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Itinerant Matters: Rubens and the Itineraries of Painting

*Mattia Biffis**

In the last couple of decades, mobility has enjoyed increasing attention as a topic of research. With their focus on the processes by which people, objects and ideas move through space and time, mobility studies pose an important set of questions and approaches for various fields in the humanities.[1] Among the disciplines, art history has probably been the most receptive to this new interest in mobility. Scholars are now tracking the reception of objects as diplomatic gifts or market commodities as they travel around the globe,[2] while interrogating artists' peregrinations in order to chart diverging attitudes towards style and influence, and engage notions of migration and belonging.[3] Within this framework, however, the actual mechanics of mobility—literally, how things moved from one place to another—has been treated in a far less systematic way. In this article, I aim to provide a different perspective on movement by considering the main logistical concerns at stake in objects' transportation in the early modern era, looking particularly at the itineraries that paintings were designed to follow in order to reach their final destinations.[4]

In the early modern period, virtually every painter had to employ specific strategies to move their ponderous works. Material aspects such as the shape and weight of pictures required careful consideration, as did the length and quality of transfer; pictures had to be packed, labeled, and entrusted to intermediaries who traveled from one place to another. Transportation demanded attention to issues such as the technologies used for circulation, the impediments (seasonal, topographical, geo-political) to an object's transferal, and the transformations that might occur during transit—all of which had the power to alter the physical conformation of the object.[5] Consequently, it should come as no surprise that transportation was often regarded as challenging as a military operation. In 1579, when escorting his large altarpiece on panel, the *Madonna del Popolo*, some 35 miles from Urbino to Arezzo, Federico Barocci complained bitterly to his patrons that the shipment of the work had been logistically difficult and quite expensive since he himself had had to "arm the panel as a war machine."[6]

How did early modern artists organize and discipline movement between distant destinations? What happened to a picture after it

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left the confines of the artist's studio? The case of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) provides a relevant example here. Living in a period characterized by the growing mobility of men and objects, Rubens was an artist thoroughly dependent on the politics and practices of delivery, and a perfect representative of a century of expansive movements and increasing cosmopolitanism. Fluent in multiple languages, he served in various diplomatic missions, and his international network extended to Italy, Spain, France, and Britain—places that he also visited repeatedly.[7] Even when staying put in and around Antwerp (where he resided with barely any interruption for 30 years), he was exposed to a diversified web of routes and connections throughout Europe and overseas. Celebrated in the late sixteenth century as "the center of the entire international economy" (Fig. 1), Antwerp was a city whose vitality derived from its role as a large transfer station between land and sea. Here, several incoming and outgoing routes converged, allowing for extremely rapid and efficient travel to distant regions, both in Europe and overseas.[8] These circumstances favored, even conditioned, the itinerancy of Rubens's works and resulted in what Svetlana Alpers has aptly described as an artistic language portable and acceptable everywhere, "bound to a culture broader than his native place."[9]

In order to move his works efficiently along the delivery lines that crossed the physically fragmented and politically turbulent landscape of seventeenth-century Europe, Rubens needed an efficient system of communication and information exchange.[10] Letters were a valid solution and served as the principal vehicle of Rubens's connectedness with friends and patrons. Through them, the artist's wishes and intentions could reach distant places and become evident to remote interlocutors. Numbering to more than 250, his missives have been thoroughly probed for details on his life, interests, and works.[11] Less attention has been paid to the information they contain on the logistics of his professional activities, such as packing and unpacking procedures, assessments of the quickest and most secure routes to specific destination, names and roles of customs agents, porters, and couriers. Details on these emerge frequently throughout Rubens's correspondence, showing the artist's profound understanding of the mechanical dimension of the shipping world as well as his personal investment in the circulation of his works. When focused on problem solving, Rubens's letters are not simply a mirror of their author, but also a manifestation of his strategies of mobility, a textualization of itineraries, and a reification of motion.[12]

Packing and unpacking strategies

Rubens's familiarity with the practices of mobility emerges in particular in cases where he describes packing a painting (or any other object) in preparation for shipping. This is a preliminary stage that the artist handled quite conscientiously, as cases and boxes helped guarantee the relative stability of their contents, safeguarded things from mechanical damage, and assured protection from external agents.[13] Packing is a major theme in Rubens's correspondence, which frequently offers pertinent observations on the techniques and procedures of containment. It seems that the artist followed no single procedure, but adhered instead to a more complex set of rules and practices that hinged on the itineraries, their length, and the size and bulk of the objects transported.

