

*Peter Paul Rubens and the Counter-Reformation Crisis of the Beati moderni.*  
Ruth S. Noyes.

Sanctity in Global Perspective. London: Routledge, 2018. xiv + 348 pp. \$119.95.

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“An audacious interpretative leap” (205–06) is how Ruth Noyes positions her claim on the imaging of the modern saints (*beati moderni*), whose cults were stridently pursued in the Counter-Reformation years in Italy. It pertains specifically to her revisionist reading of two long-studied artworks: the altarpieces (1606–08) commissioned by the Oratorians from the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens, to push the cult and *causa* for canonization of Filippo Neri in the Chiesa Nuova, in Rome. Noyes’s “audacity” is entwined with the proposed bold strategy of the Oratorians to visually and materially link Neri with Gregory the Great (presented as a champion of spiritual martyrdom) and ancient Christian martyrs through the act of painting. Rubens, she argues, worked from wax death masks and an established genealogy of representational type produced through diverse media, in order to place Neri’s face on Gregory’s body in an act of “personated” portraiture, a variant of Wind’s allegorical portraits. This bold iconographic strategy would lead to the rejection of the first version of the altarpiece—an act of self-censorship in the fraught early years of the seventeenth century, in response to recent curial clampdowns—but it also spawned the second version, which, for Noyes, raised the stakes for its highly select and inculcated audience.

Her proposition of the cultural logics of the altarpieces is energetically pursued in the final two chapters of the book, with the preceding three preparing the ground historically and theoretically. Chapter 1 examines how the *beati moderni* were inserted into the hagiographical record through images, acts, and objects, and what implications this had for notions of historical truth. Chapter 2 focuses on image censorship, facilitating Noyes’s semiotic interpretation of the iconographic strategies deployed in celebratory and propagandistic prints (*vita et miracula* type). Chapter 3 moves to the expenditure on Neri’s cult and, particularly, the sumptuous transept chapel in the Chiesa Nuova that would become the prime locus of Filippine devotion, enfolding earlier and more modest spaces (*capelletta*), as well as ritualized objects, especially the miracle-working fresco of the *Madonna della Vallicella*.

All five chapters of this book, and its lengthy introduction, are densely constructed and argued. Personally, I found the lack of subheadings, obscure lexicon, and the tendency toward compound adjectives when making her theoretical positions, to be impediments to overall readability, at times stretching credibility. Alongside the substantial length, these issues might have been addressed in the editorial phases. The book is amply illustrated in black and white. While acceptable for prints (though reproduction values are often poor) it is less favorable to the altarpieces, which, given their purported centrality and intense examination in two chapters, deserved color reproduction, and a larger scale for the church-interior views with sharp details. But then, this is

an art historical publication operating within the constraints of a particular interdisciplinary series.

From the title of the book, Rubens is the star of the show—the one who was able to realize the order's ambitions over time for one of their new saints. How this actually plays out is a different matter. It takes until chapter 4 for the artist truly to arrive on the stage. While Noyes endeavors to signpost what lies ahead in relation to what was previously covered, the intense examination of the three preparatory chapters, especially the running and productive threads of prints and imprinting which necessarily brings in multiple actors (clergy, curia, patrons, artists, publishers, objects, spaces, etc.), dominate the reader's purview. Noyes is countering previous approaches by not deploying Rubens too early, but this stalling has its own consequences.

The book marshals an impressive range of sources and theories, which will be of interest to specialists of the Oratorians and Counter-Reformation visual culture. Noyes treads her way carefully through the substantial scholarship in all its permutations, and as a result is extremely generous in her acknowledgements and citations. Her repositions and challenges to received wisdom are valuable, and there is no doubt that this case study of propaganda and censorship is worth a close eye.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2018.35

*Rubens: The Power of Transformation.* Gerlinde Gruber, Sabine Haag, Stefan Weppelmann, and Jochen Sander, eds.  
Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2017. 310 pp. \$55.

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Rubens—artist, humanist, classicist, antiquarian—was the Renaissance Man of the Baroque. Steeped in the classical tradition, his erudition challenges modern notions of spontaneity and originality. Like Dante and Milton, Rubens drew from a wellspring of imagery—biblical, theological, and mythological. This richly illustrated exhibition catalogue from Vienna and Frankfurt—a cornucopia of images and essays ranging from the general to the esoteric—demonstrates to amateurs and scholars alike the importance of probing Rubens's sources to appreciate his transformative powers.

Rubens's arrival in Rome, in 1600, coincided with the dawn of the Baroque. His drawings there of ancient sculptures suggest live models, not marbles. In his treatise *De Imitatione Statuarum*, he wrote that one must “above all else, avoid the effect of stone.” Throughout his career Rubens exemplified his underlying credo in artistic metamorphosis.

The essays herein offer introductions to the mystery and method of Rubens's transformative vision. Jaffé's welcome discussion of Rubens's “reference models” is occasionally undermined by journalistic language. Rather than “exploiting short cuts” (51)