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FRONT COVER

Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194),  
detail of plate 1, page 4.

TITLE PAGE

Joachim Beuckelaer, *The Four Elements: Air*  
(NG 6587), detail of serving girl.

# The Evolution of Rubens's *Judgement of Paris* (NG 194)

LOIS OLIVER, FIONA HEALY, ASHOK ROY AND RACHEL BILLINGE

THE NATIONAL GALLERY has two paintings by Rubens of the *Judgement of Paris*. One is an early work dating from before 1600 (NG 6379), the other, the subject of this article, dates from the 1630s (NG 194, PLATE 1). In this striking work the three goddesses, Minerva, Venus and Juno, pose in various stages of undress before the shepherd Paris, who offers the prize of the golden apple to Venus, the one he considers the most beautiful. Behind him Mercury rests his right hand on the trunk of a tree, languidly holding his caduceus in his left hand. Cupid makes a pile of the goddesses' discarded

garments while Minerva's owl watches from its perch and Juno's peacock hisses at the shepherd's dog. The Fury Alecto appears in the sky, presaging the Trojan War that will follow as a consequence of this controversial contest.<sup>1</sup>

Even to the naked eye it is apparent that a number of changes have been made to the painting. In places where the paint layers have become more transparent with age, pentimenti are visible: between Venus and Juno the figure of a putto is discernible, tugging at Venus' robe, and Paris' right leg was once casually extended (see PLATE 4).



PLATE 1 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194), 1630s.  
Oak, 144.8 × 193.7 cm.



PLATE 2 After Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, late 1630s. Panel, 49 × 63 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie. This studio work records the original appearance of NG 194. This is referred to in the text as Composition I.



PLATE 3 Digital composite image showing how Rubens's *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194) would have looked between about 1640 and 1676. This is referred to in the text as Composition II.

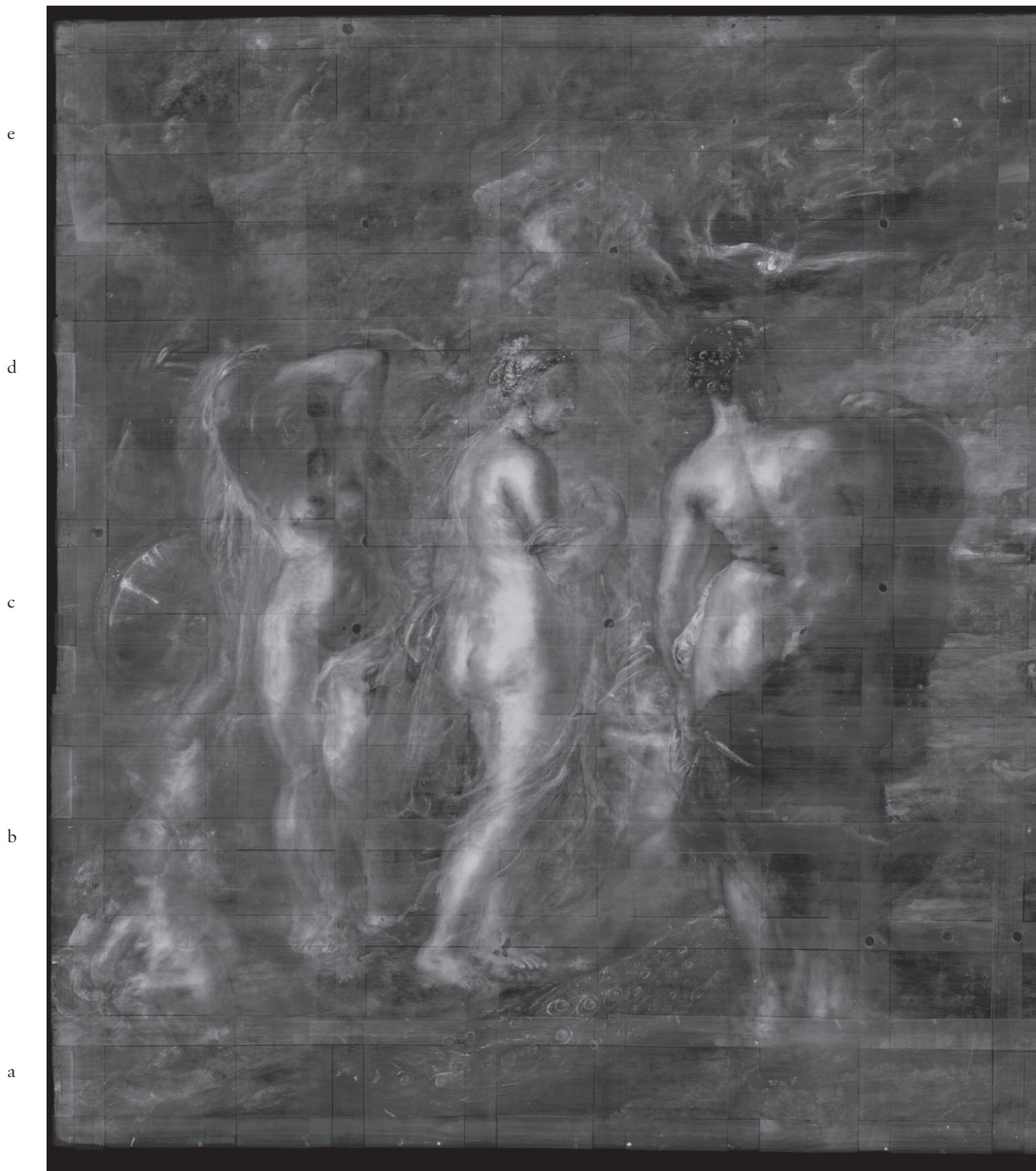
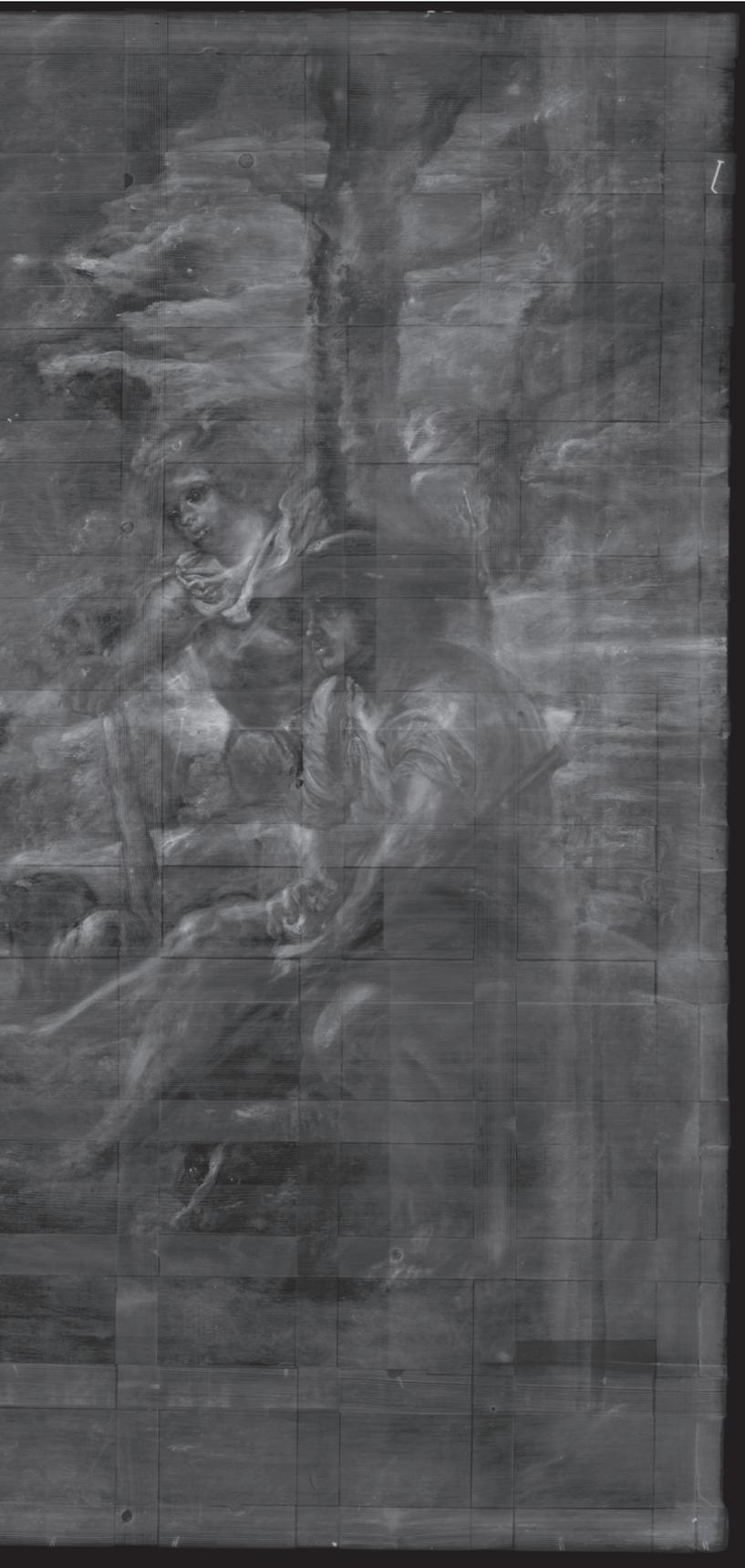


