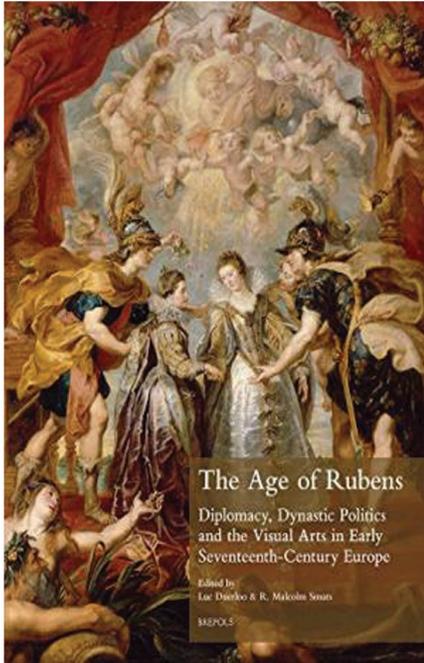


Note

L. Duerloo and R. Malcolm Smuts (ed.). *The Age of Rubens. Diplomacy, Dynastic Politics and the Visual Arts in Early Seventeenth Century Europe*, Brepols, Turnhout, 2016. 302 pp. ISBN 978-2-503-54948-4.



The Age of Rubens is a beautifully illustrated and well-edited collection of essays of the highest quality. Based on the papers given at a conference in the *Rubenianum* in Antwerp in 2012, twelve fascinating (and indexed) chapters guide the reader through the intricate links between dynastic politics and the visual arts in early seventeenth-century Europe, with a clear intention of bridging the institutional divide between art historians and political historians. While the book's theme and ambition might not be particularly innovative, the chosen approach is: to unravel the role of artists as diplomats and intermediators within the monarchical system of princes and aristocrats, and to explore the symbiotic worlds of thriving artists and courtier-diplomats. The volume stresses that Rubens' art production and that of his contemporaries in and beyond the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands spread from the Italian and Iberian peninsulas to France and the Holy Roman Empire (the Americas, unfortunately, are not covered in the essays), and configured diplomacy and dynastic politics more than is usually thought.

Unfortunately, are not covered in the essays), and configured diplomacy and dynastic politics more than is usually thought.

The career and oeuvre of Pieter Paul Rubens, and to a lesser extent that of his most important pupil Anthony van Dyck as well, serve as an entry into the questions underlying the volume. Michael Auwers and Tony Osborne explore the roles of Rubens and Van Dyck as 'painter-diplomats' in their concrete historical contexts, while dismissing nineteenth-century historiography and current romantic idealizations. Both essays stress the fact that the painters were capable of navigating the tides of court politics and maximizing

their influence within both the political and artistic spheres. While Rubens often acted on official instructions, Van Dyck appears to have been more active in maintaining secretive contacts behind the scenes. Raffaella Morselli examines the importance of Rubens' stay in Mantua, in which he not only made numerous sketches of works of art in the Gonzaga collections which influenced his later works, but also served as a painter-diplomat for the Duke to help steer events at the Spanish Court.

In their succinct, yet insightful introduction, the volume's editors Luc Duerloo and Malcolm Smuts introduce a number of important ideas underlying the various essays. They show it is important to examine and understand the political messages and diplomatic scene behind a painter's use of colors and iconographic motives, as is demonstrated in John Adamson's essay on the Habsburg pomegranate, Larry Silver's work on the *Rey planeta* in the Torre de la Parada, and Jean-François Dubost's examination of the different personifications of *la France*. Secondly, Duerloo and Smuts stress the value of a systematic analysis of material culture and court dress. In this volume, Erin Griffey and Laura Oliván discuss the importance of the wardrobe and the multi-layered messages present within a dress like the puzzling *guardainfante* (crinoline).

Even more impressive is the sustained attention given to the themes of war and peace, and the importance of dynastic marriages herein. While it features as a subtext throughout all twelve essays, those by Nicola Courtright, Erin Griffey (again), and Jean-François Dubost substantially expand upon this theme and show that allegories of peace could include both concrete references to ongoing negotiations and statements of the artists' personal opinions. Interestingly, in a comparative essay introducing the high quality copies of peace allegories sent out all over Europe during the Thirty Years War by the Barberini papal court, Anthony Colantuano shows that Rubens cleverly refrained from circulating his Allegories of War and Peace. The two Habsburg/Bourbon marriages in this period, and the impressive art that resulted from them, incorporates a very welcome gender perspective to the different contributions. Unfortunately, a recent and thematically related collection of essays, *Dynastic Marriages 1612/1615. A Celebration of the Habsburg and Bourbon Unions*, edited by Margaret McGowan for the Ashgate series *European Festival Studies*, appeared simultaneously and has not been consulted by the authors. McGowan's volume and the *The Age of Rubens* should henceforth be read in tandem in order to better understand the overlapping realms of the arts, festivals, and politics in the Spanish Habsburg world.

Violet Soen, KU Leuven – University of Leuven