Shipping containers were normally prepared according to the duration and

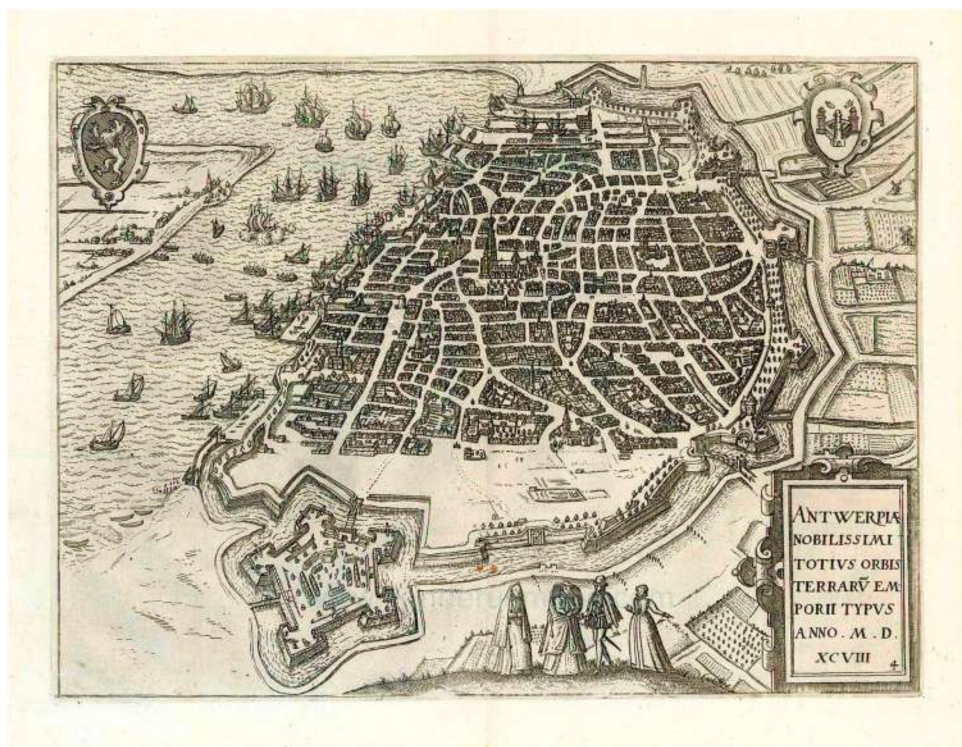

Fig. 1. ***Antwerpiae Nobilissimi Totius Orbis Terrarum Emporii*, from Lodovico Giucciardini, *Beschryvinghe van alle de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, 1612). Photo: private collection.**

complexity of the transfer. The longer the itinerary, the more complex the container. When escorting a cargo of paintings from Mantua to Spain in spring of 1603 (a trip that took several weeks in toto), for instance, Rubens designed a set of rather elaborate containers, within which paintings were protected "by a tin casing and a double oil-cloth and packed in a wooden chest."[14] These materials provided different levels of protection from, and impermeability to, external agents (through the wooden chest and tin screen, respectively), but at the same time also assured a certain degree of flexibility to the contents thanks to layers of oil-cloth.[15] However, the carefully constructed encasement did not prevent damage to the precious cargo, which, due to prolonged exposure to the elements, arrived at its destination "entirely rotted and destroyed."[16] In other instances, the crate appears to have been less of a composite, and consisted of a simple "wooden case, adequate for the journey" from Antwerp to England during the winter season.[17]

There are no surviving examples of these crates, which, as they were customized for individual shipments, were presumably recycled or repurposed after each use.[18] Visual evidence of a later era, however, does suggest that they were composed of tightly nailed simple wooden boards that offered just a thin protective barrier from the exterior.

The interior was occasionally filled with straw.[19] Unlike most of his contemporaries, Rubens himself appears to have often supervised the assembly of such containers, as in the case of the large crate meant to contain Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*, whose lengthy preparation delayed the painting's shipment from Rome to Mantua.[20] Elsewhere, he seems to have been more personally committed to their material construction and even provided his interlocutors with careful explanations on how to unbox their contents, as in the case of the "special case" made for a delicate "perpetual motion" machine, which, contained in a chest and wrapped in a cloth, he sent to Peiresc in Aix via Paris. Once the cover is removed, Rubens explains, the cloth should be lifted and the glass tube inspected to see whether it is still intact and in good condition. In addition, he instructs the courier to handle the chest with special care—a level of caution that the recipient is obliged to reward with a generous tip if the content is intact upon arrival.[21]

The size and shape of the containers depended on the contents and their materials, which, in the case of Rubens, were mostly canvases. Unlike wooden supports, fabrics permitted even large compositions to circulate widely and with relative ease, spreading the reputation of their author internationally.[22] Introduced as a new pictorial support in fifteenth-century Italy, canvas allowed even pictures of large format to undertake long journeys thanks to its resilience, flexibility, and lightness. As Vasari observes: "In order to carry pictures from place to place, men have found the convenience of painted canvas, as they weigh less and are easily transported once rolled up."[23] Rubens capitalized on this new technology, which enabled his large works to travel extensively at a reasonable cost.[24] The way in which he discusses packing in his letters indicates that canvases were normally detached from their stretchers and rolled up before shipping. The case of the six large canvases sent to Sir Dudley Carleton in May 1620 is perfectly representative of this procedure, as these were expected to remain on their stretchers for some days before being rolled up without any risk of damage.[25] In order to prevent aesthetic harm or creases, drawings too were usually rolled up (and not folded) during transfer.[26]

