From Rubens to the Grand Tour

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From Rubens to the Grand Tour

*From Rubens to the Grand Tour* focuses on *Agrippina and Germanicus* and *Roman Imperial Couple*, two paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, the famous painter from the southern Netherlands. Bringing these two works together the exhibition explores Rubens’s expert knowledge of the social and political history of the antique world, Rome in particular, and reveals how the artist set the standard for the double portrait as painterly subject matter. The concept of the exhibition is based on Curator Anke Van Wagenberg’s article “A Matter of Mistaken Identity - In Search of a New Title for Rubens’s ‘Tiberius and Agrippina’,” in *Artibus et Historiae* (2005). In the article she raised doubts about the title of the first painting, then called *Tiberius and Agrippina*, and hypothesized about a identity and thus a new title, based on the issues of the complex relationship between the Roman Emperor Tiberius and Germanicus’s wife Agrippina the Elder. Rubens’s interest in and thorough knowledge of the antiques and the Roman Julian-Claudian history is of particular importance.

**Travel to Rome**

For centuries artists have traveled to Italy and Greece to observe the antiquities first hand for inspiration. Albrecht Dürer in the fifteenth century and Pieter Brueghel in the sixteenth century undertook such voyages, as did Rubens’s teacher Otto van Veen. The seventeenth-century Dutch artist Abraham Bloemaert who had numerous students in his Utrecht studio, encouraged all of them to go to Rome. Many of them went, like Jan Baptist Weenix who is known to have spent four years in Rome. The journey remained popular during the eighteenth century when Joshua Reynolds and many others traveled all over Europe. His influence on painting and art theory was important as the first president of the newly founded Royal Academy (1768) in London and he certainly encouraged the new school’s art students to travel south. In France the *Prix de Rome* had been created in 1663 for painters and sculptors to allow the winner to spend three to five years in Rome at the expense of the King of France. One of the most famous winners of the esteemed prize was neo-classicist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres who,
like many others, brought back a renewed interest in classical and mythological subjects. The interest continues to this day with the American Academy in Rome awarding its Rome Prize since 1905 to 15 emerging artists.

**The Artist**

Peter Paul Rubens was born in 1577 in Siegen, Germany, from Flemish parents. He was a Baroque painter and a proponent of an extravagant Baroque style that emphasized movement, color, and sensuality and created altarpieces, portraits, landscapes, and paintings of mythological and allegorical subjects. He settled in Antwerp where he received a humanist education, studying Latin and classical literature. At age fourteen he began his artistic apprenticeship, first with Tobias Verhaeght and subsequently with Adam van Noort and Otto van Veen. He completed his education in 1598, and entered the Painters Guild of St. Luke as an independent master.

Rubens traveled extensively to study, paint and build his knowledge to become a true scholar, in the kind of lengthy travel that can be compared to what later was a “Grand Tour,” although those Grand Tours lacked the work element. In 1600 Rubens visited Venice and settled in Mantua at the Court of Duke Vincenzo I Gonzaga. He traveled to Florence and Rome in 1601 where he studied classical Greek and Roman art and copied works of the Italian masters. At the Mantuan court he had first-hand access to the Duke’s collection and decided to start collecting himself. From 1606 to 1608 he was mostly in Rome. In 1608 Rubens returned to Antwerp and stayed home until 1621. His return coincided with a period of prosperity in the city and in 1609 Rubens was appointed as court painter by Albert VII, Archduke of Austria and Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia of Spain, sovereigns of the The Netherlands. The following year Rubens built an Italian-influenced villa and studio, now the Rubenshuis Museum in Antwerp, where he and his apprentices worked, including Anthony van Dyck and Theodoor van Thulden. Also in the house were his personal art collection and library.

Rubens used the production of prints and book title pages, of which several are in the exhibition, to extend his fame throughout Europe. He worked with his pupil Theodoor van Thulden (1606 – 1669) on the production of engravings of decorations for the joyous entry of
Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, the brother of King Philip IV of Spain, in 1635. Rubens himself designed the title page of the book *Pompa introitvs honori* ... (1642), on loan from the National Gallery of Art Library while the prints were executed by van Thulden. The engravings were recently acquired by the Academy Art Museum. They show tremendous detail and Roman-inspired imagery, particularly in the architectural setting. The same can be said of van Thulden’s painting in the exhibition, which shows a religious scene in an imaginary setting where Roman arches and columns abound. Rubens’s artistic career was very successful. The wealth he accumulated allowed him in 1635 to purchase an estate outside of Antwerp, the castle called *Het Steen*. Peter Paul Rubens died in Antwerp in 1640.

