

Integrated Study of the Painting “Love Scene” Attributed to the Studio of Peter Paul Rubens

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(Presented by Academy Member David Lordkipanidze)

The Georgian National Museum conducts the integrated study of the Western Art Collections preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts. Objects which have never become the subject of scientific research are thoroughly studied both in terms of art historical and technical analyses. During the technical examination of the 17th century painting, previously ascribed to the School of Peter Paul Rubens, there were uncovered a number of alterations in the paintwork. In particular, the X-ray image of the picture showed that the painting contained obvious revisions. This fact triggered the further research of the object; and caused the necessity of its subsequent reattribution. The current research is innovative because previously in Georgia no complete museum collection has undergone the examination based on the selected multidisciplinary approach and methodology. The results of the study will meaningfully enrich international scientific databases, what per se will strengthen the role of Georgian National Museum in the present-day scholarly processes worldwide; and create sound ground for future academic exchanges and collaborations. Successively, the Georgian National Museum introduces and implements the new – modern standard of the fine arts collections’/objects’ research. The fallouts of the research, and their conclusive publication will become the first original Georgian language publication in decades, dedicated to the comprehensive study of Western European Fine Art works. The latter will be recommended for various relevant curricula in Georgia.
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The Western Art Collections of the Fine Arts Museum of the Georgian National Museum have never become the subject of scientific research. Within the scope of the introductory study of the collection it was uncovered (throughout the X-Ray and Infra-Red images) that the painting “Love Scene” (ascribed to the School of Rubens, 17th

century, 87x80cm, oil on board) features obvious revisions – the later interventions in paintwork. This fact triggered the further research of the object; and caused the necessity of its subsequent reattribution. The methodology of the research was grounded on the stylistic analysis of the artwork as well as the results of its technical study.



Fig. 1. *Love Scene*. Peter Paul Rubens' Studio (?). 17th century. Oil on panel. 87x80cm. Shalva Amiranashvili Fine Arts Museum collections, Georgian National Museum.

The initial observation of the object reveals that it is painted in the manner of Peter Paul Rubens. Accordingly, it is important to define the attribution of the object to the School of Rubens, or the studio of the master. The Circle of Rubens is a wide-ranging concept and encompasses a large scope of the 17th century Flemish art, while the studio of Rubens features a particular circle of artists, and does not exclude the involvement of Rubens himself in the creation of the object [1].

The "Love Scene" (№1) exposes three characters: young male and female semi-figures (in the center), and an elderly female figure (on the right, behind the male figure), painted on the black background (Fig. 1). The man is trying to embrace the young woman, who resists his touch and intends to snatch the man's dagger. The old lady stares in the direction of the opposite upper corner of the image.

The painting "Love Scene" (სბმ/ღ-ე ფ220) was transported from the State Hermitage Museum (Saint Petersburg, Russia) to the present-day Fine Arts Museum of Georgian National Museum in 1946. Previously the painting found its way to the State Hermitage Museum collections from

"Antikvariat" – the Soviet unit, responsible for sale/export of art objects in 1920s-1930s (Act of acceptance #14 between State Hermitage Museum and Antikvariat, 22.12.1935). It is learned that priorly the object was taken to Saint-Petersburg from Moscow. Earlier records are not detected, and existing archival records need careful examination.



Fig. 2. *Landsknecht mit Mädchen und Alte*. Theodoor Rombouts. 17th century. Oil on canvas. 89.5x83.5cm. Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein Gotha.

In the course of the research, the following analogous paintings were discovered in the European museums: "Landsknecht with Young Lady" (№2; Fig. 2) by Theodoor Rombouts (17th c, 89.5x83.5cm, oil on canvas, textile, inv. SG838, Gotha Castle Museum, Germany) [2]; "Soldier and Peasant Girl" (№3) (17th c, 110x94cm, inv. 540, Galleria Sabauda, Turin, Italy); "Shepherd Couple" (№4) by Justus van Egmont (17th c, 107x81cm, oil on canvas, inv. RK 142/1877, Chateau Rychnov, Czech Republic); "Shepherd Scene" (№5) by Peter Paul Rubens (1638, 162x134cm, oil on board, inv. N. 328, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany); and the copy of the latter: "Pastoral Scene" (№6) ascribed to the studio of Rubens (1635-1638, 114.5x91cm, oil on canvas, inv. N. ГЭ-493, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia).



