# 4. Rubens's Studio

## 4.1 The Return to Antwerp – Setting up a Business

Peter Paul Rubens was born in 1577 in Siegen, Germany. His parents Jan Rubens and Maria Pypelincks – both respected citizens of Antwerp – had fled the city in 1568.[103] Jan Rubens belonged to the Calvinistic faith and when Rubens's father died in 1587, his Catholic mother moved back to her hometown with her children. Due to the political unrest, Antwerp had undergone a substantial decline since Maria Pypelincks had left with her husband almost twenty years earlier and she must have found the city radically changed. When Antwerp fell to the troops of Philipp II in 1585, the population decreased by nearly fifty per cent and the blockage of the River Scheldt prevented the trade that was so vital to the city's economy.[104] However, in this context it is important to note that a large percentage of artists were catholic and consequently this particular professional group were less affected than some others.[105]

As a boy, Peter Paul Rubens attended a highly prestigious Latin school and served as page at the court of Marguerite de Ligne before commencing his artistic apprenticeship with Tobias Verhaecht, Adam van Noort and Otto van Veen. Rubens finished his training in 1598, and from the very outset of his career as a painter, he relied on assistance.[106] When he left Antwerp for Italy in 1600, he was accompanied by Deodatus van der Mont, a pupil five years his junior.[107] Van der Mont became a master in 1608, which shows that his employment with Rubens must have comprised artistic

103 In 1566, Antwerp had already experienced the first waves of emigration that threatened the city's economy. On the development of the city during Margaret of Parma's rule as general governor, see: Soen 2016.

104 The population decreased from 80,000 in 1584 to 48,400 in 1586. Kirby 1999, p. 5. When Alessandro Farnese decided to besiege the city, as a result the prices of grain skyrocketed and wages were essentially reduced to nothing. People who had the means left the city, although for most others travel documents were not permitted. Surveys undertaken during the course of the siege enable drawing conclusions concerning the population's finances and their level of supply. For an analysis of the town's situation with special consideration of the residing artists' circumstances – which were comparatively better off than most other occupational groups – see: Büttner 2016.

105 For a comprehensive study on the subject of painting in Antwerp during and after the disasters of the late-16th century, see: Leuschner 2015; and Büttner, cited in footnote above.

106 Rubens was accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp on 18th October 1598. Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 401.

107 In 1628, Rubens signed a statutory declaration, confirming that Deodatus van der Mont accompanied him on his travels to Italy and Spain between 1600 and 1608 (See: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, P. 256.). A contract between Rubens and Members of the Oratory congregation further confirms Van der Mont's presence in Italy, as he acted as a witness. Jaffé 1977, p. 93.

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training. His status was likely that of a *gezel*, a reasonably experienced assistant yet to receive the level of master.[108] In times of high demand, when the help of his one assistant would not suffice, Rubens would hire additional help. This becomes apparent in a previously-mentioned letter that Rubens wrote to Annibale Chieppo – Minister to the Duke of Mantua – concerning a commission that he had received while on a trip to Spain. Rubens complains about his Spanish assistants' lack of competence and insufficient stylistic conformity.[109] Rubens's stay in Italy ended abruptly when he received news of his mother's illness and left for Antwerp instantaneously.[110] However, when Rubens arrived in Antwerp, his mother had already passed. Initially, he had probably planned to return to Italy, having at least said as much in a letter to Annibale Chieppo. Nonetheless, Rubens prolonged his stay (most likely to attend his brother's wedding ceremony) and when he received the offer to become court painter for Isabella Clara Eugenia and Albert VII of Austria – Governors of the Habsburg Netherlands – he accepted and decided to stay for good.[111] Customarily, the court painter was committed to reside close at hand, in Brussels. However, Rubens was granted the exceptional liberty of working from his hometown.[112] Along with this position also came the rare privilege of being exempted from the requirement of registering pupils to the Guild of Saint Luke, as was customarily every member's duty.[113] Rubens's employee Jacques Moermans represents an exception, as he was registered as Rubens's disciple between 1621 and 1622.[114] The motifs behind this distinction remain unknown. Rubens's name only appears in the guild's books in two further instances: when Justus van Egmont and Willem Panneels were accepted into the Guild of Saint Luke as masters during the accounting year of 1627/1628, it was recorded that they had previously trained in Rubens's studio.[115] As tempting as the thought of guild records concerning Rubens's

108 Van der Mont was almost 18 years old when he left for Italy, which strongly suggests that he began his training a few years earlier as was the norm. On 16th-century workshop practices and employment contracts, see: Helmus 2006, p. 201–210.

109 See: Magurn 1955, p. 33.

110 The news reached Rubens in Rome, where he had just finished an altarpiece for Santa Maria in Vallicella, the principal Church of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri. See: Magurn 1955, p. 23.

111 Rubens had left Italy in October 1608 and by April of the following year he had already received the offer from the governors. Magurn 1955, p. 45–53.

112 See for instance: Büttner 2006, p. 46.

113 This is documented by a notification to the magistrate of Antwerp confirming Rubens's employment at court and his exemption from taxes and guild regulations. The document is dated 10th January 1610 and kept in the *Archives Générales du Royaume* in Brussels.

114 See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 574.

115 See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 649–650.

teaching activity may be, even if they *did* exist, it is unlikely that they would be able to answer all questions regarding the total size of Rubens's studio.[116] As previously mentioned, pupils were not the only members of a workshop and Rubens most likely employed a larger number of painters who had already received some years of training. In general, a distinction can be made between *apprentices* who received their initial training in Rubens's studio and *journeymen* or *gezellen*, who had completed their training and worked in the studio as hired help. When names are mentioned in connection with Rubens's workshop, it is not always easy to clearly differentiate between the two groups. Contemporary authors seem to have considered many of them as Rubens's "disciples" in the broadest sense of the word, not necessarily making the distinction between pupil and employee. It seems that Rubens himself did not particularly apply a distinction: he presumably still referred to Anthonis van Dyck as his "*discepolo*" in 1618, when Van Dyck had already become a master of the Guild of Saint Luke and was working as a free master.[117] Based on these facts, it should be presumed that the exact number of painters that Rubens employed throughout his career and their identities will most likely never be ascertained.[118] Although this lack of concrete information renders studying Rubens's workshop practices more difficult, some information can be deduced from written sources, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Less than six months after accepting the position as court painter, Rubens married Isabella Brant, daughter of one of Antwerp's most influential families.[119] Initially the couple moved in with Isabella's father to *Kloosterstraat*, in a property sufficiently large to accommodate a workshop. The house must have disposed of a fairly spacious work area, as monumental paintings such as the "*The Descent from the Cross*" for the Confraternity of the Harquebusiers were completed in the premises. This can be verified by documents concerning the transportation of the main and side panels in September 1612 and March 1614, respectively.[120]

116 For an in-depth study on the subject of which pupils and employees can be associated with Rubens's studio, see: Balis 2007.

117 See: Magurn 1955, p. 61/Appendix 7. In the letter, Rubens writes about the best of his pupils, which is commonly thought to have been Van Dyck, who worked in Rubens's studio from 1617 to 1620. However, theoretically he could be referring to a different person entirely.

118 Hans Vlieghe dedicated a lot of research to identifying Rubens's employees. See: Vlieghe 1993. See also footnote 116.

119 Isabella's father Jan Brant was a high city official and a close friend to both Peter Paul Rubens and his brother Philip. Philip Rubens was married to Maria de Moy, Isabella's Aunt. These family constellations show how Antwerp's elite preferred to stay among its social class. See: Büttner 2006 p. 43.

120 See: Nieuwenhuizen 1962, p. 32–33.

The painted surface of the central panel of the altarpiece measures no less than 417 × 307 cm and had to be transported "*from the attic to the ground floor of the House of P. P. Rubens and from that same house to the to the chapel*", as can be deduced from the Harquebusiers Account Book.[121]

In 1610, Rubens bought a stately property on the Wapper, which disposed of a large garden and sufficient space to build a studio, according to his exact wishes. The exact date of Rubens's relocation to his new home cannot be established, although documents show that work on the house was still in progress in 1616.[122] The extension to the house comprised a 150 square metre workroom on the ground floor, two additional rooms for paining and a study.[123] According to guild regulations, it was not uncommon for masters to provide lodging for their pupils.[124] Perhaps Rubens accommodated his students directly on his property on the Wapper.[125] The estate would certainly have provided sufficient room, especially since over the years Rubens had significantly expanded by buying the neighbouring houses and properties.[126]

### 4.2. A Multi-Person Business? Selected Literary Sources on Rubens's Studio Practices

Rubens's studio practices are by no means well documented. The painter himself left no testimony, and throughout the years various theories around the creation of his artworks have emerged. However, certain pieces of evidence offer insights to some extent. The most telling of these sources regarding Rubens's workshop practice will be discussed in the following.

Parts of Rubens's extensive correspondence have been preserved and in some letters pieces of information can be deduced.[127] For instance, in one of his often-quoted letters to the engraver Jacob de Bie, Rubens apologises for not being able to take on the young man who Jacob de Bie had evidently previously recommended, as his workshop was – in his own words – completely

121 Own translation based on: Büttner 2015, p. 81.

122 See: Cat.-Braunschweig 2004, p. 16

123 The premises are open to the public.

124 On early Netherlandish workshops, see: Campbell 1981, p. 44.

125 Anthonis van Dyck – who admittedly played a special role among Rubens's pupils – was accommodated on Rubens's property between 1618 and 1620. See for instance: Hartwieg 2018, p. 275.

126 Three of the adjacent houses stood in the axis of his main house, while three more stood on the southern border of the property. Rubens himself used one of the three houses on the south border: in 1639, books and paintings were brought to one of the houses to set up a library. See: Büttner 2015, p. 94; Büttner 2006, p. 89. On the housing situation of Rubens's domestic staff, see: Watteeuw 2015.