FIG. 1 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194), digitally processed X-radiograph.



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6



PLATE 4 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Detail showing the visible pentimento of Paris' original outstretched leg.

These details are features of a smaller studio work in Dresden (PLATE 2), which also differs in a number of other ways from the National Gallery painting. While the latter shows the culmination of the beauty contest, in the Dresden version the winner has yet to be decided. Mercury is shown gesturing to the three goddesses to remove their garments so that Paris can make an informed choice, while three putti help them disrobe. Paris, reserving judgement, holds the apple in his lap. He differs from the shepherd of the National Gallery painting not only in attitude but also in attire, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and a shirt with rolled-up sleeves. Three satyrs watch the proceedings from the safe cover of the trees on the left. That the Dresden painting records an earlier stage of the composition of the National Gallery picture can be seen by studying the London X-radiograph (FIG. 1) in which all of the features of the Dresden painting are visible. We will call this stage of the painting Composition I.

Both Gregory Martin and one of the present authors – Fiona Healy – have questioned whether Rubens himself was responsible for all of the changes made to the National Gallery *Judgement of Paris*.<sup>2</sup> Their studies prompted a new technical examination of the picture, the results of which are presented in this article. The painting has been examined using infrared reflectography, some further paint samples to supplement those taken in



FIG. 2 Rubens, sketch for *The Judgement of Paris*. Pen and ink on paper, 15.8 × 41.8 cm. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, inv. No. V.92, verso. The sketch appears with studies for *The Coronation of Saint Catherine*, which was painted in about 1631–3. It is not possible to date the sketch for *The Judgement of Paris* except to say that it was made after the studies for *The Coronation* since the curve of Juno’s wrap cuts the profile of the standing figure.

1968<sup>3</sup> have been analysed, and the X-radiograph has been digitally processed to improve its legibility. This article sets out to give as full an account as possible of the painting’s creation, exploring the evolution of the work in Rubens’s studio as well as considering its subsequent history.

#### The Development of Composition I (see PLATE 2)

Rubens often made changes as he worked on his paintings and the technical examination has shown that *The Judgement of Paris* is no exception. Composition I was by no means fully worked out in drawings before Rubens began work on the panel. On the upper left of a cropped sheet in Rotterdam (FIG. 2), a hastily executed pen and ink sketch shows Juno, Venus with Cupid or a little putto peering out from behind her drapery, and part of a third figure to the left, presumably Minerva; two lines indicate the peacock’s tail. This is the only drawing that relates explicitly to *The Judgement of Paris*, but when Rubens began work on the painting he may also have had in mind drawings of other subjects. A sheet of studies now in St Petersburg shows Rubens exploring the pose that he used for Venus (PLATE 5).



FIG. 3 Detail of painted-out putto in the X-ray image.



PLATE 5 Rubens, *Studies of female nudes and Charity*, c.1630. Black and red chalk and brown wash on paper, 33.9 × 45.5 cm. © With permission from The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Inv. 5513 verso.

The sheet also includes studies of children clutching at the skirts of Charity that perhaps informed his treatment of the putti attending the goddesses in *The Judgement of Paris* Composition I: the putto between Venus and Juno seen in the Dresden picture and in the X-radiograph of the National Gallery painting is closely related to these studies (see PLATE 2 and FIG. 3). The poses of the three goddesses are also found in a drawing of *The Three Graces* in the Courtauld Institute Galleries, London (PLATE 6), which has not previously been linked with the painting. While Rubens clearly intended it as a study for the Graces, he did not use it for any of his extant paintings of the subject. The dating of the drawing is controversial: Julius Held's proposal of 1628–31 makes it plausible that the drawing predates the painting, whereas Helen Braham's later date of 1635–40 poses greater difficulties. Whatever the relationship, it is clear that in both the painting and the drawing Rubens is exploring comparable means of presenting different views of the female form.<sup>4</sup>

The painting itself is testimony to the way in

which Rubens returned to and reworked ideas. First of all a thin layer of priming was applied over a chalk ground to the prepared panel, using broad brushstrokes, in a streaky manner consistent with other works by the artist. Infrared reflectography has revealed a number of areas of underdrawing, applied using a brush in a wet medium. There are fine sketchy outlines for the goddesses, and it has been discovered that the putto in the lower left corner, who was later transformed into Cupid, was originally drawn facing the viewer (FIGS 4 and 5). A lighter area above Cupid's back in the X-radiograph (FIG. 1, REF A1) indicates that this first putto may have been partly painted.

