

RUBENS IN COMO

FROM 27 MARCH TO 25 JULY 2010
IN VILLA OLMO
MASTERPIECES BY THE FLEMISH MAESTRO

Como presents one of the greatest artists of all time in the most important exhibition of the works of Peter Paul Rubens to be held in Italy in the last twenty years, featuring 25 masterpieces from the Painting Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, the Liechtenstein Museum and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, all of Vienna, together with more than 40 works by other seventeenth-century Flemish painters, including Anthony van Dyck, Jacob Jordaens, Gaspar de Crayer, Pieter Boel, Cornelis de Vos and Theodor Thulden.

Como organises the seventh major exhibition at Villa Olmo.

The successful exhibitions devoted to Miró, Picasso, Magritte, to the Impressionists, to Klimt and Schiele and to the Russian avant-garde maestros Chagall, Kandinsky and Malevic have so far attracted more than half a million visitors – an average of 90,000 every year – making the city on the lake one of the landmark venues on the Italian exhibition circuit.

From 27 March to 25 July 2010, the interiors of the **eighteenth-century Villa Olmo** will now be hosting **the genius of SIR PETER PAUL RUBENS** (Siegen, 28 June 1577 – Antwerp, 30 May 1640), the maestro of Baroque art.

An unparalleled effort has been made by the exhibition's curator Sergio Gaddi, also the City of Como's Councillor for Culture, who has partnered with Renate Trnek, Director of the Painting Gallery at the Vienna Academy of Fine Art, to bring together no less than **25 of the Flemish maestro's masterpieces** from the collections in the Painting Gallery itself, from the Liechtenstein Museum and from the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Devised by the City of Como Department of Culture, the exhibition shows one of the largest groups of works by Rubens ever to be seen on any one occasion in Italy, together with more than **40 works by other artists from his circle**, including the great **Sir Anthony van Dyck**, Jacob Jordaens, Gaspar de Crayer, Pieter Boel, Cornelis de Vos and Theodor Thulden.

"The exhibition in Villa Olmo celebrates the genius and the modernity of one of painting's unquestioned maestros, who after four centuries still manages to surprise us with the grandiose, exuberant forcefulness of the sign that made European Baroque so universal", comments the curator Sergio Gaddi. "Rubens is still contemporary because his work fixes the endless beauty of the world in time and breathes the life of light and colour into his creations. His painting is a feast for the soul and the eyes and the works on show in Como narrate the great artist's inexhaustible lust for life, the prodigious seductive force that springs forth from his visions. The consistent nucleus of works by Rubens is completed by a finely-chosen selection of paintings by other artists who had a variety of bonds with Antwerp and the maestro's workshop, enabling the visitor to experience an exciting view of the golden age of Flemish painting in the seventeenth century."

“With Rubens and his Flemish disciples, Como is about to experience another extraordinary period of great events, another step on the ambitious route first mapped out in 2004, which has already added our city to the circuit of capitals of art, bringing important benefits to its surroundings, to our natural vocation as a tourist destination and to our prestige,” states the mayor of Como, Stefano Bruni. *“Seven years after we first started, I still support and believe in the unparalleled driving force unleashed by these exhibitions and in their ability to attract large numbers of visitors”.*

The exhibition devised by Sergio Gaddi takes the visitor through nine rooms in Villa Olmo, illustrating the topics typical of Rubens’ painting, such as his sacred subjects and scenes from history and mythology, featuring several of the Flemish maestro’s leading masterpieces.

These include the **Three Graces** (1620-1624), a true manifesto of the contemporary ideal of feminine beauty, which Rubens modelled on the Hellenistic sculptural group found in Rome in the fifteenth century. Rubens painted the subject of the Three Graces several times, sometimes as a standalone and sometimes inserted in a broader context. In this case, the three female characters are depicted as the Greek goddesses of the seasons, clad in nothing but the flimsiest of veils and supporting a basket of flowers, which gives them an extraordinary circular movement, generating a natural, elegant pattern of hands and arms.