127 For reprints of Rubens's correspondence, see: Magurn 1955; Rooses/ Ruelens 1887.

overstaffed and he already had to turn down over one hundred applicants.[128] However, pieces of information taken from Rubens's letters have to be evaluated cautiously as there is no way of knowing whether everything that he wrote exactly corresponded to the truth. For instance, Rubens could have been exaggerating regarding the demand for a training space in his studio to be polite in turning down de Bie's candidate. Nonetheless, the letter reveals for certain that in 1611 Rubens's studio was up and running and that he had hired staff.

In 1621, an eyewitness account was compiled by Otto Sperling, describing the working methods in Rubens's studio. Sperling – a young student of medicine – visited Rubens's mansion while passing through Antwerp on his travels and documented his experiences in his diary:[129]

> "*We also visited the famous and ingenious painter Rubens, whom we met whilst he was at work, whereby he simultaneously had Tacitus read to him, alongside dictating a letter. When we remained quiet, as not to disturb him, he himself began talking to us, while proceeding with his work, still having read out loud to him, not stopping the dictating of the letter and answering our questions, hereby purposefully showing us his great ingenuity. Next he had a servant take us all around his wonderful palace and show us his antiquities and Greek and Roman statues which he had in large quantity. We also saw there a large hall which had no windows, but instead the light came from above from a big opening in the middle of the hall. In this hall sat many young painters who were all working on different pieces which Mr Rubens had previously sketched for them with chalk and on which he had added a blotch of colour here and there. These paintings the young associates had to work up fully in colour until finally Mr Rubens himself perfected everything used brushstrokes and colour to finish everything off.*

128 Rubens writes: "*From all sides applications reach me. Some young men remain here for several years with other masters, awaiting a vacancy in my studio. Among others, my friend and (as you know) patron, M. Rockox, has only with great difficulty obtained a place for a youth whom he himself brought up, and whom, in the meantime, he was having trained by others. I can tell you truly, without any exaggeration, that I have had to refuse over one hundred, even some of my own relatives or my wife's, and not without causing great displeasure among many of my best friends.*" in a letter dated 11th May 1611. See: Magurn 1955, p. 55.

129 Otto Sperling later became the private physician of the Danish and Norwegian king Christian IV and his journal was published in 1885 by the Danish librarian and literary historian Sophus Birket-Smith. See: Büttner 2006, p. 93.

> *Thus it was all called Rubens's work, through which the man accumulated an enormous fortune and kings and princes showered him with gifts and jewels.* […] *When we had seen all we returned to him, thanked him courteously and said farewell."*[130]
>
> Otto Sperling

Sperling describes Rubens as an ingenious human being and artist. Despite the fact that the account can perhaps be classified as exaggerated concerning Rubens's conduct, there is no reason to believe that Sperling's statement regarding the workshop employees is entirely false, especially since other documents convey a similar picture: Joachim von Sandrart – who published his main work *Teutsche Academie* between 1675 and 1680 – emphasises what a great service Rubens did Antwerp's youth by turning the city into a school for the arts. He writes that Rubens relied on young helpers and that some young artists reached noticeable perfection thanks to their work in Rubens's studio. In this context, Sandrart mentions Anthonis van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens and Jan van den Hoecke.[131] His description is in line with Sperling's insofar as that Sandrart also emphasises that Rubens would add the finishing touches to the works prepared by his employees or pupils.

An exchange of letters between Rubens and the English minister Sir Dudley Carleton in 1618 offers an outstanding insight not only into Rubens's working methods, but also his selling policy.[132] Sir Carleton was looking to trade a collection of antiques for several paintings and therefore Rubens sent a list of available works. A painter's studio generally accommodated a multitude of finished and unfinished paintings, due to the long drying phases associated with oil paint. In the interests of efficiency, it was custom practice to simultaneously work on several pieces. The list that Rubens provided Carleton includes the scale, prices and – most importantly – details on the

130 Most of the above-cited English translation of the text was quoted from a publication by Nils Büttner (see: Büttner 2017, p. 42). The author translated the text passages that were not cited in the aforementioned publication herself. For a citation of the original text, see: Büttner 2017, p. 51. The original document is currently kept in Copenhagen, in *Det kongelige Bibliotek* (Gl. kgl. Samling 3094, 4°, p. 28f).

131 Sandrart describes Rubens's workshop in the following words (loosely translated): *"To accelerate the production of such great works he relied on the help of many young people, diligently training them, each according to his best inclination and capacity. They copied him and significantly helped, as they usually did all the animals, birds, fish, landscapes, trees, brooks, grass, air, water and forests. So he* [Rubens] *made the invention himself on a model, about 2 or 3 spans high, and after this he had his students* [orig: "Discipel"] *Anthonis van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, von Huck or others, paint on the big cloth, which he would retouch or paint important sections himself. With this he gained a great advantage for himself, but also did the youth a great service, as they were trained in all parts of the art, and the city of Antwerp by his industriousness became a tremendous art school, in which the apprentices rose to noticeable perfection"*. For the original text in German, see: Peltzer 1925, p. 157.

132 For a copy of the letter, see: Magurn 1955, p. 59–68.

manufacturing process of the paintings in question.[133] Rubens proves to be very open concerning the contribution of his students and specifically cites the contribution of his colleagues, such as Frans Snyders – an expert on landscapes – as well as his disciples' involvement. He emphasises the fact that by adding the finishing retouches to every painting, his pupils' involvement would no longer be visible. This is an important detail as it highlights the way in which his pupils (or employees) were regarded. With the exception of specialist colleagues such as Frans Snyders, another artist's work was by no means seen as an individual contribution to his paintings. To the contrary, the only goal was to create stylistic conformity, namely in the style of the master himself. In light of this, it seems futile for scholars and connoisseurs to search for telling details that might reveal another artist's involvement. Of course, in some cases the goal of creating stylistically corresponding paintings was not met, and it is often very weak passages that betray the involvement of a less apt painter. However, it cannot be proven without doubt that those paintings that do not show these telling areas are Rubens's own work rather than testaments of him achieving his objective.

Carleton had initially set his mind on autograph paintings, but after much persuasion on Rubens's part (including keen assurances concerning the quality and value) he accepted three works predominantly carried out by assistants. The significant information that we can draw from this written conversation is that in 1618 a large fraction of the paintings stored in Rubens's studio was realised with the help of his staff.[134]

Although these reports lack specific details concerning the number of employees or information concerning the pupils' identities, it may well be suspected that Rubens employed a large number of helpers.[135] When taking Rubens's lifestyle into consideration, this hardly comes as a surprise. Beside his profession, Rubens fulfilled a multitude of obligations and interests. When discussing Rubens's lifestyle and persona, it must be taken into account that reports on this subject are more often than not strongly influenced by the author's personal agenda. However, Rubens's personal correspondence prompts the assumption that he had a keen personal interest in antiques, archaeology, architecture, scientific inventions, mathematics and

133 Rubens lists twelve paintings, of which only five were completed entirely by him. Magurn 1955, p. 60–61.

134 This is in line with Rubens's estate inventory of 1640, which lists several copies after his own compositions done by members of the workshop. On the subject of Rubens's collection containing copies by other artists, see footnote no. 280. For a study on Rubens's private collection, see: Muller 1989, p. 145.

135 This should be taken into account when regarding the ratio between autographic paintings versus paintings completed with the help of assistants. An essay by Arnout Balis (already previously cited above) on the identities of Rubens's pupils should find mention in this context. See: Balis 2007, p. 30–51.

philosophy, possessing profound knowledge in many of these fields.[136] Besides these personal occupations, Rubens was verifiably engaged in numerous diplomatic duties. This involved extensive correspondence with English, Spanish and French diplomats and political missions, which took him away for months on end.[137] Consequently, Rubens was unable to fully devote himself to painting, his "*dolcissima professione*".[138] Aside from that, even if Rubens had devoted all of his time and effort towards painting, it is highly questionable whether a single person (or a few persons for that matter) could have produced the large number of paintings.[139] All of these aspects point towards the fact that a well-functioning workshop was indispensable in the production of Rubens's works.

### 4.3. The Preparatory Process in Rubens's Studio

If it is undisputed that Rubens employed a number of assistants and pupils throughout his lifetime, not much research has been dedicated to the question of how these multiple hands worked together on a daily basis.[140] It is essential to note that the following chapters were drawn up in an attempt to categorise the material, which is not to say they represented individual artistic genres during the 17th century. The categories were formed in respect of the work's material and its intended use, and they should not be seen as a rigid segmentation since the borders are frequently blurred. As with the previous chapters, the aim was to provide a foundation for the subsequent case study and provide the reader an overview of the basis of discussion.

It is important to underline that regardless of their value, none of these preparatory works were considered artworks in their own right. Due to their great quality, Rubens's drawings and oil sketches can be admired as masterpieces, yet they were not created as individual artworks.

136 Rubens corresponded with distinguished scholars all over Europe. For instance, he reveals a keen interest in physics and the construction of a perpetual motion apparatus in letters to Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and discusses antique gems and epigraphs with the historian Frans Swert. See: Magurn 1955, p. 90ff; Magurn 1955, p. 58ff.

137 Rubens himself once referred to his busy lifestyle as constantly having his leg in a stirrup. See: Magurn 1955, p. 116.

138 Rubens himself referred to his profession as his "*dolcissima professione*". See: Magurn 1955, p. I.

139 Leo van Puyvelde argued that Rubens possessed outstanding speed and could have finished a work in one or two days. See: Van Puyvelde 1952, p. 212. However, this seems utterly impossible when considering the size and content of Rubens's works.

