici shows the young princess being instructed by Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war. Minerva wears a helmet. The musician next to Minerva has been variously identified as Apollo, the Roman god of music and art, Orpheus, a legendary musician and poet, or a personification of Harmony. The foreground is littered with literary, artistic and musical implements. The three Graces, Roman goddesses of beauty, creativity and fertility, look on and Hermes, the messenger of the gods, approaches from above, offering his caduceus to the young Marie. Hermes’ gift of the caduceus, a short staff with two serpents wrapped around it, is thought to suggest that the gods endowed Marie with eloquence, while the presence of the Graces suggests a gift of beauty. The efforts of her divine supporters can be seen as preparing her for her future responsibilities as queen.

References:

Jean Audran, a French artist born in 1667, was raised by his uncle Gerard, who instructed him in the technique of engraving. By the age of 20 he was a well-known artist and in 1707 he was appointed engraver to the French king. Here he reproduced one of Rubens’ paintings from the Marie de’ Medici cycle. In this scene, Henry IV looks at a portrait of Marie de’ Medici, deliberating on his future marriage. Hymen, the Roman goddess of marriage, and Cupid, the Roman god of love, hold the painting for him. Jupiter and Juno, shown here with Jupiter’s most characteristic attribute, the eagle, and Juno’s, the peacock, look down on the scene from above, giving their support and approval. A personification of France looks over Henry’s shoulder. The sky, which is darkened by clouds and smoke, suggests the disasters that accompany war and war seems still to be raging in the distance. But the images of war are an invention of Rubens, perhaps to justify the fact that the king repeatedly delayed the marriage. During the time their marriage was being negotiated he was not, in fact, at war. The presence of France, who appears five times in the cycle, suggests that Henry’s choice of Marie as a wife had more to do with diplomacy and the politics of the state than with love. Nonetheless, the inclusion of Jupiter and Juno makes it clear that the match was made in heaven.

References:

This image depicts Marie de’ Medici’s marriage by proxy to Henry IV. The ceremony took place in the Cathedral St. Maria del Fiore in Florence on October 5, 1600. In Rubens’ painting Duke Ferdinand I, Marie de’ Medici’s uncle, stands in for the groom who was detained by his war. Cardinal Aldobrandini is shown here blessing the marriage ring, lending legitimacy to the marriage, which was later questioned by the French people. In attendance are a number of French diplomats, as well as Marie’s aunt Cristina, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, and Eleonora de’ Medici, Duchesse of Mantua and Marie’s sister. The child holding up the bride’s train carries the torch of Hymen, the Roman goddess of marriage, and seems not to be a representation of the goddess herself but rather a child dressed up as Hymen. Thus, the painting lacks the mythology that connects events in Marie’s life with the gods in so many other paintings from the cycle.

References:
This image portrays Marie de’ Medici’s arrival at the harbor of Marseille. She is accompanied by her sister Eleonora and her aunt Christina. Christina was not only her aunt but also her adoptive mother. She was raised by her aunt and uncle because her mother, father, and stepmother all died while she was still young. Personifications of the region of Provence and the city of Marseille greet them while Nereids, sea nymphs in Roman mythology, and marine deities are depicted in the foreground seemingly helping to dock the ship. Neptune, the Roman god of the sea is in the lower right while Fame blows a trumpet above, announcing their arrival. The scene is thus filled with real people as well as personifications and mythological figures. Here we see Marie en route to meet her husband for the first time, as he was not present at their marriage ceremony. And although in reality there would have been many dignitaries who greeted Marie as she disembarked at Marseille, they are not included here but are represented instead, as mentioned, by the personifications of Provence and Marseille.