Boreas Abducting Oreithya (1615), a vigorous masterpiece and the image chosen as the symbol of the exhibition, depicts the tale told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* of the nymph Oreithya abducted by the winged, bearded Boreas, the personification of the north wind. Rubens blended the two bodies in a tight, fluctuating embrace, capturing the moment when the fear and violence of the abduction is transformed into an ecstasy of love and fantasy. The nymph’s body, like all Rubens’s female figures, is rendered with such a thoroughly realistic flesh colour as to make Guido Reni wonder: *“Does this painter mix blood with his colours?”*

Two works of outstanding importance included in this exhibition are the **Circumcision of Christ** (1605), which responded to clear iconographic standards dictated by the Counterreformation for expressing participation in religious sentiment clearly and immediately, and the **Madonna Adored by Angels** (also known as the **Madonna della Vallicella**, 1608) – possibly the most prestigious of the artist’s commissions in Italy – two models for altarpieces in the Jesuit Church in Genoa and the Church of Santa Maria della Vallicella in Rome, in which the theatrical use of light and chromatic atmosphere reveals the influence exerted by the great Venetian painters of the sixteenth century, whose work Rubens had studied during his stay in Venice in 1600.

The imposing **The Dreaming Silenus**, one of the Flemish maestro’s more unusual works, which he painted between 1610 and 1612, soon after returning to Italy, is striking not only for its allegorical sensuality, but also for the architecture of the composition, in which the group comprising Bacchus, the drunken satyr and the Maenad is set against a luxuriant still life, featuring priceless gilded pottery and a rich array of chalices and goblets.

One unquestioned rarity is **The Judgement of Paris** (1605-1608), one of only four works painted by Rubens on a sheet of copper, an unusual support for a recurrent theme in his painting, which he repeated several times, culminating in the celebrated painting executed in 1638-39 to a commission from King Philip IV of Spain, which now hangs in the Prado in Madrid. This is one of the most enchanting pieces of poetry ever painted by Rubens, where everything, from the composition as a whole to the figures, the landscape and the sky above them, is resolved in the colour and the paint applied with fluid brushstrokes, blending both the figures and the setting around them into a single, indissoluble whole. The painting illustrates the competition, judged by Paris, between the goddesses Hera, Artemis and Aphrodite for the title of the most beautiful on Olympus.

Of particular significance are the two large canvases of **The Death of Decius Mus** and **The Trophy**, both from the cycle that Rubens dedicated to the Roman consul Publius Decius Mus in 1616-1617. The cycle was inspired by the story told by Livy of the heroic Roman leader who lived in the fourth century BC. So strongly was the artist stimulated by the great epics that, in a letter addressed to William Trumbull in 1621, he wrote: *“I confess that an inborn gift has called me to execute large works rather than little curios. To each his own way.*

My talent is of a kind that no undertaking, however great and multiform the object, can overcome my self-confidence”.

There is considerable historical, as well as artistic, value in the **series of small oils on board of sacred subjects**, which Rubens painted as preparatory models for the 39 works commissioned from him in 1620 for the ceilings of the church of the Jesuits in Antwerp, works which were later lost when the church was destroyed by fire in 1718. The particularly dynamic construction of these paintings, with their view as seen from below, betrays evidence of the influence exerted by Paolo Veronese on Rubens’s imagination. In these priceless surviving preparatory works, the maestro’s own hand is conveyed very convincingly, as he made his sketches personally, while entrusting the completion of the finished full-scale work to his workshop assistants.