140 For instance, the catalogue edited by Professor Toshiharu Nakamura titled "*Rubens and His Workshop: the Flight of Lot and His Family from Sodom*" for an exhibition held at the *Modern Museum of Western Art* in Tokio takes an almost solitary stand. See: Cat.-Tokyo 1993.

The crucial factor is intention, and preparatory material exists only as a function of the finished artwork. Drawings and oil sketches come in a multitude of different forms, which offers insights to some degree, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

### 4.3.1. Drawings

Numerous of Rubens's drawings have been preserved and most of them can be considered the starting point in the process of creating a painting, although not all were created with the same purpose in mind. Drawings represent a network of functions. Among other things, they can be part of a personal creative development, illustrate and aid the progression of thoughts, represent a form of inspiration (in terms of a collection of different shapes and figures), embody a teaching tool and serve the communication between the members of a studio. As will be shown, most of Rubens's drawings probably served more than one purpose at once.[141]

Rubens kept his drawings in a place that he called the *cantoor* – which literally means crafts room – and he made use of them whenever he needed. He definitely valued this accumulation of motifs very strongly as he considered them specifically in his will. After his passing, the drawings were not to be sold until all of his sons – or future sons-in-law – had definitely decided against a career in painting. In light of how highly Rubens clearly valued his designs, it is surprising that a large number of these drawings from the *cantoor* were copied. The *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen houses a collection of around 460 drawings, whose authorship is not fully established and whose existence gave rise to a number of questions concerning their execution. The drawings were first associated with Rubens's pupil Willem Panneels by Gustav Falck in 1918.[142] Falck based this attribution on stylistic similarities between the drawings and Panneel's graphic work. Some scholars suspect that the drawings were copied under dubious circumstances, during Rubens's absence during 1628–1630, and without his consent. Jan Garff and Eva de la Fuente Pedersen – who catalogued the large part of the collection in 1988 – support this theory, as does Arnout Balis.[143] This view is opposed by Nora de Poorter, who argues that some drawings (such as the designs for the *Eucharist-Series*) could not have been made during the period of Rubens's absence, as the originals

141 On the subject of drawings being used in Rubens's studio for novices to learn to draw, see: Logan 2006.

142 See: Poorter 1978, p. 230.

143 See: Garff/de la Fuente Pedersen 1988; Balis 1993; Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 17.

were no longer located in Rubens's workshop at that point.[144] It is certainly possible that Panneels completed most of his copies during Rubens's absence. However, it is not convincing that he did so without Rubens's knowledge. Making copies for educational purposes was common practice in 17th-century workshops and for obvious economic reasons drawings were an ideal medium.[145] Numerous examples attest to the fact that Rubens's employees copied his compositions and these copies could only have been made behind the back of a very negligent studio master. With Rubens, the opposite was the case, as can be deduced from a letter that Rubens sent to his assistant Lukas. Rubens wrote from his country estate with the request that Lukas should check whether all drawings and designs were stowed and locked up in due form.[146] However, a letter to Pierre Dupuy from 1628 suggests that Rubens's collection of drawings was not arranged in a very orderly manner. The French archivist had requested information on the *Medici* cycle's image content and Rubens answered that he had not yet found the notes in his papers, but had high hopes of finding them soon.[147] Of course, this could always have been a polite way of stalling for more time and it is not entirely clear whether Rubens in fact hints at certain "chaos" within his collection of sketches and drawings or merely his written documents. Moreover, even if Rubens did not have his collection of works in perfect order, this would not necessarily presuppose that his "chaos" was open to the workshop staff. It could have been a mess behind locked doors. In any case, the letter to his assistant Lukas shows that Rubens was meticulous about the storing away of his designs and it seems unlikely that he would have left them in the open when leaving Antwerp for two years. Willem Panneels looked after Rubens's studio during his absence, which is

144 Poorter 1978, p. 230.

145 In this context, a theory on Rubens's so-called "*Drawing-Book*" is worth mentioning: the "*Drawing-Book*" comprises a title page by Paulus Pontius and twenty loose engravings, which were published after Rubens's death by Alexander Voet. Voet probably had the originals in his possession. Paul Huvenne suggested that the book was published with the intention of preserving and continuing Rubens's studio tradition (see: Cat.-Antwerp 1993). As Anne-Marie Logan highlights, this indicates Rubens would have had pupils practice to draw the different parts of the body by copying drawn examples. See: Logan 2006, p. 256–257.

146 Rubens writes: *"Take good care, when you leave, that everything is well locked up, and that no originals remain upstairs in the studio, or any sketches"*. Magurn 1955, p. 411.

147 For the full letter – sent on 25th February 1628 – see: Magurn 1955, p. 239–240.

proven by a declaration on oath.[148] Perhaps the permission to make copies from Rubens's highly-valued sketchbook was part of their mutual agreement. It was not unusual that artists collected drawings for creative purposes, although art collectors showing interest was a phenomenon that only established itself further during the course of the 17th century.[149] Few collectors acquired drawings and sketches from Rubens's collection during his lifetime and when they did, it was primarily drawings by Italian artists that Rubens had previously acquired and merely reworked. At this point in time, drawings by famous Italian artists were categorically preferred. For instance, the Bishop of Gent – Antoine Triest – acquired drawings by Titian that Rubens had reworked.[150]

When Rubens's *cantoor* sketches were sold in 1657, after his youngest daughter – Constantia Albertina – had joined a convent, the collection was almost intact. At the auction, the majority of drawings went to Johannes Philippus Happeart, an art dealer and canon of the Cathedral of Our Lady, who in turn sold parts of the collection to Henry Lankrink and Everhard Jabach.[151] Jabach sold most of his drawings to Louis XIV of France in 1671, and these drawings can be found in the collection of the *Louvre* today.[152] The remaining sketches that were not sold at the auction in 1657

148 On 1st June 1630, Rubens signed an affidavit for the benefit of Panneels, who was planning to travel to Prussia. The document states the following (own translation): "*We announce and testify through the individuals present at the date cited below, that before us the great man Peter Paul Ruebens, the noble servant of our serene highness* [...] *appeared in person to take an oath before us, at his request, to appraise the young Wilhelm Panneels, 30 years of age* [...] *He reported, claimed and testified that the same Wilhelm Panneels learned the art of painting for five and a half years and made his test piece proficiently and honestly, and when dedicating himself to the same art he did not make little progress; in particular he reaffirmed, when the said guarantor went to Spain on public business of our catholic majesty, and to England, he left the same Wilhelm in charge of his property and his facilities, for him to guard and the previously mentioned Wilhelm carried out these tasks with the utmost reliability, and when he returned to his homeland, he presented a faultless report of his activities.*" For the whole written declaration in Latin, see: Génard 1882, p. 222.

149 During the 15th century, it was primarily artists who valued and collected drawings for their use in creative processes. Unparalleled in its influence on artists' collections was Giorgio Vasari's renowned "*Libro de' disegni*", a large collection of drawings that featured Vasari's own sketches along with drawings by his contemporaries and predecessors. During the 16th century, non-professionals such as the Florentine humanist Vincenzo Borghini increasingly began to include drawings in their collections. The same applies to courtly collections. For instance, at the close of the 16th century, the ducal *Kunstkammer* in Munich already housed an inherent collection of drawings. However, it was only during the 17th century that collecting drawings underwent a surge in popularity across the board. For a brief overview of the history of drawings in public collections, see: Cat.-Cologne 1975, p. 16–19.

150 Thomas Howard – the Earl of Arundel – also showed interest in sketches by Rubens in 1619, although it is unclear whether he ever succeeded in attaining any. Plomp 2005, p. 38.

151 The auction brought a total of 6,557 guilders and 16 nickels and Philippus Happaert bought drawings for 6,000 guilders. Wood 1994, p. 333–334.

152 The collection comprised drawings that were strongly influenced by Italian artists, such as a drawing of a Transfiguration in the style of Raphael. However, the collection also reflects a wider interest and features hitherto less valued drawings such as figure studies. On Everhard Jabach's collection, see among others: Peters 1975; Cat.-Cologne 1975.

stayed in Rubens's Nephew, Philip Rubens's possession. In terms of value, they comprised 8.5% of the total collection that Rubens had bequeathed to his descendants. At the end of the 17th century, Roger de Piles bought selected drawings from Philip Rubens.[153] Parts of this fraction went to de Piles' benefactor Pierre Crozat and were auctioned after his death in 1741.[154] Among these drawings was a collection of 94 studies of heads, which was repeatedly copied by French artists such as Antoine Watteau and Nicolas Vleughels. A large part of these sketches are part of the graphic collection of the *Albertina* in Vienna. Consequently, drawings that show stamps of the collections mentioned above – or are otherwise plausibly associated with the mentioned names – have a high probability of stemming from Rubens's personal collection. However, even this is no guarantee of autograph work, since Rubens's collection verifiably included works by Italian artists, as will be discussed below. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that expedient drawings by his pupils were also kept among Rubens's own drawings. One drawing that gives cause to this assumption is a copy after Rubens's "*Adoration of the Magi*" in the *Louvre*, which probably served as a template for an eponymous print.[155] This work came from Rubens's *cantoor,* as it was verifiably part of Everhard Jabach's collection. At the time, the drawing was attributed to Rubens, but Max Rooses declared it as a work by Anthonis van Dyck.[156] If this attribution to Van Dyck is indeed correct, this drawing can be considered proof of the fact that Rubens included his pupils' work in his own prestigious collection when it suited him. Taking into account that the drawing is a copy of an existing painting, and Rubens was most likely above making copies of his own existing work, even *if* they served as a template, this hypothesis appears very plausible. In any case, Rubens's drawings fuelled his artistic repertoire and simultaneously carried on the long tradition of artists' collections, which was coined by Giorgio Vasari. In his "*Le Vite*" and "*Libro de' Disegni*" – undoubtedly known to Rubens – Vasari often refers to his own chronologically-organised collection of drawings, which included works from the early *Trecento* and concluded with Vasari's own drawings.[157] Rubens's collection of drawings can consequently be seen as not only a creative tool but a means of placing himself among the ranks of history's great artists.