References:

La Ville de Lion Va Adevant de la Reine
After Peter Paul Rubens
1710
Engraving

The Marriage Consummated in Lyons
Peter Paul Rubens
1622-1625
Oil on Canvas

This scene represents the meeting of Marie de’ Medici and Henry IV in Lyon, France. Here Henry and Marie are represented as Jupiter and Juno, king and queen of the gods, identifiable by their attributes of the eagle and peacock. Hymen, the Roman goddess of marriage, stands behind them. Below the king and queen, a personification of the city of Lyon drives a chariot pulled by lions that are ridden by torch-bearing infants with butterfly wings. This meeting represents the first time that Henry and Marie, previously married by proxy, had the chance to meet. After her arrival at Marseille, also depicted in the cycle, it took Marie three weeks to travel from Marseille to Lyon and the journey was said to have been difficult. After her arduous journey, Marie arrived to find that Henry was delayed again by his war and likely also by his reluctance to leave his mistress who was at the military camp with him. When he finally arrived, he is said to have been very pleased with his bride and a second ceremony was performed by Cardinal Aldobrandini to legitimize the original one.

References:
The birth of Louis XIII, Marie de’ Medici’s son, is commemorated by Rubens in this scene. Marie, looking exhausted from the trials of labor, gazes at her son, who is held by personifications of Justice and Good Health while Cybele, the “Great Mother,” stands behind the queen. A personification of Fecundity stands at her side holding a cornucopia, or horn of plenty. This cornucopia is filled with fruits as well as five baby’s heads, suggesting the five additional children Marie would bear in the future. Justice here may be the Greek goddess Themis who was a goddess of justice, righteousness, law, and order, as opposed to simply a personification. Her presence suggests both the sign under which Louis XIII was born, Libra, which is represented by scales, and the fact that he was later known as Louis the Just. The half nude youth next to Justice is identified as a personification of Good Health by the snake wrapped around his torso, which connects him with the Greek god of medicine: Asclepius. Apollo drives his golden chariot through the sky above this scene suggesting, by means of Apollo’s association with the sun, the arrival of a new Apollo, a sun-king.

References:


In this scene Henry IV confers the regency to Marie de’ Medici before leaving for war in Germany. The orb he hands her represents the all-encompassing power of the state. Louis XIII, their son, stands between them, and three soldiers, replacing the three fates in the original composition, stand behind Henry. A personification of Prudence, a virtue defined by the use of reason and good judgment, stands beside Marie. Behind Prudence is perhaps Generosity, although the identification of both allegorical personifications is rather shaky in this case. The architecture in the background calls to mind a triumphal arch, which is fitting as the king is departing for war. This scene deals with rather touchy historical material that was still politically sensitive at the time this was painted. Upon Henry’s death, which took place just a short while after the scene depicted here, Marie did take power in France during the minority of her son but, because of her Italian heritage, she was opposed by many who questioned her allegiance to France and the legitimacy of her claim to power. Thus, this painting can be seen as an outright political challenge to those who questioned her authority.

References:

Here we see an important event in Marie’s life: her coronation at the basilica of Saint-Denis in Paris. In this scene, Marie de’ Medici is crowned by a cardinal as spectators look on. Her son Louis XIII and her daughter Elisabeth stand nearby while her husband Henry IV looks on from a balcony above, appearing rather detached from the scene. A personification of Abundance, holding a cornucopia, and a winged Victory shower peace and prosperity on her from above. This is one of the few paintings in the series that is lacking in mythological figures. Part of the reason resides in the fact that the composition of the painting was meticulously laid out for Rubens, whose input concerning the figures included in the painting was minimal. Interestingly, the queen of France did not need to be specially crowned, according to French tradition. But in some circumstances, in order to lend legitimacy to a queen’s power, coronations were performed. It seems that Marie was crowned as a reaction to the king’s obsession, at the age of 57, with the idea of his own death. Marie’s coronation was a way to reinforce his family’s power base and ensure the continuity of his line in the event of his death. For Marie, this painting supported her claim that she was made queen and regent in her own right, not solely as royal mother. It accomplishes this by asserting the consent and confidence of the king.

References:
Unlike the coronation scene, this scene is full of allegorical and mythological imagery. Two crucial events in Marie’s life are combined here, the death of her husband Henry and the start of her term as regent. On one side of the scene, Jupiter and his father Saturn carry Henry up to Mt. Olympus, the mythical home of the gods, allegorically suggesting his post-mortem deification. Two winged female figures, most likely Victories, stand at the center of the composition in poses of mourning. Meanwhile, on the other side Marie de’ Medici sits enthroned and veiled, accepting an orb, a symbol of the power of the state, from the personification of France, while Regency offers her a rudder, the symbol of government. Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war, and Prudence stand behind her, suggesting the wisdom and rationality with which she will rule. The composition can be divided into two halves, the one representing death and strife, while the other gives a sense of peace and order. The scene of death and strife is dominated by male figures, while the portion of the picture depicting Marie’s calm assuredness is predominately filled with female figures.