As Martin observed, Rubens made a number of changes as he worked towards completing Composition I.<sup>5</sup> The infrared reflectogram mosaics provide the first clear images of the changes made to the goddesses' legs and feet (FIG. 6). The digitally enhanced X-radiograph (FIG. 1, REF D2) gives a clear picture of the doves that were originally beside Venus' head. It also reveals the lower half of a putto



PLATE 6 Rubens, *The Three Graces*, mid-1630s.  
Red chalk heightened with white on paper, 26.7 × 17 cm.  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, Courtauld Institute of Art  
Gallery, London. Inv. D. 1978. PG. 66.

hovering above Venus (FIG. 1, REF E2), not dissimilar to the flying putto bearing a torch in *The Garden of Love* (Madrid, Prado), which Rubens painted around 1632. In other versions, such as that of 1639, now in Madrid, Rubens showed a putto crowning Venus.<sup>6</sup> A paint cross-section taken from this area indicates that Rubens immediately changed his mind and the putto was painted out while the paint was still wet (PLATE 7). To the right of this flying figure the X-radiograph shows an arm, with drapery around the upper part, extending towards Juno, and possibly a head. These features appear to be too big to belong with the putto. It is perhaps an earlier position for the Fury. There also seems to be a second position for the Fury's right arm to the left of its final version.

With the Fury in place, Composition I was complete, and the existence of the Dresden painting suggests that Rubens considered the painting good enough to be copied by his workshop assistants.<sup>7</sup>



FIG. 4 Infrared reflectogram mosaic, detail of NG 194 showing underdrawing for Juno. Lines are most clearly visible at her waist and outlining her neck and right shoulder.



FIG. 5 Infrared reflectogram mosaic, detail of NG 194 showing underdrawing below Cupid. This shows that the original putto was turned to face out of the picture, with broadly drawn lines for his eyes and nose and a narrow line for his chin. An arm can be seen extending across the present left shoulder and down to a hand near the knee of the painted Cupid.



FIG. 6 Infrared reflectogram mosaic, detail of NG 194 showing changes to Minerva's and Venus' feet. Three positions can be seen for Venus' left foot, and the drapery trailing on the ground extended further.

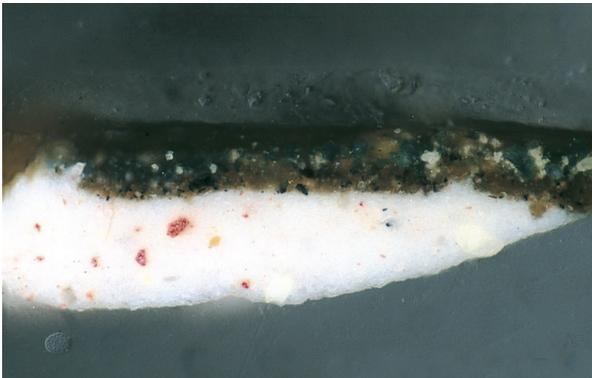


PLATE 7 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section taken from the area where the flying putto was painted out. This shows that the upper layer of dark green tree paint was applied while the flesh paint (containing vermilion) was still wet, so that the lower layer of flesh paint was pulled by the brush. Original magnification 320 $\times$ ; actual magnification 280 $\times$ .

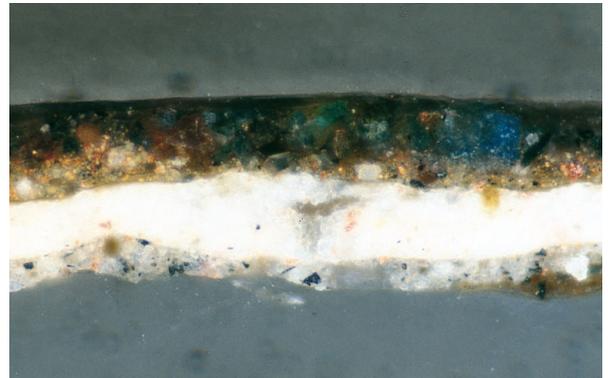


PLATE 8 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section taken from Cupid's wings. This shows a mid warm grey layer, probably undermodelling for the putto, followed by a layer of flesh colour. There is then a thin dark line marking a pause between the paint layers before the wing was painted with a mixture of vermilion, brown and azurite. Original magnification 400 $\times$ ; actual magnification 350 $\times$ .

However, Rubens then had further ideas about the composition.

#### The first set of alterations: Composition II (see PLATE 3)

Paint samples taken from the various areas of the

painting where changes were made to Composition I revealed that these changes belong to two different groups, each with its own distinct characteristics. The first set of alterations appears to have been made before the painting was varnished.

During this phase the winged putto next to Minerva was painted out and the putto in the lower



PLATE 9 After Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, late 1630s. Detail of PLATE 2 showing Minerva.



PLATE 10 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Detail of PLATE 1 showing Minerva.

left corner transformed into Cupid by the addition of wings and a quiver. Samples taken from these areas show that there was a pause between the application of the paint layers, but no evidence that varnish was applied before the changes were made (PLATE 8). Presumably the putto between Venus and Juno was painted out at the same time; however, it was not possible to sample the area to confirm this. It appears that Minerva's left arm was also reworked at this time (PLATES 9 and 10), as a cross-section taken from the area shows no discontinuity between the paint layers. PLATE 3 shows how the National Gallery painting, Composition II, might have looked after this first set of changes had been made.<sup>8</sup>

From the technical evidence it is impossible to ascertain who precisely made these changes. The rather awkward revised contour of Minerva's elbow seems unworthy of Rubens's capabilities. However, the fact that all of these changes were made before the painting was varnished suggests that this first set

of alterations was almost certainly executed under his direction, perhaps by one of his many studio assistants.<sup>9</sup>

#### The second set of alterations to the Painting: Composition III (see FIGS 8 and 9)

In contrast to the samples taken from the first set of alterations, samples from the second set of changes show a notably distinct discontinuity between the paint layers; this fluoresces under the microscope in ultraviolet light with the characteristically yellow appearance of old natural resin varnishes (see, for example, PLATE 15).