153 The whereabouts of the remaining drawings remains unknown.

154 See: Eidelberg 1997, p. 234–235

155 The drawing is part of the Louvre's collection of prints and drawings (*"Adoration des Mages"*, INV20306).

156 Rooses writes the drawing was *"exécutés probablement par Van Dyck"*. See: Rooses 1892, V, p. 148–149.

157 De Girolami Cheney 2012, p. lvii.

#### 4.3.1.1. Ricordi

Rubens's *cantoor* collection was certainly made up of a variety of different types of drawings. First, from the very outset of his career, Rubens seems to have copied artworks by other artists, so-called *ricordi*. An account by Samuel Hoogstraten – one of Rembrandt's pupils – conveys a somewhat conflicting picture insofar as Rubens was said to primarily rely on "*the treasure of his imagination*".[158] However, the body of evidence indicates differently: many of Rubens's *ricordi* have been preserved and they show numerous copies after paintings, drawings as well as statuary art (see, for instance: Fig. 18. p. 100). These copies were not precise reproductions of artworks, but allowed for a certain amount of creative freedom. Rubens's drawings generally do not reveal the model's artistic medium and when – for instance – copying a marble statue, he generally refrained from showing the characteristics of a sculpture such as reflections of the polished stone. Conversely, often Rubens slightly altered a figure's position in his drawings or added signs of life such as veins. A commonly-used material for *ricordi* was red, black and white chalk. Rubens either used these shades separately or combined them for polychromatic drawings.[159] Also, he did not necessarily create every *ricordo* from scratch. In some instances, he purchased original drawings by revered artists and reworked them to his liking.[160]

A large part of this category of drawings was carried out when Rubens was on his travels to the renowned centres of art in Italy as a young painter. Although Rubens made a large number of copies during this time, making drawings of other works was by no means a practice limited to an artist's early career and it cannot necessarily be equated with a learning posture. For instance, when travelling to Spain as an established painter in his fifties, Rubens was greatly influenced by the Spanish royal collection in Madrid, especially the works of Titian.[161]

158 This account was given in 1678. See: Logan 2006, p. 250. Accounts like these must be interpreted with caution as Rubens was famously already idealised during his lifetime as the "*Apelles of our century*" (see: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, II, p. 43–48.). If one takes all contemporary accounts about Rubens's life and methods literally, he would have to have been somewhat of a superhuman.

159 An example of Rubens's using three different colours in one sheet is the *ricordo* of "*The Prophet Joel*" after Michelangelo (*Département des Arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre*, Paris; no. 20230). Around 1700, the term "*aux troix crayons*" was coined to describe this technique.

160 The reworking of drawings shows once again how different artworks and the background of their creation were regarded compared to our present-day understanding: reworking a fellow artist's drawing was certainly not understood as a lack of respect as it would perhaps be nowadays. The drawing of *"The Miracle of the Lame Man Healed by Saint Peter and Saint John"* in the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington D.C (no. 1975.69.1) serves as a telling example: it was initially done by an unknown Italian artist and quite vigorously reworked by Rubens. See for instance: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, cat. no. 26, p. 155.

161 During the 16th century, the collection had been significantly enlarged by Charles V and housed a matchless selection of works by Italian artists.

By copying the great artworks of antiquity, as well as more recent masters such as Titian or Michelangelo, Rubens was able to compile memory aides that served as influences throughout his entire career.[162]

Often a *ricordo* cannot necessarily be assigned to one specific Rubens painting. To the contrary, the drawings were repeatedly used and consequently certain motifs – more or less faithful to the model – recur in a number of different compositions. A noteworthy example of this practice is Rubens's engagement with antique statues such as the „*Torso del Belvedere*". He drew several *ricordi* of the statue during his stay in Rome and the *Torso's* distinctive crease above the belly button is worked into a countless number of Rubens's figures.[163]

As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, sketching nude women from life was not a common practice during Rubens's lifetime, which might come as a surprise given Rubens's countless depictions of the nude female body. Rubens mainly relied on his *ricordi* when depicting nude women and – as can be seen from numerous examples – his models did not necessarily have to be female.[164] The extent to which genders were interchangeable regarding the depiction of nudity becomes apparent when comparing the uppermost figure in a drawing of three female nudes (*Frick Collection*, New York), presumably for a depiction of Venus, with a study for the personification of the Nile (*Victoria and Albert Museum*, London), which was done for the painting of "*The Four Rivers*" in Vienna.[165]

When mirror inverting one of the two works, it becomes clear that the same rear-view pose was used for both a female and male figure. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the depiction of the other two female nudes – positioned in the middle and the bottom of the sheet in the *Frick Collection* (below the female figure heretofore discussed) – are paraphrases after two artworks by Italian artists: one nude is based on a figure in the "*Ezekias*" spandrel of the Sistine

162 Several volumes of the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard* are dedicated to Rubens's copies and adaptations. See: Van der Meulen 1968; Lohse Belkin 2009; Wood 2010a; Wood 2010b; Wood 2010c.

163 This includes the depiction of Saint Sebastian for the *"Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints"* altarpiece, which will be discussed in detail in a following chapter (6.8.1).

164 Statues such as the *"Hermes Belvedere"* (*Vatican Museum*, Rome) or the "*Pothos*" (*Galleria degli Uffizi*, Florence) strongly influenced female bodies as well as his male figures. For photographs of the antique statues and corresponding drawings, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, no. 54–57.

165 For reproduction of the drawing in the *Frick Collection* (inv. no. 1936.3.59), see: Held 1959, cat. no. 46; for an illustration of the drawing in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* (no. D.903-1900), see: White/Turner 2014, II, cat. no. 519; for the painting *"The Four Rivers"* in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna (Gemäldegalerie, 526), see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 191, cat. no. 49.

Chapel and the other can be recognised from Titian's painting of the "*Andrians*".[166] Consequently, contrary to what one might assume upon first glance, the female nudes were not drawn after life, but have models in Italian art.

Besides practical reasons, there is a great art theoretical significance to making use of antique and Italian works of art and creating one's own adapted version. This practice of competing with other masters was described by contemporary authors as "*aemulatio*", a term that originates from rhetoric.[167] At the same time, it was commendable to slightly conceal these templates by bestowing the highest possible naturalness to one's depictions. Of course, Rubens was well aware of these different levels of meaning and generally obeyed by these "rules". As has been highlighted, his drawings after artworks most often show heightened signs of naturalness and life. Consequently, in his many drawings after renowned artworks Rubens fulfils the art theoretical specifications of his time to perfection.

#### 4.3.1.2. Drawings from Life

Rubens made drawings from life first and foremost to meticulously capture specific poses or features of his figures. A passage from one of Rubens's treatises offers insights relating to his outlook on the practice of drawing after live models: concerning the ideal image of a male model, Rubens expresses his displeasure of being confronted with large bodies and weakened limbs far too frequently. He states that in contrast to this, the arms of swordsmen, the legs of dancers and the bodies of oarsmen achieve perfection through fervent training.[168] Rubens's drawings frequently include numerous detailed depictions of individual body parts on one sheet, usually slightly modified. For instance, this includes the detailed study of two legs next to the depiction of a sitting man in the *Victoria and Albert Museum*. This study was probably made for the painting of the "*The miracles of St. Francis Xavier*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, although it was

166 A *ricordo* of *"Abiah, Achaz, and Hezekiah"* in the *Sistine Chapel* is in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris (INV 20270). For an illustration, see: Glück/Haberditzl 1928, no. 13; Wood 2010c, II, no. 67/68. A Rubens copy of Titian's painting can be seen in the *Nationalmuseum* in Stockholm (NM 600), see: Wood 2010a, II, no. 51. The original painting of *"The Andrians"* by Titian is currently in the *Museo del Prado* in Madrid (no. P000418).

167 On the subject of Rubens's competitive emulation, see: Büttner 2011; and more recently: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 127–129; ibidem., p. 249–251. The issue of Rubens using statues as models for his figures will also be further discussed in a chapter below.

168 White 1988, p. 92.

**Fig. 1:** Peter Paul Rubens, *Seated Female Nude/Jeune femme nue, assise, tournée vers la droite,* 1633–1635, Red and black chalk, heightened with white body colour, traces of brush and brown ink, 46.3 × 28.3 cm, Département des Arts Graphiques du Musée du Louvre, Paris (INV 20.345).

later re-used for several other works.[169] Through works like this drawing, Rubens's meticulous approach to the depiction of his figures becomes clear, which was evidently greatly indebted to creating anatomically correct, life-like representations of the human body.

His often very revealing paintings gave rise to the notion that his depictions of the female body were influenced by drawings after female nude models. A part of a letter in which Rubens supposedly wrote to Sauveur Ferrary is often cited in this context.[170] In this letter, Rubens asks

169 Rubens's repurposing of drawings unfortunately often makes it difficult to find the specific painting for which it was originally made. It should also be kept in mind that in some instances the drawings were made without a specific composition in mind. For an illustration of the drawing of the two legs in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* (D.904/5-1900), see: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, no. 75. For an illustration of the painting in the *KHM* (Gemäldegalerie, 519) see: ibidem, no. 73, p. 215.

170 Only a part of this letter has survived and neither the exact date nor its place of origin can be established with certainty. See: Magurn 1955, p. 90, no. 51.

