

Matías Díaz Padrón, *Escritos sobre Rubens*, edición revisada por Magdala García Sánchez de la Barreda, Colección Scripta Selecta, I (Madrid: Instituto Moll- Epiarte, 2021), 336 páginas (ISBN: 978-84-948585-4-3)

Earlier this year, Epiarte and the Instituto Moll published a collection of selected articles on Peter Paul Rubens, authored by the latter's honorary president, Matías Díaz Padrón. This 336-page volume represents a new pinnacle to the author's long and prolific scholarly career devoted to early modern Flemish art. Díaz Padrón belonged to an early generation of Spanish art historians who set out to explore and identify the work of Northern artists that has historically been present in large numbers on the Peninsula. Collecting Netherlandish – later Flemish – art became a lasting phenomenon in the fifteenth century, with royal and aristocratic commissions and purchases of autograph works going hand in hand with the vast influx and (local) production of copies after Flemish masters. Specializing in this domain, Díaz Padrón successfully combined a thorough understanding of the specific Spanish historical context with a deep knowledge of Spanish art collections, both public and private, often hidden in storage rooms, palaces and churches. The continued relevance of this topic is demonstrated by a recent volume of proceedings on the phenomenon of copies after Flemish masters in Spain, edited by Eduardo Lamas Delgado and David García Cueto.¹

An introductory biography of the author recalls how Díaz Padrón has pursued his work on Rubens and Flemish art in different roles and stages of his professional life: as a researcher affiliated with the Instituto Diego Velázquez, as a professor at the Universidades Autónoma and Complutense in Madrid, and as a curator at the Museo del Prado, which preserves the world's largest collection of Rubens paintings. He has continued to publish actively since his retirement, in recent years as the main contributing author to the Instituto Moll's publication series *Great Masters* and *Studia Picturarum*, with monographs on Van Dyck, Jordaens and De Crayer. The present volume marks the inauguration of yet another series, *Colección Scripta Selecta*, explicitly intended to compile Díaz Padrón's writings with the purpose of making them more accessible. Given that this concept presupposes that all texts have previously been published (and possibly reviewed), these short reflections will not address the content of the individual texts, but consider instead some general editorial choices in connection to the volume's formulated goals.

Escritos sobre Rubens brings together articles, chapters and entries originally published in journals and museum and exhibition catalogues, spanning a period of 55 years (1964-2019). The texts' lengths range from 20-page articles to catalogue

¹ Eduardo Lamas Delgado and David García Cueto (eds.), *Copies of Flemish Masters in the Hispanic World. Flandres by Substitution*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021).

entries of less than (half) a page. Most articles treat painted work by Rubens, compared to a small number of drawings. The majority of the discussed artworks belong to public collections, including, as is to be expected, the Museo del Prado. Topics include iconographic sources, reception history and attribution. The editorial team, under the coordination of Magdala García Sánchez de la Barreda, has been relatively restrained in its approach. Quotations and transcriptions have been checked and corrected, as have the artworks' material and provenance data. Text illustrations inevitably needed to be redone, diverging sometimes from the original publications and geared toward increasing the texts' comprehensibility. In exceptional cases, minor text adjustments have been made – and are marked in an easily distinguishable way – for instance to add the occasional new insight or finding. Besides these minor adaptations, it was taken as a principle to leave the texts' original *status quaestionis* intact, thereby disregarding other authors' contributions as well as later bibliography. While this is, of course, understandable, it inevitably isolates the book's content and arguments from the exceptionally rich and lively debates that have transpired in the Rubens scholarship over the past 55 years. This is partly compensated for by the inclusion of references to the *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, which for each Rubens work indeed compiles full bibliographies and detailed lists of all known versions and copies. Nevertheless, one must also take into account the limitations of these references, as some Corpus volumes are themselves decades old, while others still await publication.

Díaz Padrón's extensive bibliography on Rubens is conveniently listed and categorized in the introductory section of the volume. Apart from some practical considerations of accessibility and volume, no content-driven criteria for selecting the texts for this compilation are articulated. The international availability of some of the source publications may indeed be problematic, for instance some of the older articles published in the journal *Archivo Español de Arte*, which has apparently retro-digitized only as far back as 1996;² this seems to apply less, on the other hand, to excerpts from Prado publications. In his own short introduction to the bundle, Díaz Padrón makes reference to a number of "controversial" paintings, some of which held in private collections, that featured in exhibitions at the Museo del Prado (1975) and in the *Rubens y su siglo* show staged in Mexico City (1998) and Ferrara (1999). This remark seemingly suggests that specific cases of (re-/dis-)attribution of paintings are considered by the author as key in his contribution to Rubens research. Here too, the choice to not include recent literature may prevent a scholarly dialogue about specific attributions. Inviting multiple voices (and counter-voices) to the debate is part of the consensus model that the *Corpus Rubenianum* has traditionally pursued: an open approach that fits the complexity of both Rubens' creative and workshop processes, and of the myriad copies after his compositions.

These considerations do not detract from the usefulness of bundling a scattered bibliography into a meaningful synthesis of an author's opus. However, the goal of creating renewed and wider attention to these studies could have substantially gained from two further, fundamental editorial choices, of which language is the

² <https://xn--archivospaoldearte-53b.revistas.csic.es/index.php/aea/issue/archive> (last consulted on 3 December 2021).

first one. The 2005 anthology of Rubens articles by Frans Baudouin, brought out by the Centrum Rubenianum, consists of contributions in Dutch, English and German, with abstracts in English accompanying all non-English texts.³ The bundle of selected articles by the late Arnout Balis, that is presently in preparation in his memory, is likely to be published entirely in English in order to maximize international readership. With only one English text in the present bundle, the heartfelt invitation to the publishers would be to translate more, if not all texts, in future volumes of this new series, thereby increasing impact and intellectual exchange.

Finally, in relation to the main goal of enhancing access to a collection of Rubens texts, one might question the exclusively book format of the *Collección Scripta Selecta*. Indeed, digital publication would significantly surpass and/or complement a printed volume in terms of visibility, outreach and connectivity. In the field of Rubens research, this objective has driven the Rubenianum to set up in 2013 the project *Digitizing the Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*. Scanned Corpus volumes, published at least 15 years ago, are made available as searchable and downloadable pdf files on the institution's website, making this resource constantly and globally available. Its user-friendliness is enhanced by a digital cumulative index, while hyperlinks connect each individual artwork to the *RKDImages database*, where new literature references, attribution and provenance data, as well as colour pictures are added to the printed information. If legally and practically feasible, it would seem advisable to consider a form of open access publication for this and future volumes of the *Collección Scripta Selecta* series.

These suggestions are at least somewhat inspired by Rubens' own polyglottism and his embrace of technical innovation and broadcasting strategies. Nonetheless, it should be stressed that the present volume will undoubtedly serve the *Rubensforschung* by bringing the discussed artworks, themes and arguments to the attention of new audiences. In setting up a new series, the choice to devote the first volume to Peter Paul Rubens is a logical one, as this master represents the focal point in Matías Díaz Padrón's life-long art historical career. Any new effort to present relevant expertise and to stimulate open, scholarly dialogue is not only praiseworthy, but also appropriate to the mission of a center devoted to the study of Flemish art.

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³ Originally intended as a tribute to the Centrum's former chairman and colleague, this volume was eventually published posthumously. Frans Baudouin, *Rubens in Context, Selected Studies. Liber Memorialis*, (Antwerpen: Centrum voor de Vlaamse Kunst van de 16e en de 17e eeuw, 2005).