

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and His Landscapes: Ideas on Nature and Art.
Corina Kleinert.

Pictura Nova: Studies in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Flemish Painting and Drawing 20. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014. 398 pp. €120.

Occupying a small percentage of his painted oeuvre yet executed throughout his post-Italy career, Peter Paul Rubens's landscapes were described as "the best . . . that are to be seen" (31) by the miniaturist Edward Norgate (1581–1650), who arrived at the erroneous conclusion that the Flemish court painter abandoned history painting late in his career to concentrate on this genre. While these rare views were experienced in the first half of the seventeenth century only by those fortunate enough to know the artist, their compositions were disseminated broadly through two series of reproductive engravings by Schelte à Bolswert (ca. 1586–1659), published around 1635 and 1645, respectively. Rubens's painted topographical views and countryside scenes thus represent a very personal reflection upon place that was then propagated across Europe through another's hand. This tension between direct and indirect knowledge of the artist's inventions, in addition to the relatively modest number of surviving examples, may partially explain the disproportionate attention that the artist's landscapes receive from scholars. Building on the recent studies of Adler (1982), Vergara (1982), and Brown (1996), which catalogue the works and cast them in terms of the established poetic traditions, Corina Kleinert seeks to define the artistic, economic, and literary contexts that brought about Rubens's distinctive flavor of landscape and to explore its reception across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Using the familiar literature of the artist's voluminous correspondence, his theoretical writings on art, and other archival sources, Kleinert also draws heavily on

the paintings and prints themselves, employing focused visual analysis to buttress her contextual discussions.

Kleinert organizes her monograph into four chapters, each of which constitutes a formidable theme that more fully illuminates the significance of landscape in the artist's oeuvre. The first chapter considers the transformative social and economic structures, including the increasing urbanization of Flanders and the prosperity prompted by the Twelve Years' Truce, that defined Rubens's relationship to his native land. Here Kleinert emphasizes the depiction of nature as a celebration of national identity in tandem with the topoi of landscape painting as capturing divine expression, as protoscientific documentation, and as allegorical representation of fecundity and the Golden Age. The second chapter examines the landscape paintings within the confines of artistic theory and practice. While Rubens commented upon the relationship between nature and art only twice in writing, Kleinert extrapolates from Rubens's description of an Aurora as "done by the Life . . . [and] *un poco aiutato* [with a little assistance]" (34) that the artist situated himself within ancient and contemporary theories of those like Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570–1632), who advocated for the inspired amplification of nature's inherent beauty.

Kleinert's most powerful contribution appears in the third chapter, which offers a careful analysis of the engraved *Small* and *Large Landscape* series in relationship to the paintings. The author not only records inscriptions and dedications, but documents translations from painting to print with an attentive eye, suggesting certain compositions were made after originals in the artist's collection and others executed after workshop copies. Of great interest are the dedications to prominent collectors like Philips van Valckenisse (1596–1665), secretary to the city of Antwerp, and Jan Caspar Gevaerts (1593–1666), imperial historiographer and Rubens's friend. Kleinert argues that these lines were added neither by the artist nor by the engraver but by the publisher Gillis Hendricx (active ca. 1643–77) to confer artistic and civic value upon the prints. The fourth chapter surveys the circulation of Rubens's landscapes after his death in 1640 through the end of the eighteenth century, enumerating the high-profile connoisseurs who sought out these works, including Armand-Jean de Plessis (1629–1715), duc de Richelieu; the dealer Edme-François Gersaint (1694–1750); and the academician Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–92).

This heavily illustrated book is a useful resource for those studying the engraved series, as the numerous details offer the reader the opportunity to appreciate Bolswert's signature style. Unfortunately, the inconsistencies in the text — from font size to spelling and grammar — and the omission of the essential addresses, inscriptions, and dedications from the illustrations temper the force of Kleinert's conclusions. As a synthetic view of Rubens as a landscapist, however, this investigation offers insight into the motivations and visual language employed by the artist to achieve his artistic universality.

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