Ferrary to relay a message to Monsieur Jean Sauvages, namely to arrange a sitting with three Parisian ladies, whose black hair, striking expressions and figures would aid him tremendously in connection with the representation of sirens.[171] This letter is usually associated with Rubens's commission for the series of 24 paintings for Maria de Medici. However, the sirens depicted in the paintings have blonde rather than black hair and – more importantly – are portrayed completely naked. The idea of Rubens making studies after nude female models is highly unlikely considering the social norms of the time. If indeed the letter is authentic, he could only have alluded to studying the women's faces and their fully-clothed statures.[172]

Sheets such as "*Young Woman looking down*" (Fig. 48. p. 155) or "*Young Woman with Crossed Arms*" are noteworthy and telling examples of how Rubens portrayed women.[173] This shows how very differently the depiction of the female body was perceived, in contrast to the male – a gender difference in art easily traceable to Rubens's main influencers, namely Italian artists such as Michelangelo.[174]

If not from appointed female models, it is often believed that at least Rubens's wife – specifically his second wife Hélène, formerly Fourment – must have served as a source of inspiration. In this context, a drawing of a "*Seated Female Nude*" in the *Louvre* can be cited as an example (Fig. 1).[175] Hélène is generally thought to have been the model for this study, not least due to the fact that she is the only conceivable woman available to Rubens, given the aforementioned social conventions.[176] However, on closer inspection the figure in the drawing shows anatomical

171 Rubens writes: *"I beg you to arrange to secure for me, for the third week after this one, the two Capaio ladies of the Rue du Verbois, and also the little niece Louysa [sic]. For I intend to make three studies of Sirens in life size, and these three persons will be of infinitely great help to me, partly because of the wonderful expression of their faces, but even more by their superb black hair, which I find it difficult to obtain elsewhere, and also by their stature."*. Magurn 1955, p. 90, no. 51.

172 The letter suggests a certain acquaintance with Paris, considering Rubens's knowledge of the looks and names of the ladies as well as their residential address. Thus, it can be reasonably assumed that the letter – if indeed written by Rubens – was composed subsequent to his first stay in Paris in 1622. Rubens travelled to Paris again in May 1623 and February 1625. In 1623, he already delivered nine of the 24 paintings, during a stage at which the designs for the whole cycle must have already been finalised. Consequently, even *if* the letter were authentic, it is more likely that the studies were made for some other unknown project.

173 The two drawings are kept in the *Uffizi* in Florence and the *Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen* in Rotterdam, respectively. See: Held 1959, cat. no. 113 and cat. no. 110.

174 As Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat highlights regarding Michelangelo's *"David"*, in stark contrast to the female nude, the male nude's nakedness is not reduced to eroticism, and a male nude's potential eroticism could be perceived alongside its status as an autonomous subject. Thus, nudity had a different, almost contrasting gender-specific meaning and function. Hammer-Tugendhat 1994, p. 49–51.

175 The drawing *"Jeune femme nue, assise, tournée vers la droite"* is listed under the inventory number 20345 in the *Departement des Arts Graphiques du Musee du Louvre.* See also: Cat.-NewYork 2004, p. 295, cat. no. 109.

176 See: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 304.

weaknesses. For instance, her legs – especially from the knee downwards – are depicted disproportionally short. This raises the question of whether this study was indeed done after the living model, as a model would have allowed for a precise guide regarding the proportions. At this point, Rubens's strong drawing skills must be highlighted: his drawings generally do not show signs of anatomical inaccuracies. Therefore, this drawing cannot be accepted as a study of Hélène without reservation. There is consequently no concrete evidence in support of the assumption that Rubens made drawings after his wife's nude physique. On the contrary, it seems likely that studies after the female nude were generally not a reality in Rubens's creative process.

When looking for characteristics of Hélène in Rubens's paintings, one can distinguish between the depictions of a similar type of woman – which Rubens might have modelled after his wife to some degree – and those figures that clearly show her distinct facial features, which are known thanks to numerous official portraits. Regarding the latter, a letter from the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand to his brother – Philip IV of Spain – pertaining to Rubens's painting of the "*Judgement of Paris*" is worth mentioning: in 1639, Ferdinand elaborated on the fact that the depiction of the goddess Venus was modelled after Rubens's wife, who was the most beautiful woman in Antwerp.[177] However, this comparison to Rubens's wife primarily pertains to the figure's physiognomy, as her body is modelled after the classic figural pose of the "*Venus Pudica*", in a reference that would certainly have been obvious to the educated contemporary viewer.[178] The same is true for other depictions of other nude women equipped with Hélene's facial features, such as one of the figures in "*The Three Graces*".[179] Particularly worthy of emphasis in this context is the famous painting "*Het Pelsken*" in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna, which is sometimes interpreted as a nude portrait of Hélène.[180] In contrast to other, more idealised nudes, this painting shows a very life-like representation of a female body and the contemporary viewer can easily

177 In the original letter – which was composed in Spanish – Ferdinand wrote: *"La Venus que esta de enmedio es retrato muy parecido de su misma muger que sin duda es lo mejor de lo que ahora hay aquí"*, cited after: Büttner 2006, p. 212. For the full letter, see: Rooses/Ruelens 1887, VI, p. 228–229. On the subject of Hélène as Venus for the *"Judgment of Paris"* and an illustration of the painting, see: Healy 1997, p. 99/234, Pl. 8.

178 Prominent examples include the *"Torso of a Venus Pudica"* in the *Galleria degli Uffizi* in Florence. For an illustration of the antique statue, see: Van der Meulen 1968, III, plate 105. The parallel becomes especially clear when looking at a copy after Rubens in the *Statens Museum for Kunst* in Copenhagen (inv. no. kksgb10349), see: ibidem, plate 108.

179 The painting of *"The Three Graces"* is kept in the *Museo del Prado* (P001670). Another figure whose physiognomy is based on a portrait of Hélène Fourment is – for instance – the depiction of Callisto in *"Diana and Callisto"* (also in the *Museo del Prado,* P001671). However, Callisto is fully clothed. For more examples, see: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 300. Belkin noted that Hélène can be identified not only by her physiognomy but also from a distinct hairstyle, namely the fashionable "bouffant" coiffure. See: ibidem, p. 304.

180 The painting in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna has the inventory number "Gemäldegalerie, 688".

be seduced into imagining that Hélène truly did resemble the figure depicted in the painting.[181] Moreover, this work was a very private painting, and not necessarily meant for public display. Rubens explicitly left it to his wife and it can be assumed that it was not to be seen by anyone outside the family, which furthermore fuels the assumption of an intimate portrait.[182] This notion of "*Het Pelsken*" being a portrait of Hélène is opposed by an observation recently published by Gerlinde Gruber, who noticed that Hélène is generally shown with blue eyes in official portraits. This strongly suggests that blue was indeed her true eye colour, while the figure in "*Het Pelsken*" is depicted with brown eyes.[183] The brown eyes verifiably correspond with Rubens's ideals regarding female beauty, which included big dark eyes like those of a mare.[184] This meaningful detail reveals that "*Het Pelsken*" is hardly a portrait of Hélène, but merely a visual allusion to Rubens's wife. The figure can be interpreted as an allegory of modesty, exposed to the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer and only scantly protected only by her fur cover.

Hélène's physiognomy was at times deliberately incorporated into certain paintings, in both a private as well as a more public context. However, the notion of Rubens depicting realistic portrayals of his wife's nude body on paintings for the world to see cannot be confirmed.[185] As previously mentioned, when looking at Rubens's depictions of nude women it becomes clear that although the very life-like depictions might appear to have been done after human models, in most instances he modelled his female figures after antiques.[186] Likewise, more recent works of art such as paintings by renowned Italian masters of the cinquecento also served as sources of inspiration.[187]

In conclusion, it can safely be assumed that Rubens made drawings from life such as portraits or studies of specific gestures or postures. However, sketching persons of the opposite sex in the nude would have not been within the limits of what was socially acceptable during Rubens's

181 In this context, the previously-mentioned drawing in the *Louvre* (see footnote 175) is often seen as a preparatory study for the painting. See for instance: Lohse Belkin 2006, p. 304.

182 For Rubens's last will, see: Génard 1896.

183 See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 84.

184 Figures connected to the narrative of ideal beauty – such as Venus – were generally depicted with brown eyes. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 79.

185 Hélène might have inspired her husband in less obvious ways, although the degree to which Rubens intuitively or subconsciously fused his wife's figure into his paintings has to remain unanswered.

186 A good example of this is his drawing after a statue of a *"Sleeping Hermaphrodite"*. Today, the statue is in the *Musée du Louvre* (no. MR 220), and the corresponding drawing by Rubens is part of the *Metropolitan Museum's* collection in New York City (Accession Number: 1972.118.286).

187 Nils Büttner has shown – for instance – how Rubens adapted Titian's depiction of *"Venus and Adonis"* for his version of the same subject. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 249–265.

lifetime. Considering Rubens's high social standing and respectability, it can be assumed that he would not have blurred the lines of propriety and decorum. Consequently, the cliché of the lusty bon vivant who had a passion for nude women can hardly be applied to Rubens based on his artworks. Notwithstanding, when it came to working out the details of a figure for a painting, studies after life were Rubens's way of ensuring the highest possible exactness.

#### 4.3.1.3. Compositional Aides

There are a number of drawings that originated with a certain composition in mind, and which can be associated with the development of a specific work. They show the search for a particular composition, the placement of a certain figure within a composition or individual body parts. In terms of intended use, these types of drawings come closer to oil sketches given that they were made for a specific painting.

The first category comprises in-depth studies of specific details within a composition, which were done to work out certain details and at times even done after a living model. In these instances, this specific category of compositional aides tends to overlap with the "drawings from life" discussed in the previous chapter.[188] It can be assumed that when these drawings were made, the general outline of the composition would have been established and the rough allocation of the figure (or detail) in question determined. After all, in order to specifically position models correctly, Rubens would have to know how he would later arrange the figures in the painting. This is not to say that successful postures were then not also re-used repeatedly.[189]

A further, less detail-oriented category of drawings was also done with a specific composition in mind, namely the so-called *crabbelingen*, which literally means scribbling.[190] These sheets show disorderly strokes that are very different from the precise studies previously discussed and usually

188 Naturally, the prerequisite for the two categories to overlap is the premise that the detailed study after life was done with a specific composition in mind. The repurposing of the same drawing for other paintings would then also make it fit a different category.