Fig. 3. X-ray image of the painting: *Love Scene* (Fig. 1). Georgian National Museum.

Painting №2 (Fig. 2) repeats the composition of the painting №1 (Fig. 1). They even show similar characters. The painting №3 repeats the painting №1, with the difference that it depicts only two characters; elderly lady is absent. Similarly to paintings №3, the other images: №4, №5 and №6 partially repeat the composition of the painting №1, featuring the same posture of male and young female figures, again without the third character. While the first group of paintings №1-3 depicts the genre scenes, the latter group describes pastoral scenes. All exposed images date back to the 17th century, and are considered within the scope of Flemish baroque art.

Three exposed paintings (N 4-5-6) have exact date of creation: #5 by Rubens: 1638; its studio copy №6: 1635-1638; and the painting #4: after 1638. It is of note that Eduard Weiss, who examined the painting #4 at the Kolowrat estate in 1950s, suggested dating of “Shepherd Couple” based on the date of painting 5 – 1638 and after [3]. This opinion is inaccurate taking into consideration the approach it was based on, and the results of the late technical studies (1994), presented below. Thereby, the exact dating of painting #4 is debated. Another disambiguation occurs, as the workshop copy of the artwork (#6) is assigned to the earlier date rather than the original work (#5), though suggested dates stand close to each other; and they

represent the time of completion of the artwork, rather than its beginning.

The date when Rubens started painting the “Shepherd Scene” (#5) is not defined. Thereby, the hypothesis that the unfinished painting was housed in the studio of the master for a certain period of time may be suggested. As Rubens owned a very large studio in Antwerp, his students and other painters also worked in this studio along with the master (Rubens often appeared as the author of the idea) [1, 4]. It is known that Peter Paul Rubens knew both Theodoor Rombouts and Justus van Egmont (authors of two parallel paintings) in person [5, 6]. With Rombouts he collaborated when they painted the Temple of Janus in Antwerp [5]. Van Egmont worked in Rubens’s studio from 1622/23 to 1625/1628 [6].

In the created circumstances, it is supposed that Rombouts or van Egmont could have seen the sketch or semi-figure version of the painting #5 in the studio of Rubens. Thereby it is presumed that the initial source of this composition is the work by Rubens or the one made in his studio. As a compositional quote, with various interpretations, first it spread inside Rubens’s nearest art circle, and later inspired numerous followers of the artist.

The following argumentation is presented to strengthen the latter statement: based on the stylistic analyses of the painting #1, and its discussion in the scope of Rubens’s work, the painting should be dated back to the period between 1610-1625. Additionally, in support of the above statement, the following paintings (dated back to the same period) are referenced (with respect to models, often depicted by Rubens): “Old woman and boy with candles” (1616-1617, Mauritshuis); “Old woman with a basket of coal” (1616-1618, Dresden); “The Holy Family with St. Elizabeth and John the Baptist” (1614, Wallace Collection); “Virgin in adoration before the Child Christ” (1615, Rockox House, Antwerp); “Lucretia and Tarquinius” (1609, State Hermitage Museum).

The simple, three-figure composition of “The love scene” and the depiction of half-figures are more characteristic to Rubens’s work in its early stages [1]. Based on the composition and the coloristic mastery, the “Love Scene” was painted no later than mid-1620s. At this stage Rubens overcomes the schematism and artificiality, characteristic to his work of 1600-1610s (“Self-Portrait with Isabella Brant”, 1609-1610, Alte Pinakothek; “The Elevation of the Cross”, Cathedral of Our Lady, Antwerp; “The Descent from the Cross”, 1616-1617, The Hermitage Museum). He makes a transition to virtuoso-made, dynamic compositions, what was hugely revealed in the last decade of his life – 1630s [1].

In addition, the copy from the lost original of Rubens’s work “Salome with the head of Saint John the Baptist” created in 1616 (stored in Germany) is of note. With respect to characters and composition, the painting directly relates to the painting “Love Scene. Since the 1610s the models depicted in the “Love scene” (young man and woman) have been found on the works of various artists of Rubens's art circles shown with similar plastic composition and different interpretation. These findings allow to assert that the primary source of the regarded composition is Rubens’s workshop.