**Rubens and the Antique**

With the double-profile paintings by Rubens helped establish this iconographic type of portrait in Netherlandish art, though double profile portraits remain rare. In the Washington painting of c. 1614 the field is rectangular rather than oval, and the couple is set behind a balustrade. In height and width this painting is slightly smaller (26 1/4” x 22 1/2”) than the Ackland painting of c. 1615 (27 1/2” x 22 5/8”).

Art-historical research was undertaken in an attempt to identify the sitters in the paintings. Essential is their depiction as “Romans” as seen by their attire. Rubens frequently depicted figures of the antique in paintings like the mythological *Drunken Hercules* of 1611 (Dresden) and *Venus, Cupid, Bacchus and Ceres* of 1612-1613 (Kassel) of the same time period. The oval shape of the Ackland painting and the profile depictions combined with Rubens’s interest in Roman coins was a hint as to where to begin the research.

Perhaps the paintings were enlarged depictions of figures as seen on Roman coins or cameos. The exhibition offers an opportunity to compare compositional motifs on coins and illustrates how Rubens may have used his scholarly knowledge of the Roman artifacts. Specific features of the sitters are taken into account, as they are known from both historical descriptions and objects. When Rubens returned from Italy in 1608 it was with a reputation not only as a painter but also as a connoisseur and scholar of antiquities.

Rubens continued his collecting activities, acquiring new items through agents in Italy, as described in the Latin *Vita* of Rubens: “From Italy
he caused to be gathered for him a great number of ancient statues and gems and a large quantity of old coins, with which he adorned his home." He owned a cabinet of coins and an assortment of numismatic reference books, like the coin collectors guide, also in the exhibition, the *Thesaurus numismatum* by Charles Patin (1672). The *Venetian Coin Box with the Bust of Julius Caesar* of c. 1600 with a Roman coins on loan from the Walters Art Museum is the type of coin box a numismatics collector like Rubens may have returned with to his native country.

Interesting in this context are the portraits of imperial rulers by Rubens, including an oval bust-length panel of *Julius Caesar* (at Stephen Mazoh, New York) as part of a series of six - or maybe twelve - Emperors painted by Rubens in about 1626. Others in the series which is not extant in its entirety include Vespasian, Augustus, Tiberius, Vitellius, and Titus. Portraits of the“Twelve Caesars” in all media were popular since the sixteenth century, sometimes serving at the European Princely Courts as fictional ancestry and invoking genealogical and ideological connections with past imperial power. In the mid-1630s Rubens worked on a series of *Twelve Famous Greek and Roman Men* designed by Rubens and engraved by various printmakers (1638). The lives of the first twelve Roman emperors, known as the “Twelve Caesars” were chronicled in a firsthand historical account by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus. Suetonius’s writing is filled with gossip and lively anecdotes, and sometimes dramatic in tone but his text was probably the most widely read series of biographies from the Roman world. Consulting his own library and collection Rubens would have understood the complex relationship between the Roman rulers and family members and likely studied their features and not mistake the two sitters for *Tiberius and Agrippina*, as was the original title of the Washington painting. This was recently changed to *Agrippina and Germanicus* whose features are known from Roman coins. Why Rubens would select these two characters is subject for further study.
The Principate (First Dynasty of Roman Emperors)

AUGUSTUS  27 BC - AD 14  old age  cause of death
TIBERIUS    AD 14 - 37  old age
CALIGULA    AD 37 - 41  assassinated
CLAUDIUS    AD 41 - 54  poisoned ?
NERO        AD 54 - 68  suicide
Who is Who?

It is important that we realize that the erudite Rubens would have known the historical facts. From travelers visiting Rubens’s busy Antwerp studio in 1621 we learn that he was what today would be called a “multi-tasker.” While painting in his studio the artist was dictating a letter, as well as listening to an assistant reading the Roman historian Tacitus out loud to him. The travelers were shown the magnificent house, the antiques and Greek and Roman statues, “of which he owned great quantities.”

Our chronology begins with general, consul and statesman Julius Caesar, who was not an emperor, even though Suetonius counts him as such. Caesar led many armies to victories in the Gallic Wars, extended Rome’s territory to the English Channel and the Rhine and conducted the first invasion of Britain. He famously became involved with Egyptian Pharaoh Cleopatra when the Roman armies conquered Egypt.