References:
This scene in which the Roman gods gather is used as an allegory for the reign of Marie de’ Medici. Jupiter, shown here with his eagle, and Juno, with her doves, sit on their thrones presiding over the gathering. Saturn, holding his characteristic attribute, a sickle, and Mercury, wearing a traveller’s hat, stand behind the king and queen of the gods. Apollo, identified by the bow in his hands, and Minerva, with helmet, shield, and spear, occupy the center foreground. Pan, the Roman god of the wild and companion to Nymphs, is seen from behind, reclining on a nearby rock. The nude Venus and Mars, in full armor, appear above the radiant Apollo, who strides forward toward the five Vices in front of him, driving them back. Diana, goddess of the hunt and the moon, drives her chariot in the background and may be meant to represent Marie’s daughter-in-law as a new moon rising out of the clouds of uncertainty to take her place alongside Louis XIII, often identified as a Sun-King. The dark-robed woman at the top center has been identified as Marie herself, since she holds a caduceus, an object we often find associated with her.

References:


Marie de’ Medici is shown here accompanied by a personification of Generosity, while a winged Victory and Fame hover in the sky above her. Long identified incorrectly as a scene depicting Marie’s journey to Pont de Cé, it has since been agreed that the scene is instead her victorious return from Jülich. It shows the outcome of a military campaign she undertook during the first year of her regency, completing actions begun by her late husband. The campaign was an attempt to intervene in the succession disputes of the duchy of Jülich-Cleve-Berg. Shortly before his death Henry IV, in accordance with an old treaty, mobilized a large army to march on the forces of the Austrian Emperor, who had seized control of the duchy to prevent any of the Protestant heirs from coming to power. The campaign had only just begun at the time of Henry’s death and Marie was unenthusiastic about it, fearing that her support of Protestant princes would alienate the Pope, the Emperor, the King of Spain, and Catholic France. Nevertheless, she needed to do something with the huge army in the field and she needed to show her country that she would continue her husband’s plans and honor his commitments.

References:
This scene shows Anne of Austria, the future wife of Louis XIII, and Elisabeth of Bourbon, the future wife of Philip IV of Spain and Marie’s daughter. A personification of France stands beside Anne while a personification of Spain stands beside Elisabeth. A personification of Felicity hovers above with a cornucopia. Marie would have seen the event pictured here as one of her greatest achievements as regent, viewing the political alliances created by the double marriage as the foundations for world peace. Marie arranged for her daughter Elisabeth to marry Philip IV of Spain and in return Anne of Austria (so called because of her Habsburg blood despite being a Spanish princess) was wed to her son Louis. The setting here is theatrical, even more theatrical than the actual exchange that it commemorates would have been. During the ceremonial exchange, the two princesses were handed over to the emissaries of their new home countries on a float in the Bidassoa River, exactly on the border between France and Spain.

References:


This portrait has been described as the most luxuriant and exuberant painting of the cycle. Almost the entire scene is filled with allegorical symbols and figures. Marie de’ Medici is represented as the personification of Justice enthroned, a pair of scales in her hands. Minerva stands beside Marie, while two personifications stand in front of Minerva. These personifications, possibly Prudence and Abundance, shower gifts on the nude children in the center foreground. One of them pours trinkets, fruits, coins and other items from a cornucopia into her skirt while the other distributes them to the children below. There are six children in the scene, the number of children Henry and Marie produced during their marriage. They could thus be seen as a reference to the Queen’s fertility and the good it brought to the realm. Saturn brings a personification of France before the Queen. The nude children in the foreground, perhaps symbolizing the arts, trample upon the Vices and Fames blow trumpets in the upper right and left corners. The painting is meant to represent the felicity brought to France by Marie. For the most part Marie’s reign did not represent a golden age for France, but she did maintain peace, promote religious freedom, and form advantageous alliances.

