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GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS
SPECTACULAR RUBENS: THE TRIUMPH OF THE EUCHARIST

Exhibition explores one of Peter Paul Rubens's greatest achievements and features panel paintings alongside monumental tapestries from Madrid

On view October 14, 2014 – January 11, 2015

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center



The Victory of the Eucharist over Idolatry, about 1622-25. Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640). Oil on panel. 25 9/16 x 35 13/16 in. Image courtesy of the Photographic Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

LOS ANGELES – In the early 1620s Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577–1640) designed a series of 20 tapestries celebrating the glory of the Roman Catholic Church for the Spanish governor-general of the Netherlands, the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566–1633). *Spectacular Rubens: The Triumph of the Eucharist* reunites Rubens's exuberant oil sketches painted for this commission with the monumental original tapestries, the largest number of works for the *Eucharist* series assembled

in over half a century. The exhibition presents an unrivaled opportunity to experience the Baroque master's extraordinary impact on both an intimate and a monumental scale.

On view at the Getty Museum October 14, 2014 through January 11, 2015, *Spectacular Rubens* features six spirited painted *modelli* from the collection of the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid; four of the original tapestries, among the most celebrated treasures of the nearby Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales (Convent of the Barefoot Royals), in a rare loan from the Patrimonio Nacional; and several other paintings related to the Eucharist series by Rubens from local and national collections. The Madrid *modelli* have recently been conserved at the Prado with the support of a grant from the Getty Foundation through its Panel Paintings Initiative. The exhibition was organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Museo

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Nacional del Prado in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and in collaboration with the Patrimonio Nacional.

"Considered the pinnacle of Rubens's innovative achievement in Flemish tapestry design, the *Triumph of the Eucharist* paintings and tapestries are among the most important works of art produced in the Baroque period," explains Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "It is a great privilege to be able to bring these exceptional paintings and monumental tapestries to the U.S., many for the first time, where they will bring to life a remarkable moment in art history."



The Triumph of the Church, about 1622 - 1625. Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640). Oil on panel. 32 3/8 x 49 x 1 15/16 in. Image courtesy of the Photographic Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

The *Triumph of the Eucharist* tapestries were commissioned by the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia as a gift to the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales (Convent of the Barefoot Royals) in Madrid and have been in regular use there for almost 400 years. They decorated the convent church on two important events marked by elaborate ceremony—Good Friday and the Octave of Corpus Christi—and were sometimes displayed for other special circumstances. On select occasions they may even have been hung on the outside of the building.

Designing the *Triumph of the Eucharist* Tapestries

"Rubens's creative exhilaration radiates from the energetic brushwork of the preparatory oil sketches and within each of the huge tapestries," says Anne Woollett, curator of paintings at the Getty Museum and curator of the exhibition. "The *Eucharist* series reveal the enormous powers of invention of one of the most learned painters of the period. Rubens drew on a wide range of classical and Christian iconography and traditional allegories of Good versus Evil to express the spiritual victory of the Catholic Church over its foes."

The 20 tapestries Rubens designed together formed a complex illusionistic decoration for the interior of the convent church in Madrid. Remarkably, he devised the series in his Antwerp studio based on second-hand descriptions of the church. The tapestries portray a splendid architectural setting in which small angels hang fictional tapestries depicting dramatic Eucharist subjects. The exact arrangement of the tapestries in the church is unknown. However, two different viewpoints within the compositions and a sketch by Rubens for the

choir wall suggest the large hangings were intended to be installed in two levels, one atop the other.

Powerful figures in motion, rich color, as well as the narrative of angels unfurling fictive "tapestries" connect individual compositions. Playful illusions and spatial ambiguities appear in many scenes, as Rubens created different levels of reality in the main scenes of the Eucharistic subjects themselves, as well as the illusionistic architecture, stone framework, garlands and angels.

The 20 pieces that constituted the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia's gift to the convent may have been woven over a span of several years, from about 1625 to 1633. The tapestries were woven in Brussels by two of the most prominent tapestry workshops, headed by Jan Raes I and Jacob Geubels II, with the assistance of two other weavers.