Marc Antony, was an important military commander for Julius Caesar during his conquest of Gaul. After Julius Caesar’s assassination in 44 BC Marc Antony was assigned Rome’s eastern provinces, including Egypt, still ruled by Queen Cleopatra with whom he started a love affair while still married to Octavia. Antony was defeated at the naval Battle of Actium in 31 BC. Defeated, Antony fled with Cleopatra back to Egypt where he committed suicide.

With March Antony dead, Julius Caesar’s adopted nephew Gaius Octavius assumed the title “Augustus” and would reign as the first Roman emperor with sole power, ruling from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD.

Augustus married Livia Drusilla for whom he divorced his first wife. Livia and Augustus were married for 51 years. She also served as his adviser and was a powerful woman, enjoying the status of privileged counselor to her husband. She was the mother of Emperor Tiberius.

Tiberius’s mother had divorced her first husband to marry Augustus in 39 BC, making him a step-son and successor of the Emperor. Suetonius described the Emperor Tiberius in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*: “In person he was heavy-set, and strong, of a stature above the average, broad in the shoulders and chest, and the rest of his body of congruent proportions. [...] His complexion was fair, and he wore his hair so long behind that it covered his very neck; which was observed to be a fashion affected by his family. His face was ingenious and well-favored, but
was covered with pimples. His eyes were large (…).” The description resembles his coin portrait but does not resemble the lean and young, smooth-skinned male figure in the Washington and Ackland paintings.

This is where Agrippina comes into the picture. She was a distinguished and prominent Roman woman of the first century and wife of the general and statesman Germanicus and related to the first Roman Emperors. She was a granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus and to Emperor Tiberius she was sister-in-law, stepdaughter and daughter-in-law. Agrippina accompanied Germanicus on military campaigns to the East as well as to Germany, where “Colonia Agrippina,” today’s city of Cologne, was named for their daughter Agrippina the Younger who was born there. Agrippina was the mother of the Emperor Caligula, maternal second cousin and sister-in-law of the Emperor Claudius and the maternal grandmother of the Emperor Nero.

Tiberius had been forced to adopt the young and intelligent Germanicus, who became the “crown prince” to the imperial thrown. Germanicus was endowed with everything his adoptive father Tiberius lacked. He was young, had charm, energy and courage. Although Germanicus died too young to become emperor, he nevertheless is the main hero in the first two books of Tacitus’s *Annals* and is most notable for military successes in Germany. He was received as a true hero in Rome where he was tremendously popular. His wife Agrippina is described as the perfect wife who loved her husband although she also loved intrigue and had boundless ambition.

Tacitus describes Agrippina as arrogant, violent, headstrong and dominating. Germanicus died at 34 years of age in 18 or 19 AD, either from natural causes of from poisoning. Agrippina is suspected of having spread rumors that attributed the premature death of the young hero Germanicus to the envy of the unpopular Emperor Tiberius. There was no truce between Agrippina and Tiberius. In a wild and delirious sequence of public scenes and intrigues, Agrippina became the implacable accuser of the Emperor. They were on such bad terms that Tiberius banished her from Rome and in 33 AD she starved to death in exile on the island of Pandateria.

The scholarly Rubens would not have taken Germanicus for Tiberius. We can compare their features on Roman coins in the exhibition. It is most likely that the successful couple Agrippina and Germanicus is depicted by Rubens, first in the Washington painting with the powerful woman in the front and next in the Ackland painting where they have
reversed positions. Unfortunately no coin or cameo with double profile portraits or Agrippina and Germanicus exists. Double portraits remained popular and were produced also in the 17th century, for example in the Coronation Medal of William and Mary.

By the late 1610s, Rubens was constantly involved with the study of both coins and gems. He met and became friends with the French scholar Claude Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc. In their correspondence are numerous descriptions of specific objects belonging to Rubens. They exchanged casts, drawings and engravings and decided to co-operate on a book of engravings of the most famous cameos in Europe, which unfortunately never got beyond the title page. The Gem Book originated in 1621 with Peiresc’s discovery in Paris of the large sardonyx cameo, he called the Gemma Tiberiana, also known as the Cameo of the Glorification of Germanicus. Rubens saw the Gemma Tiberiana the next year and made a drawing to prepare the engraving.