The article published in 1994 conveyed the results of the extensive study regarding the “Shepherd Scene” by Rubens (painting №5) [7]. It was found that the painting was previously a semi-figure composition, and later it was extended by Rubens by means of adding wood boards around, and making respective changes in paint layers [7]. The previously believed approach that similar half-figure compositions were larger in size before and became smaller due to the practise of cutting naked parts of the body from the standpoint of ethics (thus make young ladies avoid inappropriate thoughts) [2, 7] became irrelevant. This is to underline the importance of the technical research and its capacities to fundamentally change the approaches

and perspectives in the boundaries of the art historic discipline.

The technical examination of the painting “Love Scene” (Fig. 1) showed that it is made on the 6mm thick oak board, widely used by Peter Paul Rubens and other masters in his studio. Study by the binocular microscope exposed the thick, sticky prime on the board. The color tone over the foundation is grey or greyish-brownish. The painting layers were scumbled.

The palette of the painting is not wide. Rubens used linseed oil, walnut oil, turpentine, pine resin and occasionally egg (both white and yolk) in his work. The palette was not particularly wide: lead white, vermilion, lead-tin yellow, verditer, Eschel variety smalt, verdigris and (rarely) red lead. The minerals employed were ultramarine, azurite, malachite, orpiment (rarely) and quartz as an additive. The earths were yellow ochre, brown and red-brown earths, hematite, umber; Kassel brown, chalk and green earth (rarely). Organic compounds were buckthorn berry yellow lake, cochineal lake, madder lake, indigo, charcoal black, bone black and lamp black [8].

As mentioned above, obvious revisions of the paint were discovered in the artwork as a result of the X-Ray and Infra-Red images’ examination. Predominantly the face of the young female figure was a subject of later alterations. On the X-Ray image (Fig.3) it is visible that the young woman was painted in older age and brushwork was coarse. On the current upper paint layer she looks younger; and the brushwork is improved. This latter discovery allows us to presume that the artist took creative approach while working on the painting. Further research will be directed towards the discussion of the “Love Scene” in the framework of the studio of the Peter Paul Rubens.

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ხელოვნებათმცოდნეობა

პიტერ პაულ რუბენსის სახელოსნოს სურათის „სასიყვარულო სცენა“ ინტეგრირებული კვლევა

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ბოლო ორი წლის განმავლობაში, საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმის, შალვა ამირანაშვილის სახელობის ხელოვნების მუზეუმის დასავლეთ ევროპის ქვეყნების ხელოვნების კოლექციის განსაკუთრებით მნიშვნელოვან ექსპონატებს, სრულყოფილი სახელოვნებათმცოდნეო და ტექნიკური კვლევა უტარდება. პიტერ პაულ რუბენსის სკოლის უცნობი მხატვრისათვის მიკუთვნიებული, XVII საუკუნის სურათის „სასიყვარულო სცენა“ რენტგენოგრამაზე გარკვევით ჩანს სურათის ფერწერულ ფენებში ცვლილების კვალი. აღნიშნულმა ფაქტმა სურათის შემდგომი კვლევისა და ხელახალი ატრიბუციის აუცილებლობა განაპირობა. ამ დრომდე საქართველოში არცერთი სამუზეუმო კოლექცია არ შესწავლილა ხსენებულ მულტიდისციპლინურ მიდგომებსა და მეთოდოლოგიაზე დაყრდნობით. შესაბამისად, წარმოდგენილი კვლევის შედეგები მნიშვნელოვნად გაამდიდრებს საერთაშორისო სამეცნიერო მონაცემთა ბაზებს, ხელს შეუწყობს საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმის როლის გაძლიერებას მიმდინარე სამეცნიერო პროცესებში და მყარ ნიადაგს მოამზადებს სამომავლო სამეცნიერო თანამშრომლობისათვის. პროექტის განხორციელებით საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმი დასავლეთ ევროპული ხელოვნების ნიმუშების/კოლექციების შესწავლის ახალ, თანამედროვე სტანდარტს წერგავს. კვლევის შედეგები და მათი საბოლოო პუბლიკაცია დასავლეთ ევროპის ქვეყნების ხელოვნების შესახებ უკანასკნელი ათწლეულების განმავლობაში ქართულ ენაზე გამოქვეყნებული პირველი ორიგინალური ნაშრომი იქნება. პუბლიკაციის გამოყენება რეკომენდებულია საქართველოში საგანმანათლებლო სისტემის სხვადასხვა საფეხურზე შესაბამისი პროგრამებისათვის.

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