189 In the previous chapter, a drawing of two feet in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* was mentioned and a further example of such a compositional aid is a drawing titled: *"Studies of Arms and a Man's Face"* in the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in London (for an illustration, see: Held 1959, cat. no. 89). The sheet shows no less than six arms, outstretched in different angles and slightly altered poses. The purpose of a sheet like this was undoubtedly to find the ideal positioning without having to try and err later on in the process of painting. As mentioned in the previous chapter, initially these types of studies were most probably done for a specific painting, which again most likely did not stop the work from being useful for later compositions.

190 A sheet showing this technique – which is kept in the *Metropolitan Museum* in New York – will be discussed in detail in a chapter below.

only haphazardly map out the coarse contours of a composition. Nonetheless, *crabbelingen* do not necessarily show the whole composition, but sometimes merely depict individual figures or groups. For these preliminary designs, Rubens almost exclusively used pen and ink, and the drawings mostly comprise sketchy contours, sometimes with sporadic additional hatching. Apparently, Rubens had no need to address the exact details of figures or faces in these first designs. These sheets were purely done to clarify compositional questions, and often they show several versions of one figure, sometimes even overlapping on one sheet. In view of Rubens's extensive œuvre, *crabbelingen* are relatively sparse and the technique is only preserved on a few sheets. They mostly appear in correlation with his later works and this form of drawing could be owed to Rubens's progressing illness, which might occasionally have prohibited him from making more detailed designs.[191] Where in earlier creative periods the drawings would have been worked out to a more sophisticated degree, the *crabbelingen* would have been an ideal way of conveying his ideas to his employees with the least amount of physical effort. However, the circumstance that these sheets do not exist in connection to earlier works could also simply be owed to the fact that they were not held in such high regard and that Rubens did not save and store them as carefully.[192] After finishing a composition, in contrast to other categories discussed, these sheets could no longer serve any purpose and were perhaps more easily discarded.[193] Even outside of Rubens's own studio, collectors probably appreciated these types of drawings less throughout the centuries, which could also explain the small numbers. Consequently, these drawings could well have been more customary than has been generally suspected. However, it should be noted in this context that there are instances in which Rubens sketchily drew the outline of a composition immediately on the panel of the oil sketch, and in some cases also the painting.[194] Oil sketches done within a series comprising several works show that this technique was only used from time

191 Rubens suffered from gout, and letters from his contemporaries indicate that attacks of the disease periodically paralyzed his hands. See: Büttner 2007, p. 116–117.

192 For instance, Arnout Balis and Nico van Hout believe that many of these sheets were lost due to the lack of interest that 17th- and 18th-century collectors held in them. See: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 18. Anne-Marie Logan suspects that this disinterest was already with Rubens or the executor of his estate. Logan 2007, p. 169.

193 For instance, it would be quite conceivable that he did not carry sketches of this kind with him from Italy to Antwerp.

194 Loose underdrawings appear in a number of finished paintings. In some cases, this can only be detected through technical investigations (see – for instance – the infrared reflectography of *"Holy Family with Parrot"* in: Balis/Van Hout 2012, p. 24.), although sometimes they are visible to the naked eye. An example for the latter would be Rubens's portrait of his two sons in the *Liechtenstein Princely Collections* in Vienna, which will be discussed in more detail below.

to time.[195] Most probably the presence of these lines can be understood as a contraindication regarding the existence of a *crabbelingen* sketch.

It should be kept in mind when dealing with all kinds of preparatory work that it was done with a purpose in mind; for instance, if a drawing shows a certain figure or a group of figures that can also be distinguished in a finished painting, the first instinct is usually to declare the drawing as a preparatory work of that painting.[196] However, if that same finished painting shows traces of changes to the figure done during the process of painting, it is rather unlikely that the drawing in question – which resembles the end result – was done *before* the work, since the drawing would have served as a guideline and prevented the artist from having to make errors on the image carrier itself. In other words, if Rubens – or any artist for that matter – took the time, costly material and effort to make a preparatory work, it is very unlikely that the results of this work would not have been applied thereafter when creating the painting. This is not to say that spontaneous changes were not possible, as Rubens regularly abandoned preconceived notions; however, in these cases the figures found on the preparatory works are no longer similar to the finished result. In light of Rubens's demanding lifestyle, it can be expected that he never touched a pen without incentive and this concerns all forms of preparatory work, even if some forms – such as *crabbelingen* – would probably not have taken a huge amount of time or effort.

### 4.3.2. Oil Sketches

> "*There are curious spirits who as a result of much experimentation and experience can conjure up any scene whatsoever in the mind and execute it without any supplementary means. That, though, is not vouchsafed to all, but is an exceptional gift of a masterly brain, and is only fitting for small paintings with few figures* [...]"[197]
>
> Joachim von Sandrart

195 For instance, in the *"Life of Achilles"* series, the technological investigations revealed that these underdrawings were only done in some cases, interestingly in the less complex compositions. See: Cat.-Rotterdam 2003; Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007. This could mean that the more difficult compositions were prepared with a drawing, which was not necessary in the simpler cases. This issue will be further addressed in the following chapter on oil sketches.

196 Theoretically, this makes perfect sense in terms of the consecutive order of preparatory steps. The sequence would start with a haphazardly-done *crabbelingen* sketch on paper, proceed with a more detailed drawing and presumably end with the most worked-out version of the oil sketches. However, Rubens's working process was most probably seldom this consistent.

197 Translation from: Von Sandrart 1675, I, 3, chapter VII, p. 72.

These were Joachim von Sandrart's thoughts on the subject of swiftly-executed, wet-in-wet oil sketches, written in 1675. In some respects, it is still an apt representation of what Rubens's oil sketches are deemed to be today. They are presumably a direct representation of Rubens's artistic genius and allow for an unfiltered view into the way in which his creative mind worked. For instance, in an exhibition catalogue from 2004, Rubens's oil sketches are described in the following unambiguous terms: "*An oil sketch is an original composition by Rubens* [which offers] *direct access to the creative process, concentrated and undiluted evidence of his mastery*".[198] François-Xavier de Burtin gave a rather different assessment in 1808: he had interviewed one of Rubens's ancestors, who claimed that Rubens had his assistants work on not only the paintings but also the preparatory oil sketches (*esquisses*) that were made after Rubens's rudimentary sketches.[199] In the end, Rubens would rework everything, according to necessity. It is consequently difficult to make a general statement regarding the oil sketches' execution. It can be assumed that the master himself did make some of the preparatory works autonomously. At the same time, assuming that the making of oil sketches was his task alone does not do justice to the complex structures of a multi-person workshop.

Rubens himself referred to an oil sketch as "*dissegno colorito*" – a colorful drawing or design – and quintessentially this is what they were.[200] As mentioned in the previous chapter regarding drawings, even though these works are considered individual pieces of art today, they were not created as such, but rather a means to an end. This is also evident from the fact that they were often painted on less expensive panels of lesser quality.[201] Concerning the reason for their fabrication, oil sketches pose a somewhat more complex issue compared with the drawings discussed above. First and foremost, they are considered to be draft versions that Rubens made for his personal use, by means of which he was able to figure out a composition's effect before transferring it to a much larger scale. A coloured version would naturally be able to convey this much more realistically than any drawing. This is by no means a technique exclusive to Rubens's process, but rather it is characteristic of many great Italian artists in whose footsteps Rubens sought to follow.[202]

198 Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 10–11.

199 Burtin 1808, I, p. 157.

200 Rubens mentions one of his "*coloured designs*" – namely the oil sketch "*Saint Bavo about to receive the Monastic Habit in Ghent*" – in a letter to Archduke Albert of Austria. See: Magurn 1955, p. 56.

201 See for instance: Fraiture/ Dubois 2011b, p. 326.

202 For artists, visiting Italy – which was at the time a great centre of the arts – did not only inspire content-wise. Naturally techniques and studio practices were also absorbed. However, this is not to say that inspiration only flowed in one direction. Through their travels, artist from the north side of the Alps also carried knowledge southwards.

Second, an oil sketch provided the perfect tool for presenting the design to a patron for approval. It was not unheard of for patrons to outright reject finished paintings, as Rubens knew from his own experience. In the case of one of his earliest major commissions – namely the painting for the altar of the Church of Santa Maria in Vallicella in Rome (the principal church of the Congregation of the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri) – the finished work was rejected and Rubens was compelled to paint a second piece.[203] To avoid this kind of additional workload, showing off a sketch ahead of time could be beneficial. Finally, an oil sketch can be seen as a way of communication between the different members of a workshop. In theory, Rubens would create the sketch himself and then pass the design to his employees or students for them to transfer it to a large scale. Naturally, this would limit Rubens's own involvement to potential finishing touches.

Apart from the aforementioned scope of possibilities, the oil sketches have one common benefit, namely that just like Rubens's collection of drawings, the oil sketches would remain in his possession, making past compositions available to him even after the paintings themselves were sold. The notion that this was no minor concern is demonstrated by Rubens's reaction concerning his *modelli* for the ceiling paintings of the Jesuit Church in Antwerp:[204] when the Jesuits faced him with the choice of leaving the designs with them or exchanging the works for an additional altarpiece, Rubens chose the latter.[205] Considering that an altarpiece by Rubens was worth approximately 3,000 gilders, this choice says a lot about his strong appreciation for his *modelli*. With this in mind, it is not unlikely that oil sketches were also done *after* the finished painting, before it left the studio. Oil sketches are generally automatically categorised as preceding the finished paintings, although this might not always be the case.[206] As previously mentioned, making oil sketches was an ideal learning method and the possibility of the finished painting serving as a template should also be considered.