The engraving relates directly to the Washington and Ackland paintings: it is devoted to Emperor Tiberius and his relatives, including Germanicus and Agrippina, and Rubens must have studied their features. They are all present: in the top rank, the deified Emperor Augustus is carried to heaven on the back of the goddess Roma, Julius Caesar on the right, and Marcellus (the nephew of Augustus who died tragically at an early age) riding the winged horse Pegasus; in the middle rank, a group of members of the Julio-Claudian family.

From right to left we see Agrippina with her son Caligula, Germanicus, his mother Antonia, the Emperor Tiberius, his mother Livia (wife of Augustus), Tiberius’ son Drusus the Younger and his wife Livilla. Rubens collecting activities and scholarly interest were a direct result of his “Grand Tour” avant la lettre.
The Grand Tour
The Grand Tour was the traditional journey of Europe undertaken by mainly upper-class European young men of privilege to complete their education by learning languages as well as geography and culture. By the end of the 17th century the journey included an appreciation of classical Roman ruins and the collection of art and antiquities, in the same way Rubens had done earlier. The custom flourished into the 19th century. A variety of literature and bibliographic material accompanied and evolved with the Grand Tour. Important in the exhibition is Giacomo Barri’s *Painters Voyage of Italy* (1679), on loan from the National Gallery of Art Library, which describes a tour of the most famous paintings and altar pieces, like an early travel guide. An account like this provides us with information about what aspects of the trip were considered important, interpretations of the sights travelers took in, and the meaning they placed on these experiences. Travelers who had experienced the Grand Tour gave published accounts. They allow us today to understand the itineraries of travelers at the time.

Soon a market arose that provided souvenirs for these travelers to take home with them. John Smith (c. 1682 – 1770), a well known art collector, connoisseur and consul to Britain based in Venice, published his *Select Views in Italy: with Topographical and Historical Descriptions in English and French* (London, 1792–1796), containing engravings of the most famous sites. In the 18th century a new genre of paintings, drawings, and prints know as vedute, or scenic views of Italy, emerged. Prints and drawings were collected and could be bound into volumes. Very popular were the architectural prints by Piranesi, like his famous prints of the Colosseum and the Pantheon in the exhibition.

A fascinating and educational object takes us to the 19th century. It is a collection of Italian plaster intaglio reliefs, in a case with small drawers, made by John Tyrell in London in the mid 19th century. Originally it comprised of 207 reliefs in plaster. Tyrrell had acquired over 1000 neoclassical gems from the Prince Stanislas Poniatowski collection in 1839 and had numerous plaster casts made. He published his collection in 1841, in a catalogue written by James Prendeville. The casts depicting scenes and figures from classical mythology served as an intellectual after-dinner game à la Trivial Pursuit today, where dinner guests had to guess who was depicted in the miniature images. The player with the most correct answers won.
**Checklist**

**Illustrations (I – XVII)**

**I  Sir Peter Paul Rubens**  
*Agrrippina and Germanicus*, c. 1614  
Oil on panel  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Fund, 1963.8.1

**II  Sir Peter Paul Rubens**  
*Roman Imperial Couple*, c. 1615  
Oil transferred to masonite panel  
Collection of the Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund, 59.8.3

**III  Anthony van Dyck**  
*Peter Paul Rubens, Painter and Diplomat*, 1630  
Engraving  
Pia Gallo Fine Old Master and Modern Prints & Drawings, New York

**IV  Studio of Sir Peter Paul Rubens**  
*Peter Paul Rubens*, c. 1620  
Oil on panel  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Timken Collection, 1960.6.33

**V  Theodoor Van Thulden* after designs by Peter Paul Rubens**  
*Arcus Monetalis, part posterior*, 1642  
Engraving from *Pompa Introitus Honori ... Ferdinandi Austriaci ... (Entry of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp, April 17, 1635)*  
Academy Art Museum, Easton, Maryland, 2014.009.01

**VI  Theodoor Van Thulden* after designs by Peter Paul Rubens**  
*Arcus Monetalis, part anterior*, 1642  
Engraving from *Pompa Introitus Honori ... Ferdinandi Austriaci ... (Entry of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp, April 17, 1635)*  
Academy Art Museum, Easton, Maryland, 2014.009.02

**VII  Venetian**  
*Coin Box with the Bust of Julius Caesar*, c. 1600  
Wood, leather, silk, velvet, gilded copper alloy, pigmented paint, gold leaf  
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, 42.237