References:
This scene shows the coming of age of King Louis XIII and again Rubens designed a scene more allegorical than historical. Marie de’ Medici stands at the stern of the ship gesturing towards the rudder, which symbolizes Government, while her son Louis XIII holds the rudder. This action makes Marie seem humble and submissive in her role as Queen Mother, graciously relinquishing power. A personification of France stands at the center holding a sword and an orb, which symbolizes the power of the state. Four allegorical figures, identified by the shields attached to the ship as Fortitude, Piety, Justice, and Concord, row the boat. Another personification, perhaps Prudence, furls or unfurls the sails at the front of the ship depending on whether the ship is interpreted as arriving or departing. The ship of state is a theme used frequently in French royal imagery.

References:


Shown here is Marie de’ Medici’s escape from her imprisonment at the castle of Blois. Marie stands at the center while Minerva stands behind her, throwing her arms protectively around the Queen. Night and Dawn hover above, possibly suggesting the time of day at which the events took place. Her relationship with her son Louis XIII was a troubled one following his majority and he was responsible for her imprisonment. The identity of the men who greet her as she exits the castle is not certain. Marie was under house arrest at Blois for nearly two years, during which time her visitors were screened. She was prevented from having contact with her children, and she had very little contact with the outside world in general. According to the story of the actual events, Marie climbed out a window and down a ladder to find freedom. Rubens shows her with much more dignity than the actual events probably allowed. He shows a queen liberated from unjust captivity rather than a corpulent matron climbing out a window.

References:
This picture represents yet another political statement made by Marie. Depicted is the Treaty of Angoulême or the reconciliation with Louis XIII. Mercury, the messenger of the gods, presents Marie with an olive branch, representing peace. A cardinal and a personification of Prudence accompany her. Interestingly, Louis is not present. The subject was a touchy one, as relations between Marie and her son were still problematic. The treaty that was signed on April 30, 1619 was so ineffective that it caused their domestic squabble to escalate to the point of military conflict. The olive branch offered by Mercury was not backed by Louis’ good intentions. Less than a year after the treaty was signed, the mother and son were at war. This painting, then, does not commemorate peace between mother and son rather the wrongs done to the mother by the son. The painting highlights the fact that Marie saw herself as a wise guardian of a young monarch who was in the habit of making mistakes. For this reason, Marie is not equated with Juno or Minerva. She is simply as she wished to be seen by her country: humble, patient, wise, tolerant and long-suffering.

References:

This image represents an abstraction of events between Marie and her son. Originally, an image of a military battle between Marie and Louis was to follow *The Negotiations at Angoulême*. Since Marie was defeated and humiliated in that battle the idea was abandoned. This painting replaced the battle scene. In this scene, a great deal of generalization can be found and if the picture is taken literally, it tells very little. Marie is shown walking up steps to a round structure, resembling a classical temple. She is accompanied by Mercury and Innocence while a personification of Peace occupies the central position holding a torch. The three *Vices* make trouble in the left foreground. Despite the presence of Peace, the smoke of fire and battle still lingers in the scene. The Latin inscription above the doorway identifies the temple as one to the Roman goddess Securitas, a personification of Security. So, rather than seeing this as an image of peace or reconciliation, it can be read as a depiction of Marie’s retreat to security and safety following the failed attempt at reconciliation at Angoulême. More generally, it can be read to symbolize Marie’s withdrawal into the security of life as dowager.

References:


This picture represents the reconciliation of Marie de’ Medici with her son Louis XIII. Marie holds the caduceus, traditionally an attribute of Mercury, and her son Louis XIII stands next to her represented as Apollo, the youthful god of art and music. Meanwhile, a female figure uses a thunderbolt to slay the Hydra, a mythological snaky beast with many heads. The thunderbolt is traditionally associated with Zeus. A personification of Government hovers above holding the orb, representing the power of the state, and the rudder, representing government. Symbolically, the Hydra represents the death of her chief opposition, an advisor of her son. Thus, the positive change in relations between mother and son is attributed to the death of this man and blame for their problems is simultaneously ascribed to him instead of them. The mode of his death as shown carries importance. He is depicted as dying by divine punishment, not by natural causes. The many heads of the serpent can be seen as referring to enemies of Marie that infested Louis’ court. This image claims, then, that Marie’s return to favor had nothing to do with actions taken by Louis, but rather was destined by the gods.

