

can fall victim to his own lecherousness. Inappropriate sexual desire is also the subject of *Amnon and Tamar*, from the book of 2 Samuel in the Bible. Amnon, King David's eldest son, was in love with Tamar, his half-sister. When he feigned illness and Tamar took cakes she had baked herself to his bedside, he sent everyone out of the room so that he could rape her. He later took a dislike to the girl and called a servant to send her away. However, the consequence of this was his death.

The drama and the passions that Steen depicted can be seen as expansions of situations from everyday life presented as if on a stage. His characters play their parts with violent gestures and dramatic facial expressions. It is striking that they are wearing turbans, old-fashioned trunk-hose and open sleeves with slits that look as if they have come out of the costume chest box. The figure who looks straight at the viewer from the painting, offering a comment, also reminds us of the stage practices of that era. The most appealing theme in theatre, literature and opera is still that which Steen incorporated into many of his history paintings: women as temptresses or as the victims of male desires, and men who are unable to control their passions or other emotions. But what distinguishes Steen's paintings from those of his fellow artists is his mockery of the idiotic behaviour of his main characters. This mockery and humour are expressed above all in the clownish minor characters, the commentator or laughing jester, or Steen's grinning self-portrait. In his work, these familiar stories become an entertaining farce. The painter appears to want to tell us that people act with stupidity and that their emotions are only fleeting; but what's more, it's better to laugh at human behaviour than cry.

Jan Steen was one of those people who put human life very much into perspective. The ease with which he was able to capture dramatic moments appealed not only to the public of his day, but still makes him an attractive artist to a modern public too.

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Jan Steen's Histories, at the Mauritshuis in The Hague, until 13 May 2018 (www.mauritshuis.nl)

The Catalogue of Rubens's Oeuvre Fifty Years of Work in Antwerp

The year 1968, half a century ago, saw the publication of *The Ceiling Paintings for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, the first part of what should, by 2020, become the complete catalogue of Rubens's oeuvre: the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*. How did this massive project, carried out in Antwerp, come into being?

As early as 1919, the Antwerp art historian and museum director Paul Buschmann expressed the wish that the Rubens House there, which it had been decided to restore, should have a Rubens documentation centre to cater to the needs of researchers. When the plans for restoration gradually took shape in the years that followed and were finally carried out, it became clear that the building would be too small to serve this purpose. So, for this documentation centre, which by then had been named the 'Rubenianum', those concerned started thinking about a separate building adjacent to the restored Rubens House. The dilapidated Kolveniershof, where Antwerp's archer's guild had once met and which adjoined Rubens's garden, was discovered by chance during the Second World War. This building turned out to be the perfect location for the Rubenianum. After the war, the city council purchased the building. However, it was only many years later, in 1975, that work was able to start on the restoration of the old Kolveniershof and a new wing to extend it. In the meantime, as from about 1950, an academic library had been installed in the Rubens House, specialising in the Flemish art of Rubens's day. The intention was that it would one day be housed in the Rubenianum.

One of the milestones in the history of the development of the Rubenianum was the purchase, in 1963, of the complete documentation collected by the German-British art historian Ludwig Burchard (1886-1960), who had dominated the field of *Rubensforschung* (research into Rubens) since the 1930s. The collection amounted to about 8,000 books and many tens of thousands of photos.

Thanks to a focussed purchasing policy, the Rubenianum has gradually been able to develop into an important research centre that is open to students, scholars and others with a specific interest in Rubens and the Flemish art of his era. It was



initially housed on the upper floor of the Smidt-Van Gelder Museum in Antwerp, but since 1981 it has been located in the modern accommodation that was built at the now restored Kolveniershof, which is used for conferences, talks and representational purposes.

The most important task of the Rubenianum is the encouragement of the study of Rubens, specifically by stimulating the publication of an oeuvre catalogue based on the documentation bequeathed by Burchard. Enabling this publication was one of the imperative conditions of the agreement made between the city council and Burchard's heirs in 1963. The city council entrusted this task to the then Nationaal Centrum voor de Plastische Kunsten van de 16de en de 17de Eeuw (National Centre for the Plastic Arts of the 16th and 17th Centuries), which is now called the Centrum Rubenianum. This centre was established in 1959 and since its foundation was headed first by the Ghent professor Roger-Adolf d'Hulst (1917-1996) and subsequently by the then director of the Rubens House, Frans Baudouin (1920-2005). They can justifiably be called the 'founding fathers' of the whole Corpus Rubenianum project.

To implement this ambitious enterprise, an appeal was made to several young and recently appointed members of the academic staff of the Rubenianum who had in the meantime had the opportunity to specialise in the study of Rubens. It goes without saying that this small group (initially only three people) could not manage this whole operation on its own. For this reason help was also sought from experienced foreign scholars who were familiar with the oeuvre of Rubens and his contemporaries. In this way, the publication of the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard became an international project, the first part of which was

able to be published in 1968, exactly fifty years ago. This publication was from the beginning planned as a major series, initially consisting of twenty-six parts (this has since increased to twenty-nine). Of these parts, a considerable number are divided into several volumes, so that the final number of separate books is estimated to reach more than fifty. Each part of the Corpus is devoted to a particular subject in Rubens's oeuvre and is edited by one or more art historians who, as its authors, are responsible for the content, with their names printed on the title page.

Each author starts out from the information assembled and interpreted by Burchard and the views he adopted, which must be made clear and evident in the text. But each author/editor must at the same time check Burchard's material against present knowledge. Where necessary, they must supplement and correct and also clearly explain their own points of view when they differ from those of Burchard. Forty-four volumes have so far been published. The same number of authors are (or were) currently involved in the project. They are of Belgian, Dutch, French, British, German, Austrian and American nationality.

The project was initially subsidised by the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, and later by its successor, the Research Foundation – Flanders. However, this financial backing came to an end shortly after the beginning of this century, and the years that followed were not easy for the project. As from 2010, however, work was able to continue with new zest. The Rubenianum Fund was set up under the wing of the King Baudouin Foundation, led energetically by the Belgian entrepreneur Thomas Leysen. This patron funding aims to support Rubens research in Antwerp and to make completion of the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard possible by 2020. Thanks to this fundraising project, the Rubenianum Centre was able to establish a group of proper editorial staff so that the tempo of publication could be substantially increased, meaning that 2020 now appears to be a feasible deadline for the project.

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www.rubenianum.be/en