203 The first painting depicted the *"Ecstasy of Saint Gregory"*, which Rubens later took with him to Antwerp and installed at his Mother's grave. According to Rubens's own claims, the main issue with the painting was that the canvas reflected too much. Rubens painted the second version on slate, a material that absorbs light to a greater degree. However, the fact that the second painting shows a different composition – namely a *"Madonna Adored by Angels"* – suggests that perhaps it was more than an issue of light reflection.

204 The church fell victim to a fire in 1718 and sadly the entire ceiling paintings were destroyed. For details, see footnote below.

205 For details on the commission and more specifically the contract between Rubens and the Jesuits, see: J. R. Martin 1968, p. 213–219.

206 The fact that Rubens kept copies after his own works which had left the studio is illustrated by a request of Duke Wolfgang Wilhelm: the duke wanted two drawings after altar pieces Rubens had made for two churches in Brussels. The originals had left the studio at that point and consequently the drawings must have been made after oil sketches that were still on site. See: Cat.-Munich 1990.

Rubens's process is usually recreated according to the material at hand, although there is always the possibility that additional material existed at one point. Not all works that bear the characteristics of a sketch can necessarily be considered "preparatory".[207]

In a similar vein, when there are two versions of a composition, a guiding principle should be that Rubens never copied his own work.[208] As has been said, making copies was very typically a task assigned to pupils and employees. Leaving the socio-historical argument aside that a master of Rubens's calibre would not devote himself to the relatively lenient task of copying compositions, it should also be kept in mind that Rubens was a very busy man.[209] His time was precious and consequently it can safely be assumed that his skills and authority as the studio's master were utilised efficiently. After all, there was only one master but many employees. Consequently, when there are two versions of a subject, one must be identified as a copy.

One of the most outstanding features of Rubens's oil sketches is the strong divergence concerning the level of completion. In some cases, the sketches are almost comparable to loose drawings, with colour only added sporadically. These types of oil sketches are often referred to as *bozzetti*, which is Italian for sketch or design. In other cases, the miniature paintings are worked out to such a degree that the term *sketch* hardly applies. There are also sketches that show various degrees of completion in a single sketch, with some figures worked out in great detail, while others are only hinted at. These varying levels of completion can potentially give an indication concerning the intended purpose.[210] For instance, it can be assumed that important patrons would only be shown the well-worked out sketches, or *modelli*, whereas loose drafts would indicate an in-house usage. However, the designs for some of Rubens's cycles show that it is not always this simple.[211] When looking at multiple sketches within one series – such as the "*Life of Achilles*" series – one would expect uniformity given that all sketches serve the same purpose. However, in the case of this series – which depicts the life of Achilles in eight compositions – the

207 This issue will be discussed in more length in the context of the case study; for instance, the "Stockholm" drawing is an example of an artwork that was categorised as "preparatory" prematurely. See chapters 6.2 and 6.2.1.

208 He famously made copies of artworks by other artists who he revered, such as Titian or Veronese, but copying his own compositions must be seen in a completely different light than these reinterpretations of (predominantly Italian) masterpieces.

209 For a detailed account of Rubens's routine, his many obligations and his general lifestyle, see for instance: Büttner 2006.

210 In some few cases, it was also the medium that demanded a slightly different execution. For instance, Rubens's design for a statue of Saint Norbert was painted in beige monochrome colours.

211 Rubens designed several series of paintings, such as the *Medici* Cycle for Maria de' Medici, widow of Henry IV of France and four tapestry cycles, including *"The Life of Achilles"*.

sketches are worked out rather heterogeneously. The differences in execution are visible to the naked eye; for instance, Nico van Hout has highlighted that the herms framing the compositions are worked out very well in some compositions, and rather inept in others.[212] When the oil sketches were scanned in a technical examination via infrared reflectography during the course of an exhibition in Rotterdam, it was found that the sketches also differ in terms of how they were executed: some compositions show distinctive underdrawings, while others (especially the more complex designs) do not.[213] This is a rather peculiar circumstance, which the authors of the catalogue explain with the theory that Rubens made preparatory drawings for the more difficult compositions, which then rendered underdrawings unnecessary. Although this could potentially have been the case, it does not explain the divergence in completion visible to the naked eye. This could well be an indication of the fact that Rubens was not solely responsible for creating designs; rather, he may well have delegated the task of creating compositions to his more capable employees.[214]

It can be summarised that oil sketches represent a heterogeneous and multifunctional part of Rubens's process, an aspect that will be further discussed and exemplified in the following case study.

212 See: Cat.-Rotterdam 2003; Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 78.

213 See footnote above and also: Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007.

214 Nico van Hout assumes that the differences in the framing herms might be the result of careless restoration, but allows for the possibility of the studio's involvement. Cat.-Cincinnati 2004, p. 79.

### 4.3.3. Supports and Underdrawings

Most of Rubens's oil sketches are done on oak panel, and this seems to have also been his preferred support for paintings.[215] Nonetheless, roughly only around half of his works were done on panel, while the other half was painted on canvas, which had the great advantage of making them transportable over longer distances. This includes Rubens's major international commissions such as the *Medici Cycle*, the ceiling paintings for the Banqueting House in London and the paintings for the Torre de la Parada. Apart from obvious logistical motivations, when a major work was commissioned the choice of the support's material seems to have occasionally been the patron's. A particular case is well documented thanks to diligent book keeping on the patron's side, namely the Guild of the Arquebusiers. The guild had commissioned the "*Descent from the Cross*" altarpiece in 1611 and kept an exact record of their expenses, which shows that they themselves – not Rubens – paid the panel maker Hans van Haecht for his work.[216] The altarpiece of the "*Miraculous Draught of Fishes*" for the Guild of the Fishmongers in Mechelen is a similar example: guild officials ordered the panel in 1613, and after finalising a contract with Rubens five years later, the panel was sent to Antwerp to be painted, and returned to Mechelen the following year.[217]

According to regulations published in 1617 by the joiners' guild as well as the Guild of Saint Luke, every panel maker (*tafereelmaker or paneelmaker*) in Antwerp was obliged to have his panels inspected by the guild before selling them, or become liable to a fine of 12 guilders per piece.[218] If they passed the inspection, the panels would be branded with two hands and/or a castle – symbol

215 This seems to have been partly due to the exceedingly flat surface panels provided. See: Hartwieg 2018, p. 276.

216 The guild records also show that the members of the guild's council were closely involved with further decisions concerning the panel. On 4th April 1613, two members visited the Church of Saint Walburga to inspect the reverse side of the *"Elevation of the Cross"*, which had been done by Hans van Haecht, the same panel maker who was also responsible for making the panel for *"The Raising of the Cross"*. At this point, Rubens had already delivered the central panel, so the reason for their visit cannot have been to decide whether Van Haecht was the right man for the job, but perhaps to check if there was anything regarding the installation worth modifying. For a detailed account, see: Nieuwenhuizen 1962.

217 The contract between Rubens and the guild was only finalised on 5th February 1618. On 11th August 1619, three members of the guild travelled to Antwerp to escort the panel back up the river to Mechelen. See: Rooses 1892, II, p. 24/25, no. 252.

218 If panels did not pass the quality test, the inspector was even authorised to break them. See: Kirby 1999, p. 19. In the early-17th century, the craft of panel makers had been established within the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke, separate from the traditional joiners. See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 314.

of the city – as well as the maker's mark.[219] Jørgen Wadum has highlighted that in practice these rules were not always complied with one hundred per cent, as he has encountered numerous inadequate panels that were nevertheless branded by the dean.[220] This indicates that besides quality control, the main objective of these regulations was to guarantee the guild's governance over panel production.[221] Rubens's œuvre includes panels without marks, which indicates that Rubens had the possibility to buy the panels straight from the maker without going through official channels, a special position that was perhaps made possible by his status as court painter. However, many panels indeed show markings and Michiel Vrient seems to have been Rubens's panel maker of choice.[222]

In a dendrochronological analysis of Rubens's paintings, only four out of 137 single boards contained remnants of sapwood, which tells of his panel makers' meticulous selection.[223] Thus, Rubens generally painted on panels made from high-quality wood. However, the quality of the individual boards is not the only decisive factor when it comes to the longevity of panels; indeed, his œuvre contains some paintings that are made on fragmented panels, insofar as that they comprise boards haphazardly pieced together to subsequently enlarge the painting surface.[224] Many of Rubens's paintings are too large to comply with the standard formats, but are still constructed properly. However, later enlargements are frequently more problematic: apart from problems with stability, colour differences visible to the naked eye reveal the enlargement in many cases. The reasons for these enlargements are easy to understand in some instances. We know of one case in which Rubens commissioned Michiel Vrient to belatedly enlarge a panel for the main altarpiece in the Cathedral of Our Lady due to a mistake in the measurement of its

219 For instance, the panel maker Michiel Vriendt would brand his initials MV into the back of his panels. If a maker failed to do so, he could be fined three guilders. On the making of panels in Antwerp, see: Van Damme 1990, p. 235/236. The two hands – which are also found on the city's coat of arms – recollect the legend of the founding of Antwerp: The giant Druon Antigoon had terrorised the region until he was defeated by Salvius Brabo, who chopped off his hands and threw them into the river Scheldt. On the different versions of the brands resulting from different branding irons and their chronology, see: Wadum 2007, p. 183ff.

220 See: Wadum 2007; Fraiture and Dubois come to the same conclusion, see: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 313/320; Fraiture/Dubois 2011a, p. 139.

221 See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 314.

222 Another name that can be associated with the production of Rubens's panels is the aforementioned panel maker Van Haecht. For instance, he was also responsible for making the panels for Rubens's monumental *„Elevation of the Cross"* triptych. See: Fraiture/Dubois 2011b, p. 326.