References:
This image is an allegorical depiction of the reconciliation of Marie de’ Medici and Louis XIII. Louis, at left, hands Marie an emblem of harmony: a laurel wreath with clasped hands holding a burning heart inside the wreath. Below, Time lifts Truth upwards towards the mother and son. The allegorical pair below takes up significantly more space in the composition than the real people above. It is as if this image claims that the true purpose of the cycle was to elucidate the truth of the complicated relationship between mother and son. Louis here is depicted in Roman garb and appears triumphant, quite different from the depictions of him in previous paintings in the cycle as a youthful Apollo. This is perhaps to suggest that he has grown out of his ill-advised youthful rebellion against his mother, representing a hope for good relations in the future.

References:
Marie de’ Medici is shown here as a triumphant queen, standing partially nude with helmet and scepter and a small statue of the goddess Victory in her hand. Armor is scattered at her feet and a cannon is behind her, suggesting military victories. Cherubs hold a laurel wreath above her head, also a symbol of victory. In the print, we see the addition of a coat of arms above within a draped curtain border. The main composition finds direct parallels with ancient statues of Athena, the Greek version of Minerva. The colossal chryselephantine statue of Athena in the Parthenon shows Athena in military garb holding the goddess Nike, the Greek version of Victory, in her hand. This portrait of her as the goddess Minerva/Athena is the climax of her painted biography. This painting could have been an attempt to suggest her victory over her son, who was unsuccessful in preventing her influence in French politics. Ultimately though, after the cycle had been completed, Louis did exile Marie de’ Medici permanently in 1631. She was first exiled to northern France but she escaped to Brussels, then Amsterdam, eventually dying in Germany.

References:
OTHER PRINTS FROM THE EXHIBITION

Some of the prints included in this exhibition were not based on paintings that were part of particular series. Many of these prints depict religious subjects but were not part of either the *Apostles Series* or the *Eucharist Series*. The *Drunken Silenus* is one of Rubens' many paintings dealing with subjects from classical mythology. As we have seen in the Marie de' Medici Cycle, Rubens included mythological references even in paintings that dealt with historical subject matter.
This print is an original by Rubens and depicts Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a Christian saint who was martyred in the early fourth century under the rule of the Roman Emperor Maxentius in the wake of Diocletian's Great Persecution. Constantine succeeded both emperors and issued the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which formally ended the Empire’s persecution of Christians. Saint Catherine was condemned to die on the spiked breaking wheel, an instrument of torture, but the wheel was “miraculously” destroyed and she was then martyred instead by beheading. Ruben’s depiction of Saint Catherine features her with her typically represented saintly attributes: the wheel to which she was condemned, the sword that beheaded her, and a palm branch, a symbol of martyrdom. The martyr appears victorious, standing atop a cloud with one foot placed upon the wheel; rays of light issue from behind her head, which suggests a halo.

References:
This print depicts the Christ child embracing the Virgin Mary with a riverscape in the background. Significant iconography related to the Virgin pertains to her robe. Mary’s robe is usually shown in the color blue to symbolize her purity. However, because this is a black and white representation the engraver in particular shows the significance of the robe by its size. The billowed drapery surrounds Mary and the Christ child. The painting is similar in the figural composition, but differs in background and stylistic qualities.

Resources:
The British Museum Online Collection Database  
http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database
Metropolitan Museum of Art  
http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections
This image portrays a scene from the Christian Bible taken from Luke 5:1-10 in which Christ preaches to the people at the Sea of Galilee from a boat. According to Christian narrative, Christ instructs Simon to put the boat out into deep water and to let the nets down in order to catch fish. Simon responds, saying that he and his company attempted to fish for the entire night before but were unsuccessful. Despite this, he does as Christ wishes, and is awed when the fishermen haul up nets full of fish. According to Christian tradition, Christ then tells Simon and the fishermen they will become fishers of men, making them Christ’s first disciples. The print of this scene is by Pieter Claesz Soutman (c. 1580-1657), a Dutch printmaker and painter who was a contemporary of Rubens. Soutman was one of the engravers whom Rubens employed for the reproduction of his works in print format. The compositional differences between Rubens’ painting and Soutman’s print suggest that Soutman was permitted by Rubens, who oversaw the reproduction processes, to take artistic liberty and depart from the original composition.