Alongside these masterpieces by Rubens, the exhibition in Villa Olmo also features **40 canvases by Flemish painters from his circle, in particular Anthony van Dyck**, a friend of the maestro’s and certainly his most talented pupil – represented here by his celebrated **Self Portrait** as a young man and his splendid **Portrait of a Commander in Armour** – as well as works by Jacob Jordaens, Gaspar de Crayer and Theodor Thulden. Outstanding for their quality and minute detail among these Flemish works are the still life executions by Pieter Boel, Jan Fyt and Jan De Heem, showing evidence of the blend of naturalism, exoticism and artificiality typical of the aristocratic *Kunstkamer* collections that were so fashionable in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. That is an apt description of Pieter Boel’s **Still Life with Globe and Cockatoo**, Jan Fyt’s **Fruit Still Life with Monkey** or the **Richly Laid Table with Parrot** by Jan Davidsz de Heem. One variant on the still life theme that was very much in vogue in Flanders around the middle of the seventeenth century, the display of game, is well represented in this exhibition by such works as **The White Peacock** by Jan Weenix (1693), or the two paintings of **Still Life with Game**, respectively by Jan Fyt and Melchior Hondecoeter.

Don Chisciotte, cavaliere del Barocco (Don Quixote, the Baroque Knight) is the **new theatre project**, edited by *Teatro in Mostra* of Como and directed by Eleonora Moro, that repeats the previous experience of staging a parallel didactic event to investigate the bonds between Rubens and the Baroque era.

Catalogue by **Silvana Editoriale**.

Como, February 2010

RUBENS AND THE FLEMISH SCHOOL

Curated by Sergio Gaddi and Renate Trnek

LOCATION

Como, Villa Olmo - via Cantoni 1

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday to Thursday: 9.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Friday to Sunday: 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.

(the ticket office closes one hour earlier)

Closed on Mondays

ENTRY

Full price: € 9.00

Discount price: € 7.00 (visitors aged over 65 and from 6 to 18, university students up to 26, groups of at least 25 with free entrance for one accompanying guide, categories with conventions)

Discount price for schools: € 5.00 (school groups of at least 25 with free entrance for two accompanying guides)

Free of charge: children aged up to 6, disabled visitors with one companion each

Online ticket offices: www.ticket.it www.ticketone.it

CATALOGUE

Silvana Editoriale www.silvanaeditoriale.it

VISITS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADULTS

Guided tours (up to 25 people): € 100.00

Theatre on show (single ticket, with a minimum of 20 tickets sold on reservation): € 5.00

Theatre on show, calendar of extra performances: 9 April, 24 April, 22 May, 19 June, 10 July at 9.00 p.m.

VISITS AND ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS

Guided tours (up to 25 people): € 50.00

Guided tour + didactic workshop (up to 25 people): € 70.00

Didactic workshop (single ticket, without the guided tour): € 2.00

Theatre on show (single ticket, with a minimum of 20 tickets sold on reservation): € 3.00

SERVICES

Audio guide service

Special audio guides (kids' tour) for children

Obligatory wardrobe, free of charge

Restaurant and bar in the gardens of Villa Olmo

Return shuttle service by lake from Piazza Cavour, every Saturday, Sunday and public holiday

Access and toilets for disabled visitors

SPECIAL OPENING ON PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

4, 5 and 25 April, 1 May, 2 June: opening hours from 9.00 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.

CULTURE PASS

The exhibition ticket also allows unrestricted access until 25 July 2010 to the following civic museums:

Giovio Archaeological Museum, Piazza Medaglie d'Oro, 1

Garibaldi Historical Museum, Piazza Medaglie d'Oro, 1

Didactic Silk Museum, via Castelnuovo, 9

Civic Painting Gallery, via Diaz, 84

The Volta Memorial, Lungo Lario Marconi

Museum opening hours

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday: 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., 2.00 to 5.00 p.m.

Wednesday: 9.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. - Sunday: 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.; closed on Mondays

Didactic Silk Museum opening hours

Tuesday to Friday: 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon, 3.00 to 6.00 p.m.

Volta Memorial opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday: 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon, 3.00 to 6.00 p.m.; closed on Mondays

INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS

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