This second set of alterations included the changes to Mercury and Paris (FIG. 7) and the suppression of the satyrs. Discontinuity in the paint layers evident from samples was detected in the following areas: between the paint of Paris' suppressed outstretched leg and the landscape painted over it (PLATE 11); between the original



FIG. 7 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). X-ray detail of Paris.



PLATE 11 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section showing the discontinuity in the paint layers between the paint of Paris's original outstretched leg and the landscape painted on top. Original magnification 280x; actual magnification 245x.

landscape and his now bent leg (PLATE 12); between the paint of Mercury's torso and the white of Paris's sleeve painted over the top (PLATE 13); in the area of the right-hand satyr between the paint of the satyr and the dark foliage paint on top (PLATES 14 and 15). Additional trees were also apparently added at this time to the area just behind Paris. They appear



PLATE 12 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section showing the discontinuity in the paint layers between the original landscape and Paris's reworked leg. Original magnification 300x; actual magnification 265x.



PLATE 13 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section showing the discontinuity in the paint layers between the paint of Mercury's torso (cream colour) and the white of Paris's sleeve painted on top. Original magnification 340x; actual magnification 300x.

in an engraving by J. Couché and J. Dambrun published in 1808 as well as in a National Gallery photograph taken prior to cleaning in 1940–1, when the trees were removed (FIGS 8 and 9).<sup>10</sup>

Materials from these areas were analysed in order to provide information on the possible date of this set of alterations, but all of the pigments identified would have been available to Rubens and extensively used by him and his studio. Two of them, mineral azurite and lead-tin yellow, fell out of general use in Europe towards the end of the seventeenth century, suggesting a fairly early date for the changes.<sup>11</sup> However, they continued to be available in France somewhat later than elsewhere: both pigments have been identified in a painting in the National Gallery by André Bouys, which is dated to about 1715.<sup>12</sup> This is significant, as evidence concerning the provenance of the National Gallery

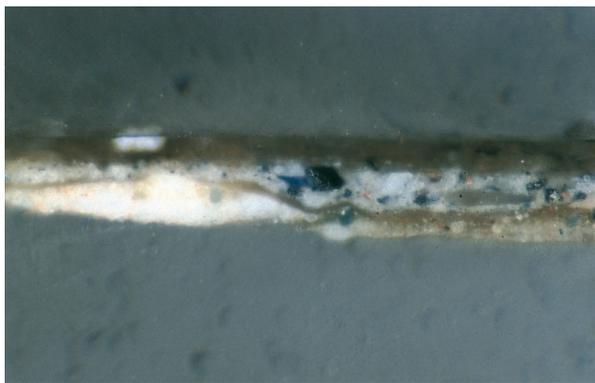


PLATE 14 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Paint cross-section showing the discontinuity between the paint of the satyr and the dark foliage (containing blue pigment) painted on top. Original magnification 350x; actual magnification 310x.

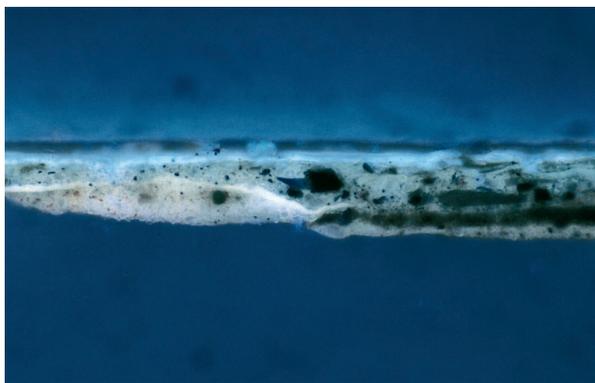


PLATE 15 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Sample in PLATE 14 viewed in ultraviolet light. This shows that the discontinuity between the paint layers, flesh and then foliage, fluoresces in the manner characteristic of old resinous varnish. Original magnification 350x; actual magnification 310x.

painting suggests that these alterations were most likely to have been carried out in France between 1676 and 1727.

### Provenance and the date of Composition III

The *Judgement of Paris* as it now appears, Composition III, was acquired by the National Gallery in 1844, having led a well-documented nomadic existence following the dispersal of the Orléans Collection in Paris in 1792. It had been acquired by the Duc d'Orléans by 1727 at the latest, for in that year it was described in detail in the catalogue of his collection in its Composition III state.<sup>13</sup> However, there is good reason to believe that in 1676 the painting in its intermediate – Composition II – form was in the collection of the Duc de Richelieu.

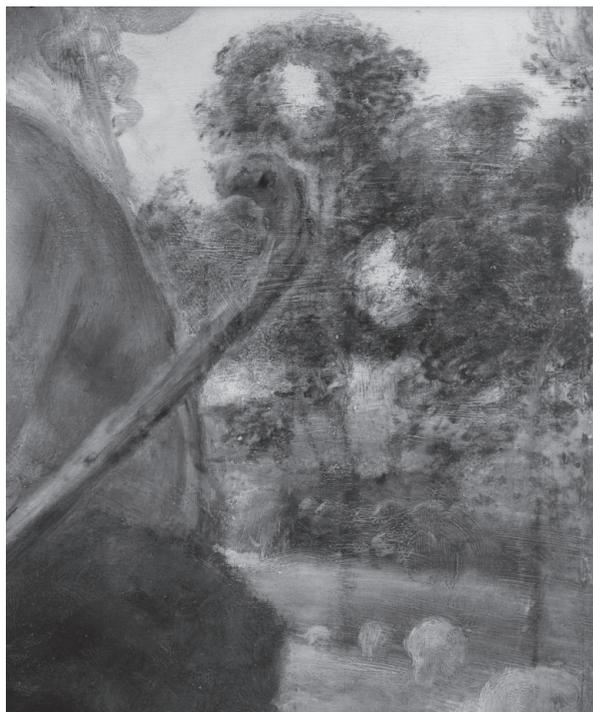


FIG. 8 Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris* (NG 194). Photograph of the painting in 1940, showing altered landscape on the right of the painting.

It has for a long time been thought likely that *The Judgement of Paris* sold to the Paris art dealer Jean Picart from the collection of the Antwerp merchant Diego Duarte in 1675 is the National Gallery painting, and that it is also the same painting that was subsequently acquired by the Duc de Richelieu by March 1676.<sup>14</sup> An engraving by Adriaen Lommelin, showing *The Judgement of Paris* Composition I, bears an inscription identifying Diego Duarte as the owner of the painting (FIG. 10). Though undated, the print must have been published by 1649 at the latest because it identifies Duarte as 'nobilis domesticus Regis Angliae', a title he would have lost when Charles I of England was executed in 1649. However, this is the second state of three: the first was published without any reference to Duarte's collection. Taking into account the evidence of the technical examination of the National Gallery painting and documentary evidence discussed below, it now appears highly likely that the model for the print was not actually the painting owned by Duarte, but a version of Composition I, perhaps the Dresden panel or another copy. It seems that the painting in Duarte's collection was in fact the National Gallery painting, then still in its Composition II phase.<sup>15</sup>

This accounts for the correspondence between



FIG. 9 J. Couché and J. Dambrun after Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, Galerie du Palais Royal gravée d'après les tableaux des différentes Écoles, 1786, vol. II, 1808. © Copyright The British Museum, London. Inv. P&D 1855-6-9-500.