References:
Esther Before Ahasuerus
After Peter Paul Rubens
17th century
etching on paper

This etching is done after an unknown Peter Paul Rubens painting of Esther Before Ahasuerus. The subject matter is based upon the The Old Testament book of Esther. Esther interceded with the Persian king, Ahasuerus, to spare the Jews. When Ahasuerus’s wife Vashti had offended him, he replaced her with Esther, not knowing she was Jewish. After it was decreed that all Jews in the Persian Empire be massacred, Esther intervened on behalf of her people. She did so even though to enter the king’s presence without being summoned was forbidden on pain of death. Swooning with fear, she confronted the king, who received her and granted her request. Throughout his career, Rubens created a large amount of religious artworks as a devout Catholic. These emotional paintings were an attempt to instill religious faith in concert with the Counter-Reformation. Therefore, as this print is an example, he employs the use of idealistic figures and iconographic symbols in order to glorify scenes from the Christian Bible.

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Peter Paul Rubens Short Biography.
  http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/rubens/
This image portrays a biblical scene taken from Matthew 3:13-17, in which Christ is baptized by St. John the Baptist. According to Christian tradition, Christ goes from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Hearing Christ’s wish, John protests, saying he is not worthy of baptizing Christ and that he is the one who should be receiving the baptism. As the story goes Christ then responds, saying that it must be so, and John obliges. In the Christian narrative, after Christ is baptized, a voice from heaven speaks and claims Christ as his son. The print depicts Christ standing in the waters of the river, head bowed before John, who stands on the riverbank and pours a small bowl of water over Christ’s head. The clouds open above Christ to reveal a dove who casts rays of light onto the scene, meant as a representation of the Holy Spirit. According to the British Museum, the print was based on a painting by Rubens from the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Mechelen, Belgium.

References:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/
This image depicts a Dionysiac scene, a popular theme explored by many artists. Dionysiac scenes, also referred to as Bacchanalia, depict Dionysus or his followers engaged in revelry. Revelry was their method of worshipping the god Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. Here Silenus, a tutor and companion of Dionysus, is depicted stumbling along while other revelers help to support him. Silenus was almost always drunk and was thought to have special knowledge and the power of prophecy when intoxicated. Among the revelers are satyrs and maenads, followers of Dionysus. Silenus is sometimes depicted as fully human and is other times depicted as a satyr, displaying some characteristics of a goat or horse. Mythic tradition tells us that Silenus was the foster father of Dionysus. Dionysus was transferred to, and birthed from, his father Zeus’s thigh after his mother, Semele, when pregnant, was destroyed by the fire of the brilliance of Zeus in his godly form. In order to protect him from the jealous rage of Zeus’s wife Hera, Dionysus was entrusted to Silenus after his birth. Revelry played a large part in the rituals associated with the god Dionysus and in Roman times a mystery cult surrounding Dionysus, called the Dionysian Mysteries, became popular. The followers of this cult would use wine, music, and dance to put themselves into a trance-like state.

References:
GLOSSARY

**allegory**: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence; also an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression.

**apostle**: one of the authoritative New Testament group sent out to preach the gospel and made up especially of Christ’s 12 original disciples and Paul.

**Ascension**: an event described in the Christian New Testament in which the resurrected Jesus is taken up to heaven.

**attribute**: an object closely associated with or belonging to a specific person, thing, or office, a scepter is the attribute of power; especially such an object used for identification in painting or sculpture.

**caduceus**: symbolic staff of a messenger, usually depicted with two entwined snakes and two wings at the top. Carried by Hermes as a symbol of peace, it served to protect messengers and ambassadors.

**chryselephantine**: something made of gold and ivory.

**cornucopia**: a curved goat’s horn overflowing with fruit and ears of grain that is used as a decorative motif symbolic of abundance.