Rubens was a leading tapestry designer, and the *Eucharist* series was the third and largest series of his career. Making no concessions to the weavers, Rubens designed complex scenes with illusionistic effects in the manner of large-scale paintings. Large expanses of bare flesh, often in dynamic, foreshortened poses, challenged weavers to create volume with gradations of delicate hues for modeling. His demanding compositions advanced tapestry production toward a more pictorial effect.

The Patron

The Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia was the eldest and favored child of Philip II (1527–1598) and Isabel of Valois (1545–1568). Raised at the Spanish court, she had a profound sense of religious obligation and familial duty from an early age. She was also exposed to the extraordinary art collection of Philip II, who favored Titian and Flemish painting.

She and her husband Cardinal-Archduke Albert of Austria (1559–1621) ruled the Southern Netherlands (a region corresponding roughly to the country of Belgium today) as co-sovereigns, establishing a solid Catholic state after decades of conflict and suffering. Following Archduke Albert's death in 1621, Isabel Clara Eugenia exchanged her court dress for the habit of a pious nun (in the manner of "Poor Clare") and stayed in Brussels as Governor-General. For the remaining twelve years of her life, she assiduously waged military and diplomatic campaigns to secure peace in the Thirty Years' War and success for the Spanish crown.



Isabel Clara Eugenia with Magdalena Ruiz, 1585 – 1588. Alonso Sánchez Coello (Portuguese, active in Spain, 1531 - 1588). Oil on canvas. 92 x 61 13/16 x 3 3/8 in. Image courtesy of the Photographic Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

Tremendously popular, she was mourned at her death in 1633 as a model of virtue.

At the time of the commission for the *Eucharist* tapestries, Rubens was at the height of an illustrious career. After early training in Antwerp and eight years in Italy and Spain, he accepted the generous terms of Archduke Albert and Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia to become their court painter in 1609. Painting intense devotional works as well as captivating mythologies, among many other subjects, Rubens gave form to the values of the cultured Brussels court. After Albert's death in 1621, he also served the Infanta in a diplomatic capacity and was rewarded for his success with a knighthood by Philip IV. Patron and painter shared a deep spiritual conviction that infuses the *Eucharist* series.

Panel Paintings Conservation

The oak panels of the six *modelli* for the *Eucharist* series in the collection of the Museo Nacional del Prado were painstakingly conserved between 2011 and 2013 to address the cracks and distortions caused by centuries-old alterations. With a grant from the **Getty Foundation** through the **Panel Paintings Initiative**, expert panel conservators completed structural treatment of the paintings as part of a program for panel specialists. Once the stabilization was complete, the pictorial surfaces were treated. This project is the second partnership with the Museo del Prado, and the only Panel Painting Initiative project to be featured at the Getty Museum.

Prior to the Getty's presentation, the exhibition was on view at the Prado Museum in Madrid from March 25, 2014 through June 29, 2014. After the Getty, the exhibition will travel to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from February 15, 2015 through May 10, 2015.

Also on view

Concurrent to *Spectacular Rubens*, the Getty Museum will present *Drawing in the Age of Rubens* on view October 14, 2014 through January 11, 2015. Featuring Flemish drawings from the Museum's collection, the exhibition bears witness to the flourishing of artistic culture in the southern Netherlands from the 16th to 17th centuries, and will include drawings by Rubens and his pupils, predecessors and contemporaries. The survey includes landscapes, figural studies and religious subjects.

Related Publication

In relation to the exhibition, a lushly illustrated volume of the same title, co-produced by Getty Publications and the Museo Nacional del Prado, provides new insight and information about the series. The book presents stunning photography of the paintings and tapestries, which are testaments to the brilliance of this master artist of the Baroque period.



The Triumph of the Church, 1626 – 1633. Woven in Brussels by Jan Raes I (Flemish, 1574 - 1651) after designs by Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640). Image courtesy of the PATRIMONIO NACIONAL, Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales, Madrid. Photograph by Bruce White.

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