**VIII  Roman**  
*Laureate Head of Julius Caesar*, 43 BC  
Aureus  

**IX  Roman**  
*Antonius and Octavia*, busts, jugate, 39 BC  
Cistophorus  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1944.100.7032

**X  Roman**  
*Head of Augustus*, 19 BC - 15 BC  
Denarius  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1957.172.1482

**XI  Roman**  
*Marble Female Portrait, perhaps the Empress Livia, Wife of Augustus*  
Late 1st century BC – early 1st century AD  
Marble  
Fortuna Fine Arts, Ltd, New York

**XII  Roman**  
*Bust of Livia as Pietas*, draped and veiled, 80 - 81 AD  
Dupondius  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 426. 1944.100.41827

**XIII  Roman**  
*Bust of Agrippina the Elder*, her hair falling in queue down her neck, 37-41 AD  
Sestertius  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1957.172.1524

**XIV  Roman**  
*Agrippina the Younger*, 37-41 AD  
Caesaraugusta  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1944.100.65120

**XV  Roman**  
*Head of Germanicus*, 40 - 41 AD  
As  
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1957.172.1522

**XVI  George Bower**  
*Coronation Medal of William (Willem III) and Mary*, 1689  
Silver  
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland (Gift of Joaneath Spicer, 2008), 57.2306

**XVII  John Tyrrell**  
*A Collection of Italian Plaster Intaglio Reliefs in a Tray Cabinet*, c. 1850  
On loan from Peter and Betty Carroll, Oxford, Maryland
Also included in the Exhibition

**Roman Coins**

*Cleopatra*, 36 BC
Tetradrachm
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1967.152.567

*Head of Claudius*
As, 50-54 AD
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1944.100.39403

*Caligula*, 37 – 38 AD
Sestertius
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1944.100.39337

*Nero*, 66-68 AD
Sestertius
Courtesy of The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1935.117.364

*Coin with the Head of the Roman Emperor Augustus*, 27 BC-AD 14
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland (Gift of Harold Landon, 1943), 59.627

*Coin with the Head of the Roman Emperor Vespasian*, AD 69-79
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland (Gift of Harold Landon, 1943), 59.644

*Coin with the Head of the Roman Emperor Titus*, AD 80-81
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland (Gift of Harold Landon, 1943), 59.645

*Coin with the Head of the Roman Emperor Domitian*, AD 81-96
Copper alloy
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland (Gift of Harold Landon, 1943), 59.646

**Engravings**

*Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (1720 - 1778)
*The Pantheon exterior*
(Anagoria del Pantheon d’Agrippa oggi Chiesa di Santa Maria ad Martyres)
Etching, from the *Vedute di Roma* (Views of Rome), 1740 – 1760
On loan from Warren and Claire Cox, Washington, DC

*Francesco Piranesi* (1758/1759 - 1810)
*The Colosseum*
(Scena dell’Anfiteatro Flavio Detto Il Colosseo)
Witching, from the *Vedute di Roma*, c. 1750–1778
On loan from Warren and Claire Cox, Washington, DC

**Books**

*Jan Caspar Gevaerts*
*Pompa Introitus Honori .. Ferdinandi Austriaci ...*
(Entry of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand into Antwerp, April 17, 1635). Designed by
Peter Paul Rubens, Engraved by Jacob Neeffs, Etched and published by
Theodoor van Thulden, 1642
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

*Goltzius, Hubert*, 1526-1583
*Icones imperatorum Romanorum : ex priscis numismatibus ad vivum delineatae, & breui narratione historicâ ...* Antverpiae: En officina Plantiniana Balthasaris Moreti, 1645
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

*Patin, Charles*
*Thesaurus numismatum e musaeo Caroli Patini*, [Amsterdam] : Sumptibus autors, 1672
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

*John Smith*
*Select views in Italy: with topographical and historical descriptions in English and French*
London, 1792–1796
National Gallery of Art Library, Washington, David K. E. Bruce Fund

**Cameos and Medals**

*Guillaume Dupré*
*Portrait of Henry IV and Marie de’ Medici*, 1603
Bronze
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland
(Gift of Douglas H. Gordon [formerly part of the Walters Collection], 1941), 59.586

*John Tyrrell*
*A Collection of Italian Plaster Intaglio Reliefs in a Frame I - IV*, c. 1850
On loan from Peter and Betty Carroll, Oxford, Maryland

*Venetian*
“Antique” *Cameo with Portrait of the Roman Emperor Vespasian*, 1600-1650
Onyx, gilded copper alloy mount
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, 42.237