Picart and the Antwerp dealer Matthijs Musson concerning the 1675 sale of Duarte's *The Judgement of Paris*. During the negotiations Musson sent Picart an engraving of the *Judgement* – presumably that by Lommelin – in order to encourage him to purchase the painting. Picart was unimpressed, but Musson quickly assured him that the print was incorrect in its illustration of all parts of the figures and bore no resemblance to the painting. He wrote that he could not understand why such a great work by Rubens had not been better engraved, and explained the differences by pointing out that Rubens frequently reworked his paintings. It has previously been assumed that Musson exaggerated the differences between the print and the painting in order to secure the sale.<sup>16</sup> However, the results of our recent technical examination of the painting suggest that Musson may simply have been stating the truth. If the picture owned by Duarte and sold to Picart in 1675 is the National Gallery painting,

the technical evidence indicates that by this date it would have been Composition II, which did indeed look substantially different from Lommelin's print.

When Roger de Piles described *The Judgement of Paris* belonging to the Duc de Richelieu in his *Conversations sur la connoissance de la Peinture*, which was compiled by March 1676 but published only in February 1677, he was obviously looking at Composition II (see PLATE 3). He describes Mercury signalling to the goddesses to approach their judge, and notes that they are removing their clothes; he observes that Paris wears the clothes of a shepherd and sits, with one leg resting on the ground, the other stretched out casually, contemplating the contestants opposite him, while three or four satyrs watch intently from a rocky outcrop among the trees. He also notes that each goddess is accompanied by distinguishing attributes, Minerva by her owl and Gorgon shield, Juno by her peacock, and Venus by Cupid, yet significantly makes no mention



FIG. 10 Adriaen Lommelin after Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, before 1649. Engraving, image 43.1 × 61.9 cm.  
 © Albertina, Vienna, inv. H. II 19, fol. 104, V.S. 126, 60.

of the other two putti who originally attended the goddesses in Composition I.<sup>17</sup> Again it has been assumed that de Piles simply omitted them from his description,<sup>18</sup> but the technical examination of the National Gallery picture shows that they had already been removed before the painting was varnished. It therefore now seems most likely that the painting owned by the Duc de Richelieu was indeed the National Gallery painting in the form of Composition II.

Roger de Piles was Rubens's staunchest advocate in France. His *Dialogue sur le Coloris* of 1673, a theoretical treatise on the pre-eminence of colour, upholds Rubens as the most brilliant of colourists, as the *Dieu de la peinture*. As adviser to Richelieu, de Piles had the opportunity to put his theoretical views into practice when in 1672 he was called upon to help Richelieu amass a new collection of paintings. Within a short space of time and with the help of Picart and presumably other dealers, de Piles was able to acquire for the Duc an extraordinarily large number of fine-quality paintings by the Flemish artist.

*The Judgement of Paris* seems to have been in

the Richelieu collection for only a very short period however, as it is no longer listed in the *Dissertation*, de Piles's revised catalogue of the collection that was published in 1681.<sup>19</sup> Together with thirteen of the other works by Rubens that had been catalogued in the *Conversations*, the 'very beautiful but far too expensive' *Judgement of Paris* was banished,<sup>20</sup> presumably sold. But what could have motivated such a passionate collector of Rubens paintings to dispose of these prize possessions? It is suggested here that the Richelieu collection had become the focal point of an acrimonious dispute between the Rubénistes and Poussinistes, that is, between the proponents of the supremacy of colour in art and those who advocated the primacy of *dessin* or drawing. It is also suggested that the final group of changes to the composition were designed to rectify what the Poussinistes would have viewed as narrational inaccuracies and compositional weaknesses.

Around 1676 two anonymous art critics, whose identities are fortunately now known to us, conducted a virulent and public exchange over the merits of the Duc's collection. De Piles, writing

under the pseudonym of a 'Frenchman', countered the attacks levied on Richelieu, de Piles himself and Rubens's art by a certain 'gentilhomme flamand'; this Flemish gentleman has been identified as one Hubert Gamard, or Gamare, the Captain of the Guard of the Governor of Paris.<sup>21</sup> By making himself into a 'compatriot' of Rubens, our 'Flemish Gentleman' clearly felt he could give greater objectivity and authority to his condemnation of Rubens, for Gamard writes that although he loves his fellow Flemings, he above all loves the truth.

That these denunciations were not confined solely to Rubens's art but extended to a criticism of Richelieu's own person helps understand his decision to dispose of so many paintings. In one very polemic poem entitled *Les Banquets des Curieux*, Richelieu is presented as a gullible man who has been deceived by the *caballe* or conspirator (that is, de Piles) and conned by the *trompette de la Caballe* (that is, Picart) into buying over-expensive paintings.<sup>22</sup> Clearly such public ridicule of Richelieu's character, taste and reputation was not the sort of attention that any member of the French aristocracy wished to attract.

One may well ask why Rubens's paintings prompted such virulent outpourings. In one letter the anonymous critic simply laments the fact that the most beautiful painting by Guido Reni is held in less esteem than three Bacchanals by Rubens.<sup>23</sup> But in other cases the criticisms are more specific. Both *The Rape of the Sabines* (London, National Gallery, PLATE 16) and the *Massacre of the Innocents* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek) are faulted because Rubens shows these events taking place before one of the large inns of Brussels and portrays the participants as overweight, wearing their 'Sunday best', and so drunk that they need support to stay standing. By choosing to represent these historical events in this unseemly manner, Rubens failed in his duty as an artist to portray the clarity and purity of ancient times. Again he is compared unfavourably with Poussin, who shows the illustrious women of the past wearing simple antique dress instead of opulent contemporary clothing. Even Rubens's landscapes are reproached, for instead of rendering beautiful Italianate landscapes complete with ancient monuments or illustrating the fertile valleys of Palestine, the artist, even when depicting



PLATE 16 Rubens, *The Rape of the Sabines* (NG 38), c. 1635–40. Oak, 169.9 × 236.2 cm.