223 Ideally, panels were made entirely of heartwood, which is harder and less susceptible to warping. See: Bauch/Eckstein/Brauner 1978, p. 216.

224 On the subject of Rubens's faulty and enlarged panels, see: Brown 1996; Von Sonnenburg 1980; Von Sonnenburg/Preußer 1980; Gatenbröcker/Kaul 2005; Renger 1994; and most recently: Hartwieg 2018.

hanging space, whereby the "*Assumption of the Virgin*" altarpiece was subsequently enlarged by 10 cm.[225] However, the rather obvious reason for a change in dimension – namely making a painting fit its place of destination properly – was not the only reason for belated changes to Rubens's paintings.[226] Panels were also enlarged for content-related reasons, such as spontaneous compositional changes. A noteworthy example is that of "*Judith and Holofernes*" in the *Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum* in Braunschweig.[227] As a study by Silke Gatenbröcker conclusively shows, the central panel was enlarged during the painting process, which resulted in boards being attached perpendicular to the core panel.[228] This was presumably done due to spur-of-the-moment changes to the painting's composition and it did not occur as seldom as one might think. In her study on paintings from the *Gemäldegalerie* in Berlin, Babette Hartwieg showed how variant the process of enlarging panels was: in some cases, Rubens's paintings were enlarged by the panel maker, sometimes during the painting process and sometimes years after the painting had initially been completed.[229]

Connecting boards without the grain of the wood running parallel causes problems concerning the durability, when the wood moves due to changes in the surrounding temperature or air humidity. Consequently, irrespective of the core panel's quality, the attachments inevitably lead to greater instability. Concerning the aforementioned painting of "*Judith and Holofernes*" in Braunschweig, Gatenbröcker concludes that it is hardly imaginable as a commissioned painting

225 Vrient was paid 38 guilders to enlarge the panel for the *"Assumption of the Virgin"* altarpiece, *"which was too small"*. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 403. The largest panels available seem to have been 340 cm and panels of this size were used for the very large paintings such as *"The Elevation of the Cross"*. On panel making techniques, see: Wadum 1995; For a study on the enlargement of panels in Rubens's œuvre, see: Renger 1994; and more recently: Hartwieg 2018. Of course, painting on canvas poised the same problem, as cloth also came in certain "standard" formats that were contingent on the size of the weaving loom. Many of Rubens's large canvas paintings show a seam, visible to the naked eye.

226 See: Renger 1994, p. 157; Van de Velde 1975b, p. 272ff.

227 For further details on the painting in the *Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum (GG 87)*, see: Cat.-Braunschweig 2004.

228 See: Gatenbröcker/Kaul 2005, p. 17ff. A further telling study on the subject of enlarged panels was recently done by Gerlinde Gruber on the painting of Hélène Fourment ("*Das Pelzchen*") in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* in Vienna. See: Cat.-Vienna 2017b, p. 273ff.

229 See: Hartwieg 2018. For instance, in the case of a *"Landscape with Cows and Duck Hunters"*, it was the panel maker himself who enlarged the panel (p. 286). In the case of a portrait allegedly of Rubens's first wife, this was definitely not the case (p. 279). A portrait of a small child with a bird was enlarged over 20 years after it had been begun (p. 280.), while in some cases – such as *"The Conquest of Tunis by Charles V"* – the enlargement was made at the very outset of the painting process (p. 283). In other instances, it is more difficult to determine the motivation for the change in size, the exact time of the enlargement and whether it was done by in Rubens's workshop or at a later date.

due to its physical condition.[230] Thus, it is not altogether surprising that many of these enlarged paintings show private content such as family portraits, whereby this issue will be discussed in greater detail below.[231]

For panels to be sufficiently smooth to paint on, they were first prepared with a chalk (calcium carbonate) and animal glue ground layer. This was very common at the time as it created an even surface. On top of this ground layer, a greyish *imprimatura* containing lead white was applied. Rubens's *imprimatura* is on the lighter side of what was typically used and the characteristic underground was an integral part of creating a painting.[232]

Canvases were primed slightly differently. First, they had to be fitted into frames and stretched before they could be primed. Subsequently, they were painted with glue, which would make the canvas less absorbent and then – as with the panels – a chalk ground followed by the characteristic grey *imprimatura* would be applied.[233] However, with canvases, the ground mixture of calcic carbonate, a low proportion of lead white and earth particles was also mixed with linseed oil.[234]

Generally, coating the panel was the panel maker's task after the inspection, although this was perhaps different in Rubens's special case. When visible, the *imprimatura* in Rubens's paintings is of a very characteristic streaky finish and this specific feature would indicate that it was applied in his workshop.[235] One occasion is known in which Rubens chose to outsource the job of priming a panel to Adriaen Schut.[236] However, this was a commissioned work and it is difficult to say how Rubens proceeded when ordering panels for his everyday business. The analysis of the ground layer of many paintings shows variations, which could easily be explained by different hands working in the workshop. However, it is also conceivable that a primer (a so-called *plamuurder* or *witter*) generally applied the ground layer and only the characteristic *imprimatura* was applied in Rubens's workshop.[237]

230 See footnote 228.

231 See chapter 5.2 below.

232 For instance, in Rembrandt's œuvre, the ground layers are usually much darker or more red-toned and the *imprimatura* a lot warmer. See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 14.

233 On the execution of large Altarpieces on canvas, see: Dubois 2007, passim.

234 For more information on the formulation of paint layers, see: Sedano Espín/Sánchez Ledesma 2005.

235 On Rubens's use of streaky *imprimatura* as a preparatory layer, see: Boersma/van Loon/Boon 2007, p. 82.

236 Adriaen Schut was registered at the Guild and paid 8 guilders to coat the panel for the "*Assumption of the Virgin*" in 1625. See: Rombouts/Van Lerius 1961a, p. 403; Renger 1994, p. 157.

237 Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 15.

As with the wooden panels, canvases could be bought already prepared for painting. It is also difficult to establish whether Rubens chose to buy ready-made canvases or if the priming was done in his workshop. The inventory of Rubens's estate shows a payment to a certain Hans Diericx for *schilderlynwaet*, which was probably sold untreated.[238] In any case, given Rubens's immense output, outsourcing as little as possible seems like the logical thing to do handling wise.

It was fairly usual to sketch the first contours of a painting (or also an oil sketch) with brush and diluted ochre or umbra toned oil paint. This step is visible in an unfinished painting in the *Rubenshuis* in Antwerp, namely "*Henry IV in the Battle of Ivry*". Although a series of paintings for Henry IV was planned, Rubens never finished the commission and consequently this work remained incomplete.[239] In such cases, the underdrawing was not merely a part of the design process—namely a means to create the outlines of a composition—but rather it helped in developing the depth and colour changes in future layers. For instance, light reflects in the depicted armour are likewise already applied with the purpose of shining through the subsequently-applied paint.

Underdrawings in the traditional sense – namely with a charcoal pencil, metal point or graphite – seem to play a relatively minor role in Rubens's paintings and they are only traceable in a few cases.[240] Unfortunately, underdrawings are generally difficult to detect, especially if paint was subsequently applied in line with the outlines of the drawing. Consequently, it is difficult to make definite assertions. Nevertheless, Rubens's painting process is typically rather unpredictable and often his compositions are subject to belated changes, which could have also influenced his reluctance to make preliminary drawings directly on the support. One possible reason for using underdrawings sparingly is the drawback that when diverging from the sketched outlines, the charcoal can often be detected through thin or light-coloured sections of a painting with the naked eye. Consistent with this argument is the observation that oil sketches show underdrawings more often than finished paintings.[241] Presumably the lines were less bothersome in preparatory material than they were in finished paintings.

238 Kirby 1999, p. 26.

239 This work reveals another very interesting part of Rubens's working process, namely the collaboration with fellow masters, in this case fellow court painter Pieter Snayers. He had been Sebastian Vrancx's pupil, who is considered the forefather of battle scenes and later became the official painter of battle scenes to the House of Habsburg. In this particular painting, Snayers had previously already finished the terrain and the forces in the background in his workshop in Brussels.

240 For instance, Hubert von Sonnenburg mentions "*The Watering Place*" in the *National Gallery* in London as a telling example. See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 19; and more specifically on the subject of this particular painting: G. Martin 1966.

241 Noteworthy and well-researched examples of oil sketches under which underdrawings were detected are the previously-mentioned sketches for the *"Life of Achilles"* series (see the above chapter on oil sketches).

Underdrawings seem to have stayed especially apparent since Rubens made underdrawings over the *imprimatura* instead of under it, which was Flemish custom.[242] For instance, underdrawing can be detected with the naked eye in Rubens's portrait of his two sons – Albert and Nikolas – in the *Liechtenstein Princely Collections*, Vienna. Nikolas's left foot in a crème stocking shows fine black lines shining through the light-coloured paint. This is a noteworthy example insofar as the private image content would generally point towards an execution by the master himself. This stands in contrast to the assumption that underdrawings served as a guide for workshop employees, a plausible notion that was fuelled by Otto Sperling's account of Rubens's workshop practices.[243]

One question that should be addressed is how the underdrawings relate to preparatory material. When Rubens designed or prepared a composition via an oil sketch, would that render underdrawings in the finished painting irrelevant?[244] Or conversely, are underdrawings only found in paintings that were not prepared via sketch or oil sketch? Generally, the sporadic presence of underdrawings would indicate a fairly irregular designing process. Additional technical studies and art historical research along these lines could potentially offer remarkable insights.

242 See: Von Sonnenburg 1980, p. 19.

243 See footnote 130.

244 The same question would also apply to the underdrawings found on oil sketches and their relation to antecedent preparatory drawings, such as *crabbelingen*.