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 Review by Ellen L. Longworth

Georgievska-Shine, Aneta. *Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth, 1610-1620: Visual and Poetic Memory*. Aldershot, Surrey & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. 223 pages.

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*Rubens and the Archaeology of Myth, 1610-1620: Visual and Poetic Memory* is a study of four paintings of mythological subjects that the artist produced after his return to Antwerp from Italy in 1608. The paintings—*Juno and Argus* (1611), *Prometheus Bound* (1612-1618), *The Finding of Erichthonius* (circa 1616), and *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, (1616-1618)—are treated in separate chapters, the book a revision of the author's Ph.D. dissertation (1999). The book also is preceded by related articles published in *Artibus et Historiae* (2002), *Marburger Jahrbuchs für Kunstwissenschaft* (2003), *The Art Bulletin* (2004), and *Word and Image* (2007). Aneta Georgievska-Shine's analyses bring attention to Rubens' "remarkable antiquarianism" (157) and his deep appreciation for the poetry of mythic tales. As a member of a humanist circle that included his brother Philip, who died in the year the artist began the first of the four paintings, Rubens' intellectual associations in Antwerp are of the utmost importance. It is thought that these four works were among those that the artist kept for a time in his studio, and that the subjects largely were of his own choosing. Of the four, only *Prometheus Bound* was a subject represented with any frequency, arguing, I would think, for the personal nature of the mythic episodes represented. The works are thematically connected, a form of abduction or rape explicitly or implicitly present in each of the myths depicted.

A richly woven fabric of pictorial and literary sources informs the four paintings, Rubens' eloquent visual language giving voice to the ancient tales he portrayed. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is in the foreground, while numerous other texts, ancient, medieval, and contemporary, further shape the content. Works by Michelangelo and Titian have interpretive as well as formal consequences for three of four of the paintings. The relationships of these borrowings at times mirror Ovid's "transmutations," as when Michelangelo's

*Leda* becomes Titian's *Danäe*, the two then reflected in Hilareia, one of the Leucippides. Formally similar, these three also are "sisters" in that each was the subject of divine rape/abduction.

In each case, Georgievska-Shine casts a wide net, pulling in references to works Rubens may or may not have known, enveloping *Prometheus Bound* (Chapter 1), for instance, in an enlightened and complex mantle of ancient and contemporary influences, including Rubens' own *De Imitatione Statuarum*, while Aeschylus and Euanthes provide "the literary and pictorial points of departure" (41) from the classical past. She demonstrates that Rubens' appropriation of Titian's and Michelangelo's depictions of Tityus are not simple quotations, but the agent by which the figure of Prometheus is invested with a depth of meaning that expresses with great power the analogy recognized in the Renaissance between Tityus and Prometheus.

Georgievska-Shine characterizes *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (Chapter 2) as a "visual treatise on beauty" (89), in which the influences of Titian and Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Giovanni da Bologna, Paolo Veronese, and other, more ancient sources are at play. She argues, as she does throughout the book, that the specific models chosen by Rubens, and their visual and literary interrelatedness, create a pictorial environment of learned discourse through which meaning is communicated in a multiplicity of layers. Citing Quintilian, who is famous for having challenged orators to create "vividness" or vivacity in their speech, she praises Rubens for having employed similar means in bringing to life this "exemplary rape" (93) in all of its multivalent abundance.

She likens the more pictorially elaborate *Juno and Argus* (Chapter 3) to the rhetorical practice of *oekonomia*, whereby elements are rearranged to appeal most strongly to the emotions. Central to the discussion of this painting are color and light, "the re-illumination of Argus' eyes" in the tail of the peacock understood "as a metaphor for the passage of light into color" (116). The analysis is informed by reference to a contemporary treatise on optics, for which Rubens designed the title page: *Opticorum Libri Sex*, written by Jesuit scholar Franciscus Aguilonius and published in Antwerp in 1613. Word-play also is significant to this discussion, in one instance resulting in the tentative identification as Aurora of the female figure rushing into view on the right of the

painting. What is not identified is the probable origin of this partial figure. An equally enigmatic and voluptuous female figure enters the right margin of Titian's *Garden (or Festival) of Love*—a painting Rubens knew well, having rendered a copy in oil.

The fable of *The Finding of Erichthonius* (Chapter 4) is a particularly sophisticated narrative related to the history of Athens. As Georgievska-Shine unravels this astonishingly intricate mythic tale, one cannot help but be dazzled by her erudition. We learn, for instance, that a barely visible black bird, fluttering in a darkened tree in the upper left of the painting, and a diminutive peacock located below and beyond this same tree, are essential to the story. Although compositionally marginalized, these two birds act as “narrative insets” that extend the reading of the painting outside of its frame and into the greater complexity of the myth, which Georgievska-Shine unfolds in exquisite detail.

At the beginning of her study, Georgievska-Shine tells us that the four paintings under discussion “are never merely visual demonstrations of [Rubens'] artistic parity with the ancient and modern models he invokes. Instead, their layered textures respond to the very nature of the poetic fictions they represent” (10). This book is an outstandingly effective demonstration that this, in fact, is so. Four high quality color plates and numerous black-and-white illustrations accompany the text. The study is further enhanced by substantive endnotes, an extensive bibliography, and index.

*Ellen L. Longsworth*