PLATE 17 Nicolas Poussin, *Israelites gathering the Manna*, 1637. Canvas, 149 × 200 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 7275. © RMN, Paris.

ancient subjects, reproduces his native Flemish countryside, complete with its gothic ruins, cottages and huts.<sup>24</sup>

*The Judgement of Paris* is mentioned only once in these exchanges, when the author simply expresses his astonishment that such a work is held in greater esteem than an (unidentified) *Agony of Our Lord*. However, given that language was a powerful weapon in this type of exchange, the choice of wording for this particular comparison is especially interesting. Our ‘Flemish Gentleman’ employs a clever play of words to vent his disapproval: the ‘Jugement de Paris’ becomes the ‘Jugement *infame* de Paris’.<sup>25</sup> In the first instance one could of course read this as a simple reference to the common interpretation of Paris’ decision to award the apple to Venus as infamous, since his choice led to the Trojan War. But in the overall context of the exchange of letters, the word *infame* was clearly intended as a negative reference to the painting rather than its subject: the ‘*infamous* painting of the Judgement of Paris’ or the ‘*infamous Parisian* Judgement’. Regardless of the way one

reads it, the implication is that the Duc de Richelieu’s judgement, like that of the shepherd Paris, is misguided.

By looking at *The Judgement of Paris* Composition II (PLATE 3) through the eyes of the Poussinistes it is possible to understand at least some of the criticisms levelled at Rubens. According to their strict standards, Rubens failed miserably as a draughtsman. This was of course no new complaint to be laid against him in France; already in 1622 his friend, the renowned French antiquarian and humanist Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, had informed him that his cartoons for the tapestry series showing the *Life of Constantine the Great* had been criticised for their lack of *dessin*.<sup>26</sup> Even de Piles acknowledged Rubens’s inadequacies by awarding him only thirteen points out of a possible twenty in his famous *balance* or league-table, which allocated points to artists in the four categories of composition, design, colour and expression.<sup>27</sup> Nor could the Poussinist faction be faulted for criticising Rubens’s draughtsmanship in *The Judgement of Paris*: the shepherd’s extended left leg is clearly

neither anatomically credible nor visually attractive.<sup>28</sup> This in itself might not have been so problematic were the shepherd not characterised by other 'negative' features, such as a vacant facial expression, slumped posture, peasant clothing, and generally coarse demeanour. This image of Paris as a rather stupid and boorish fellow takes us to the heart of the problem.

The artistic sensibilities of seventeenth-century France were, for the most, formed by the writings of members of the Académie Royale de Peinture, foremost among them Charles Le Brun and André Félibien. One of the issues discussed by Félibien in his *Entretiens sur les Vies et sur les Ouvrages des plus excellens Peintres anciens et modernes* (1666–85) is that of pictorial unity. The principle governing such unity is *convenance* or 'fitness', and it includes the notion of 'appropriateness' and 'decorum' or *bienséance*, as well as *vraisemblance* or the dependency between the parts and the whole. The basic understanding is that an artist must render his subject in a manner appropriate to the 'literary and literal connections between person and objects which in their entirety constitute the fable or the subject'.<sup>29</sup> The artist's erudition is tested on his ability to show fittingly the nature and characteristics of the protagonists while maintaining historical exactitude in the setting and costumes as well as the notion of probability.

Rubens's Paris (Compositions I and II) would certainly not be mistaken for the handsome son of Priam, king of Troy, whose good looks were much praised by ancient authors; nor could he compete with Raphael's shepherd, who in the eyes of the art critic and theorist Fréart de Chambray was the perfect model of beauty and whose controlled expression befits his task as judge.<sup>30</sup> By portraying Paris as a gauche country bumpkin rather than as a noble prince who has assumed the role of shepherd, Rubens was seen to ridicule the ancient story. Any viewer trained to observe according to the principles laid out by Félibien and others would have had difficulty accepting that the three Olympian goddesses would have ever submitted their beauty (let alone their naked bodies) to the appraisal of such a clearly unqualified judge. Rubens thus flagrantly disregarded all notions of appropriateness and decorum.

Rubens's choice of narrative moment would also have met with disapproval. Seventeenth-century critics were much concerned with the structural similarities between literature and painting, ultimately derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* with its distinction between the main action and episodes.

The theorists viewed episodes as a means of adding pictorial variety, which could not, however, replace the main action. In a famous discussion that took place at the Sixth Conference of the Académie Royale de Peinture on 5 November 1667, both Le Brun and Félibien agreed that in his *Israelites gathering the Manna* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, PLATE 17) Poussin had *not* disregarded the principle of the 'unity of action' by showing some people still starving while others gather manna. Though they occurred sequentially and not simultaneously, the two critics agreed that by including the earlier moment Poussin presented a linear sequence of events that gave the viewer a better understanding of the main action. Applying these principles to *The Judgement of Paris* Composition II we find that Rubens rendered nothing more than an anecdotal episode: Paris is simply contemplating the goddesses as they disrobe. Since nothing in the composition indicates that the apple will be awarded to Venus,<sup>31</sup> Rubens created a work that lacks the 'main action', the *raison d'être* of the story. Here, it is argued, lie the reasons for the drastic interventions in the painting that resulted in its present appearance. Whoever acquired the painting after its removal from the Richelieu collection ensured that changes were undertaken which would bring the image into line with the theoretical understanding of the structure and content of painting as expressed by Félibien, Le Brun and others.

The alterations to the shepherd immediately corrected the picture's two most serious defects. Decorum and appropriateness were restored by changing Paris into a handsome figure wearing clothing that befits his heroic and noble status.<sup>32</sup> By transforming him from a contemplative to a decisive judge, the painting acquired its essential 'main action'. In keeping with this change of moment, Mercury's now superfluous gesture of requesting the goddesses to advance was logically suppressed. If one applies the criterion of 'unity of action' that was deemed acceptable for Poussin's *Israelites gathering the Manna*, then the fact that Venus and Juno are still in the process of disrobing can be interpreted as a linear visualisation of the events leading up to Paris' choice of Venus as the most beautiful.