**cycle**: a group of creative works (as poems, plays, or songs) treating the same theme.

**disciple**: a follower who accepts and helps in spreading the doctrine of another, often used to refer to Christ’s followers.

**doctrine**: principles or position in a branch of knowledge or system of belief, often used to refer to the principles of the Christian belief system.

**dowager**: a widow holding property or a title from her deceased husband.

**emissary**: one designated as the agent of another.

**Eucharist**: a Christian rite that commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples. The rite involves eating bread and wine that represent the body and blood of Christ, respectively. In Roman Catholicism the Eucharist is a sacrament, and the bread and wine are thought to become the actual body and blood of Jesus through transubstantiation. Anglicans and Lutherans also emphasize the divine presence in the offering and recognize it as a sacrament, while others regard it as a memorial with largely symbolic meaning.
Evangelist: a writer of any of the four Gospels.

extant: still existing. Not destroyed or lost.

fecundity: fruitfulness in either offspring or vegetation, often related to fertility.

Feeding of the Five Thousand: Also known as the miracle of the five loaves and two fish, an event described in the Gospel of John in which five small barley loaves and two small fish were used by Jesus to feed five thousand people.

felicity: the quality or state of being happy.

flay: to strip off the skin or surface.

Flemish: of, relating to, or characteristic of Flanders or the Flemings or their language. Flanders is located in modern Belgium.

foreground: the part of a scene or representation that is nearest to and in front of the spectator.

fuller: one who fulls woolen cloth, shrinking and thickening it by moistening, heating, and pressing.

goblet: a bowl-shaped drinking vessel with a foot and stem but often without handles

Gospel: one of the first four New Testament books telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

habit: a costume characteristic of a calling, rank, or function.

host: the Eucharistic bread.

the Hours: goddesses of the seasons and of time in Greek mythology. They were regarded as goddesses of order and natural justice.

idolatry: the worship of a physical object as a god.

Maenad: a female follower of Dionysus. The name comes from the Greek for "raving ones." Maenads were often in a state of ecstatic frenzy, brought on by dancing and drunkenness. In this state, they would lose all self-control, begin shouting excitedly, engage in uncontrolled sexual behavior, and ritualistically tear animals to pieces and eat their raw flesh. They are also known in myth to have torn apart men and children.
**majority:** the age at which full civil rights are accorded.

**martyr:** a person who suffers death as the penalty of witnessing to and refusing to renounce a religion or who sacrifices something or great value, often his/her own life, for the sake of a principle.

**minority:** the period before attainment of majority, during which the person is a legal minor and does not yet have full civil rights.

**modello:** a preparatory study or model, usually at a smaller scale, for a work of art or architecture.

**orb:** a spherical body, often symbolizing kingly power or justice.

**paganism:** a polytheistic religion, such as the religions of Greece and Rome.

**Pentecost:** a Christian feast on the seventh Sunday after Easter commemorating the visitation of the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

**personification:** representation of a place, thing or abstraction as a person.

**proxy marriage:** a marriage celebrated in the absence of one of the contracting parties who is represented at the ceremony by a proxy, a person authorized to act for another.

**regency:** the office, jurisdiction, or government of a regent or body of regents.

**regent:** a person who governs a kingdom in the minority, absence, or disability of the sovereign.

**resurrection:** the return to life of one who was dead, often refers to the rising of Christ from the dead.

**revelry:** noisy partying or merrymaking.

**royal consort:** the wife of a reigning king.

**sacrament:** a Christian rite that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.

**Satyr:** a sylvan deity in Greek mythology having certain characteristics of a horse or goat and fond of Dionysian revelry.
scythe: an implement used for mowing or cutting and composed of a long curving blade fastened at an angle to a long handle.

sickle: an agricultural implement consisting of a curved metal blade with a short handle fitted on a tang.

theologian: a specialist in theology, the study of religious faith, practice, and experience. Especially, the study of God and God's relation to the world.

unorthodoxy: not conforming to established doctrines, especially in religion.

the Vices: personifications of vice in Greek mythology, often connected with the later Christian idea of the seven deadly sins although there was no set number of Vices in Greek myth.

Zealot: a member of a fanatical sect arising in Judea during the first century A.D. that militantly opposed the Roman domination of Palestine.


