



ANTWERP MASTER, CIRCA 1610–15

A study of a monk's head looking upwards.

Oil on panel.

47.5 x 37.7 cm.

Provenance: European Private Collection. Peter Paul Rubens used this virtuoso study of a head painted from life as a model for Saint Dominic for the altarpiece "Saints Dominic and Francis Protecting the World from the Wrath of Christ", painted circa 1618 and now in the Musée des Beaux Arts in Lyon (inv. no. A194, see fig. 1). The head of Saint Augustus on Rubens' altarpiece of the same name of circa 1615 (see fig. 2), today in the Real Accademia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid (inv. no. 685, see Vlieghe, Hans: *Corpus Rubenianum* Ludwig

Burchard. Part VIII: Saints, vol. 1, London/New York 1972 pp. 97-98, no. 66, ill. 117) is also based on the painting offered here, which has only recently come to the attention of art historians. In the inventory which was compiled after the death of Rubens for the sale of his estate, there were several studies of heads: "Une quantité de visages au vif, sur toile, & fonds de bois, tant de Mons. Rubens ..." (Denucé, J.: *De Antwerpsche "Konstkamers," Inventarissen van Kunstverzamelingen te Antwerpen in de 16. en 17. eeuwen*, Antwerp 1932, p. 70). Some of these heads showed monks which were listed in a document of 1641 in connection with the auction of Rubens' estate: "Dry Trognien van capucinen, geteeckent no. 916, no. 998 ende no. 999, by den heer afflyvigen geteeckent" ("Three tronies of Capuchin monks, listed under nos 916, 998 and 999, painted by the deceased"). These were sold for 48 guilders, see: Pierre Génard, "De Nalatenschap van P.P. Rubens", *Antwerpsch Archievenblad - Bulletin des Archives d'Anvers*, 2, 1865, p. 87, no. LXII). These studies were produced mostly using life models around 1610-20 (Held, Julius S.: *The Oil-Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens. A Critical Catalogue* (2 vol.), Washington/Princeton 1980, vol. 1, pp. 597-599) after Rubens, having spent many years in Italy, returned to Antwerp in the autumn of 1608 and was shortly afterwards appointed court painter to the Archdukes. Remarkable in the study offered here is the use of a technique aimed at creating a sense of distance. As in Rubens' study of the head of Saint Ambrose in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh (inv. no. NG 2097), our study shows the left eye and ear heightened in white and has brown brushstrokes on the upper lip, applied as final accents. These were conceived not as anatomical details, but rather suggest the corresponding plasticity of the head as viewed from a distance (art historical analysis, Dr. Jaco Rutgers, 15.6.2018/ 12.7.2018). In addition, the alternating nuances of colour of the skin tone, composed of partly opaque white and orange tones on a pink base, bring the skin to life. A recent dendrochronological analysis of the wooden panel by Prof. Dr. J. Klein dates the felling of the tree from which the panel was made between 1594 and 1604, indicating a fabrication date for the panel of 1602/1612. The appearance of this expressive and artistically masterful study of a head presents us with a valuable

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insight into the creative process of Peter Paul Rubens, who was at one time the leading history painter of Antwerp, and whose works were sought after far beyond the borders of Flanders. From a contemporary perspective, this study also captivates through its modernity through its reductionistic expression of the essential features of a living model into individual brushstrokes.

Estimate on request

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