The constraints of pictorial decorum also explain the removal of the satyrs in the tree. Although pictorial representations of the *Judgement* frequently enlivened the scene by adding nymphs and river gods, satyrs were rarely included among the onlookers. The presence of these licentious creatures suggests that Paris' choice was



PLATE 18 After Rubens, *The Leopards*, after 1687. Canvas, 205 × 317 cm. Montreal, Museum of Fine Arts. Purchase, special replacement fund, inv. 1975.17. © The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Quebec. Photo: Brian Merrett.

motivated less by reason than base sexual desire,<sup>33</sup> and such an interpretation cast an ignoble shadow on the myth, even if some ancient authors took a similar view of the contest. But the notion of decorum applied not only to the internal pictorial structure but also to the way one looked at art. *The Judgement of Paris* Composition II confronted the viewer not just with the contest for the apple but also with the satyrs who unbeknown to the goddesses take delight in spying on their beautiful naked bodies. The voyeuristic satyrs thus ‘mirror’ the spectator’s own position as an illicit and undetected presence. Their excited whisperings must surely have produced a sense of unease in (male) viewers at a time when conversation among fellow connoisseurs on the merits of art was an essential feature of social interaction in aristocratic and learned circles. Given that the myth tells of a beauty contest, discussion most certainly centred on Rubens’s rendering of the female form. With the removal of the satyrs, the viewer’s decorum was restored, for now he could approach and appreciate the painting without being confronted by an unseemly reminder of the sexual connotations that its portrayal of female nudity could arouse.

The London *Judgement of Paris* seems to have been the only work from the Richelieu collection to

suffer such a drastic overhaul, perhaps because its subject and composition allowed for a relatively easy ‘correction’ of perceived failings. The transformation produced a successful ‘Rubensian’ shepherd, who for a number of years graced a poster promoting the National Gallery’s collection. But though stylistically deceptive, the changes to Paris turned Rubens’s unusual interpretation into a bland rendition of the classical myth. Seven of Rubens’s eight depictions of the Judgement of Paris – the exception is his pre-1600 version in London (NG 6379) – show the shepherd *contemplating* the disrobing goddesses. This choice of moment was essential to Rubens’s desire to focus the viewer’s attention on the serious process of decision-making. Painted at a time when the chances for the peace that Rubens so desired for his beloved Flanders were being eroded by those at the helm of power, his unflattering portrayal of Paris as the decision-maker in the National Gallery painting (Compositions I and II), his unusual characterisation of Minerva and the presence of the Fury Alecto can be interpreted as a biting commentary on the capability of those invested with the task of making choices.<sup>34</sup> Such criticism of the contemporary political situation had of course no place in the artistic ideals of seventeenth-century France.

Although the technical examination and art-historical analysis go some way towards explaining what, when, where and why the changes to *The Judgement of Paris* were made, nothing is known of the artist responsible for altering Rubens's composition. Whether this artist might have trained in Rubens's studio or was simply a painter sufficiently versed in Rubens's technique to emulate his style passably is at this point unclear. What is interesting is that in addition to the altered *Judgement of Paris*, the Duc d'Orléans also acquired a painting called *The Leopards*, today in Montreal (Museum of Fine Arts; PLATE 18), which according to the findings of a technical examination not only 'cannot be by Rubens' but must have been painted sometime after 1687, that is, around the time *The Judgement of Paris* was altered, and before about 1720.<sup>35</sup> This indicates the presence of painters who most likely, but not necessarily, worked in France and who were sufficiently adept at reproducing Rubens's style and technique to satisfy what was, despite all criticisms, a demand for the Flemish painter's artistic production.

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#### Notes and references

- 1 That this figure is Alecto and not Eris, the goddess of discord, as had hitherto been believed, was first suggested by Gregory Martin in *The Flemish School, c.1600–c.1900, National Gallery Catalogue, 1970*, pp. 153–63, esp. p. 154, note 8. This is the only one of the eight versions of the subject by Rubens to show Alecto; his decision to include her here was perhaps associated with the outbreak of war in The Netherlands in 1635; see Fiona Healy, *Rubens and The Judgement of Paris: A Question of Choice*, Turnhout 1997, pp. 109–22, esp. p. 114.
- 2 Martin 1970, p. 155; Healy 1997 (both cited in note 1).
- 3 The painting was originally sampled in 1968 to provide information for Gregory Martin's catalogue of the Flemish School, cited in note 1.
- 4 See J.S. Held, *Rubens: Selected Drawings*, Oxford 1986, cat. 188; Helen Braham, *Rubens. Paintings, Drawings and Prints in the Princes Gate Collection*, Courtauld Institute Galleries exh. cat., London 1988–9, cat. 42.
- 5 Martin 1970 (cited in note 1), pp. 153–4.
- 6 Rubens also included a putto crowning Venus in the earlier painting of *The Judgement of Paris* in the National Gallery (NG 6379), but the motif there is of course adapted from his source: the engraving of *The Judgement of Paris* by Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael. Intriguingly, a painting clearly based on the National Gallery picture (NG 194) and including a flying Cupid crowning Venus appeared for sale at Sotheby's on 4 May 1966, lot 29.
- 7 We are grateful to our colleagues in Dresden for providing infrared images of the painting in the collection. It shows underdrawing in a different hand from the underdrawing in the National Gallery painting.
- 8 There is another detail that differs in the Dresden and London paintings, which could belong to this first set of changes. In the Dresden painting, Juno has a single bun (PLATE 2), while in the National Gallery painting she has a double bun (PLATE 1). It was not possible to take a sample from this area, so it is impossible to tell whether this change was part of the first or second set of alterations.
- 9 It is likely that varnishing would often be undertaken by the purchaser, so paintings will sometimes have left the studio unvarnished if they were intended for immediate consignment. A letter by Rubens from Antwerp dated 26 December 1624 refers to the care needed in rolling canvas pictures for transport so as 'not to spoil the colours', suggesting that the paintings were not varnished on dispatch. Generally, the paint surface would not have been sufficiently hard and dry for up to a year for varnish to be applied safely. See letter to Palamède de Fabri, Sieur de Valavez in R.S. Magurn, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, Cambridge, Mass. 1955, letter no. 59, p. 99.
- 10 Fortunately, a tiny fragment remained, and this was found to contain azurite. Since azurite is also present in the paint used to make the changes to Paris' legs, the trees most likely date from the same period. The additions to the landscape were probably undertaken to give the setting a more pastoral quality.
- 11 Lead-tin yellow was found in both the original apple beneath the present surface and the new apple.
- 12 The Bouys painting *La Barre and Other Musicians* (NG 2081) was examined as part of a re-cataloguing programme by Dr Humphrey Wine for eighteenth-century French paintings in the National Gallery. See also Humphrey Wine, 'A Group of Musicians by André Bouys (1656–1740) in the National Gallery', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 138, September 2001, pp. 73–80.
- 13 *Description des Tableaux du Palais Royal avec la Vie des Peintres ... dédiée à Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans, Premier Prince du Sang*, Paris 1727 (reprint Geneva 1972), pp. 415–16.
- 14 Martin 1970, p. 157; Healy 1997, pp. 117–19 (both cited in note 1).
- 15 None of Lommelin's engravings is dated but they were almost certainly all executed after Rubens's death in 1640. The print was published by Gillis Hendricx, who became a master in the Antwerp Guild of St Luke around 1643–4. It is possible, though unlikely, that Lommelin made his engraving from the National Gallery painting Composition I before it was altered to Composition II (PLATE 3); Lommelin is first recorded in the Southern Netherlands, in Bruges, in 1639/40 and the National Gallery painting was most likely altered before that date. In any case the painting must have been sold before Rubens's death in 1640 as it is not recorded in the *Specification*, the sales list of works from the artist's estate. However, Nicolaas Rubens purchased a copy of a *Judgement of Paris* from his father's estate for the relatively high price of 150 guilders. It is no longer possible to ascertain which version this was, or if indeed the copy was after the National Gallery painting. The Dresden *Judgement of Paris*, or some other copy, could have provided the model

