

# Rubens & Brueghel

## *A Working Friendship*

### BIOGRAPHIES

#### **PETER PAUL RUBENS (Flemish, 1577–1640)**

The son of a lawyer and alderman, Peter Paul Rubens originally trained for a civic career before becoming the preeminent painter in Antwerp. Fluent in six languages, Rubens was also a savvy businessman and diplomat. Over the course of his career, he transformed a variety of influences into a bold new style that earned him an international reputation and major public commissions.

In 1600, he embarked on an influential eight-year sojourn in Italy, where he served as court painter to the Duke of Mantua and studied works from antiquity, as well as Renaissance masters such as Michelangelo and Titian, and contemporaries like Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio. Within a year of returning to Antwerp, Rubens established himself as one of the city's leading artists and became court painter to the Governors of the Spanish Netherlands, Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia. Rubens specialized in large religious and historical figurative subjects. His energetic Baroque style introduced a new dynamic sensibility and monumentality. Erudite and cultured, Rubens was esteemed by princely patrons throughout Europe, producing paintings for the rulers of France, England, and Spain, among others.

To expand his reach and influence, Rubens worked with assistants to reproduce his works, maintaining a strict control over the quality. His engravers made prints of book illustrations, tapestry designs, festival decorations, and paintings on every subject.

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Rubens' impact was international and long lasting. Even after his death, artists continued to reproduce Rubens' images, which remained in demand.

### **JAN BRUEGHEL THE ELDER (Flemish, 1568–1625)**

Jan Brueghel hailed from a dynasty of Flemish painters—he was trained by his grandmother, Mayeken Verhulst Bessemers, a miniaturist; his father was the renowned painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder; and his older brother, Pieter Brueghel the Younger, was also a successful artist.

Called "Velvet Brueghel" for his skill at painting rich and delicate textures, Brueghel was celebrated in his own time, becoming dean of the Antwerp painters' guild by 1602. He traveled widely throughout Europe. During a three-year trip to Italy in the 1590s, he met Cardinal Federico Borromeo, the future archbishop of Milan, who would become a lifelong friend and patron.

Specializing in still-life and landscape subjects, Brueghel worked from nature, often traveling great distances to find rare examples of flora, which he depicted in tightly composed still lifes. Borromeo saw evidence of God's presence in Brueghel's marvelously detailed natural subjects, and delighted in the artist's depiction of paradise and unexpected vistas filled with flowers and animals. Brueghel combined the past—artificial, cluttered late sixteenth-century compositions—with observation from nature. He frequently provided lush woodland scenes densely populated with exotic animals and flowers as backdrops for other artists' figures. Brueghel's sons, including Jan Brueghel the Younger, and later artists carried on his style well into the 1700s.

The Premiere Presentation ***Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship*** is on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center from July 5–September 24, 2006.