- for the print.
- 16 Martin 1970, p. 160; Healy 1997, p. 118 (both cited in note 1).
- 17 'Le Peintre a pris le moment que les Déesses viennent d'ôter leurs habits, et que Mercure leur fait signe de s'approcher de leur Juge auprès duquel il est. Elles sont toutes trois debout mais de différentes veuës, et chacune accompagnée des marques qui les distinguent. Junon qui est sur le devant du Tableau est veuë par derrière, et se cache encore de sa robe qu'elle vient de laisser aller quand il en sera temps. Pallas est veuë de front les bras pardessus la teste, comme si elle achevoit de quitter sa chemise. Elle est placée à l'un des costez du Tableau, et Venus qui est entre Pallas et Junon est veuë de profil, et s'avance d'un air coquet et assure au signe que luy en fait Mercure, elle a son fils auprès d'elle; Pallas a sa Choüette et sa Gorgonne, et Junon son Paon, lequel semble vouloir faire querelle au chien de Paris, comme part presentiment de l'arrest qui doit ester prononcé. Trois ou quatre Satyres du Mont-ida sont parmi des arbres et sur un bout de roche qui sert de fond à la figure de Pallas. Ils regardent avec attention, ils s'avancent avec empressement, et paroissent émerveillés de la nouveauté d'un si beau spectacle. Paris est de l'autre costé assis sur une motte de gazon en habit de berger: l'une de ses jambes pose à terre, et l'autre est negligemment estenduë. Sa mine rêveuse et toute son attitude font voir assez qu'il est au dedans fort occupé du jugement qu'il va rendre. La Discorde est meslée parmi les nuages; elle tient un serpent d'une main, et de l'autre un flambeau dont la lumière rougeastre éclaire un peu de dessus de la teste de Junon, et fait une union admirable.' See also Bernard Teyssède, 'Une Collection Française de Rubens au XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Le Cabinet du Duc de Richelieu. Décrit par Roger de Piles (1676–1681)', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 62, 1963, pp. 241–89.
- 18 Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), p. 118.
- 19 *Dissertation sur les Ouvrages des plus fameux Peintres, dédiée à Monseigneur le duc de Richelieu*, Paris, 1681 (2nd edn 1683). See Teyssède (as in note 17) who provides a useful table (p. 245) indicating which Rubens paintings appear in the different publications.
- 20 So described by Picart in a letter of 13 December 1676; see J. Denucé, *Na Peter Pauwel Rubens. Documenten uit den kunsthandel te Antwerpen in de 17. eeuw van Matthijs Musson*, Antwerp 1949, p. 424.
- 21 On this exchange of letters, see Jacques Thuillier, 'Doctrines et Querelles Artistiques en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle. Quelques Textes oubliés ou inédits', *Archives de l'art français*, XXIII, *Documents inédits sur l'art Français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1968, pp. 125–217, esp. p. 140, n. 1, for the identification of their authors; see also Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), pp. 119–22, for a more detailed account of the following.
- 22 Thuillier 1968 (cited in note 21), pp. 178–83; Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), p. 120.
- 23 Thuillier 1968 (cited in note 21), p. 185.
- 24 Thuillier 1968 (cited in note 21), p. 188; text also in Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), p. 198, n. 68.
- 25 *The Agony of Our Lord* was then in the possession of a 'Monsieur Edelinck'; see Thuillier 1968 (cited in note 21), p. 188.
- 26 For Peirese's letter of 1 December 1622, see M. Rooses and C. Ruelens, *Codex Diplomaticus Rubens. Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres*, 6 vols, Antwerp 1887–1909, III, pp. 83–8; also Julius S. Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens. A Critical Catalogue*, 2 vols, Princeton 1980, I, p. 66, for a discussion of the exact criticisms.
- 27 *The Balance* first appeared in de Piles's *Dissertation* of 1681 (see above, note 17).
- 28 A somewhat comparable pose is found in Rubens's *Landscape with the Rainbow* (St Petersburg, Hermitage), which was also in the Richelieu collection. There the shepherd's pose appears more natural as his extended leg rests on a mound of grass.
- 29 See Thomas Puttfarcken, *Rogier de Piles' Theory of Art*, New Haven 1985, esp. p. 1–37 for his study of Félibien and the theoretical concepts of Unity of Action, Fitness and Propriety. All English translations of the French terms are taken from Puttfarcken.
- 30 De Chambray was referring to Marcantonio's famous engraving after Raphael's design; see R. Fréart de Chambray, *Idée de la perfection de la Peinture*, Le Mans 1662, pp. 23–46, esp. p. 31 for his description of Paris.
- 31 Although the Fury Alecto refers to the Trojan War, it seems that de Piles and others took her to represent Eris, the goddess of Discord, who initiated the competition by throwing the golden apple among the goddesses. See above, note 1.
- 32 Note, however, that his dog remains a common sheepdog; Rubens's other depictions of the myth all show Paris accompanied by an appropriately noble hunting dog.
- 33 This is most clearly expressed in an engraving by Giorgio Ghisi showing a satyr with erect member standing directly behind Paris; see Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), fig. 19. Rubens did show two satyrs in NG 6379 dating from before 1600, but their characterisation is less lustful and their behaviour less conspiratorial than in NG 194 Compositions I and II.
- 34 See Healy 1997 (cited in note 1), pp. 150–5.
- 35 Paint samples revealed the use of 'wet process vermilion', a synthetic form of the pigment that was invented only in 1687 and to that date had not been found in any other painting by Rubens. It also contains the lead-tin yellow 'type I', which does not occur in works after around 1720. The Montreal painting is most likely a copy after the lost painting that Rubens sold to Dudley Carleton in 1618, see Healy 1997, p. 122, fig. 140; J.S. Held, 'P.P. Rubens: "The Leopards" – *Originale de mia mano*', *Burlington Magazine*, 115, 1973, Advertisement Supplement; M.-C. Corbeil et al., 'The "Leopards" in Montreal, an attribution to Rubens disproved', *Burlington Magazine*, 134, 1992, p. 724.