The drying of canvases was a crucial preliminary stage before shipment. Only perfectly dry pictures could be rolled up, and delivery was often delayed if the weather threatened to dampen them, a frequent problem, especially during the winter. In a letter of 20 January 1628 to his friend Pierre Dupuy, Rubens announces the forthcoming completion of his portrait of Ambrogio Spinola, but notes with some bitterness in the margin that "painting goes slowly in winter, since the colors do not dry easily."[27] Time needed for drying pictures varied according to atmospheric conditions. In his correspondence with Dudley Carleton, Rubens observes at a certain point that "with the aid of the sun, if it shines bright and without wind (which raises dust and is injurious to freshly painted pictures), [the paintings in question] will be ready to be rolled after five of six days of fine weather."[28] In light of this close attention to drying procedures, it is by no means a coincidence that the 1692 engraving of the *Views of Rubens House* (Fig. 2) shows a recently completed oil painting representing the artist's *Perseus freeing Andromeda* set out to dry in the sun, as if the drying process were some sort of personal device—a signature-technique that allowed the artist's pictures to be moved without any risk of damage or alteration.[29]

Fig. 2. Jacobus Harrewijn after J. van Croes, *Views of Rubens House*, 1692 (London, British Museum). Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The duration of encasement was another critical aspect as prolonged enclosure could severely harm a picture, especially its painterly surface. This is a risk that explicitly comes up in the case of a self-portrait that Rubens—at the time in London on a diplomatic mission—promised in August of 1629 to dispatch to his friend Peiresc in Aix, and the delivery of which underwent many delays. The canvas had been prepared for shipment before Rubens's departure from Antwerp, but something had gone wrong, and the case remained on hold in Antwerp. "If I knew," Rubens writes, "that my portrait were still in Antwerp, I should have it kept there in order to open the case and see if it had spoiled at all after being packed so long without any light and air, and if, as often happens to fresh colors, it had taken on a yellow tone, very different from what it was."[30] The painting, which has been identified with the version today at the National Gallery of Australia (Fig. 3), shows no particular sign of injury on its surface, an indication that Rubens's preoccupation was probably exaggerated.[31] Yet, as this passage shows, the transmission of the correct chromatic information was considered a crucial factor in a distant exchange, even more so if it related to Rubens's own features. The episode is further intertwined with the simultaneous outbreak of the plague in southern France,

Fig. 3. Peter Paul Rubens, *Self Portrait*, 1623–1629 (Canberra, National Gallery of Australia). Photo: Bridgeman Images.

which delayed intraregional communication and restricted the passage of goods suspected of contamination.[32] Given this event, one wonders whether Rubens's advice on how to heal his own portrait by exposing it to the sun—"the only antidote for this grave malady"—echoed contemporary concerns about health and sanitation.[33] From this

perspective, its long detainment in Antwerp appears as a sort of anticipated quarantine of the painter's own *doppelgänger*.

Once they arrived at their destination, canvases had to be mounted on a support and, depending on their condition, polished and retouched. Installation was a significant part of a painting's production—especially in the case of large altarpieces—as it had obvious long-term effects on its reception. For this reason, contracts often included clauses demanding that painters (or their delegates) be present at the installation site to proceed with repairs or restoration, if need be.[34] With regard to Rubens, there is little direct information on unveiling procedures, which were occasionally performed remotely without the artist's direct supervision,[35] as in the case of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Fig. 4), a large altarpiece commissioned from the artist in 1608 by the Oratory—a lay order based in Rome—for its church in Fermo, in the Marche.[36] At the time, Rubens was busy with other works in Rome, making it impossible for him to travel to a remote location in the Papal State, some 120 miles from the capital, to execute the painting *in situ*. For this reason, all communication between the two parties—including particulars about dimensions and illumination—was conducted via post.[37] When dispatching the finished painting, Rubens's representative in Rome, Father Flaminio Ricci, sent precise instructions on how to unpack the picture, freshen its varnish, and tilt it forward in its frame to avoid distracting reflections caused by the natural light in the chapel. "I forgot to warn you," Ricci wrote to his Ferman confreres in July 1608,

> by the painter's instruction, that if the wrapping paper should be stuck to the painting, it is possible to wash it off gently with a little warm water, and that if in this way the picture does not come out with complete success in the light, give it a fresh coat of varnish (which all the same will be left on, and it will become browner in effect); and finally that, for this same resolution of the light, take care in putting it in its position, to have the top hung in such a way that it is inset far less into the enframement than the lower part.[38]

Like a how-to manual, Ricci's letter provides instructions for mounting the altarpiece in its final location. The work arrived in Fermo rolled up and reduced to a standard shape so that it could easily be carried by the porter, its painted surface wrapped in paper to prevent chipping and cracks. This method was also used by other contemporary painters, such as Nicholas Poussin, to stabilize and secure paintings in transit.[39] Ricci goes on to offer advice on how to display the altarpiece, the subject of which—a nocturnal scene—requires special lighting arrangements. As the painter was unavailable, someone else at the site had to adjust the canvas to the existing frame of the altar in order to minimize the raking light on the dark surface. As similar instructions are infrequent in contemporary sources, one is left wondering whether the discussion here was related to the recent episode of the altarpiece executed by Rubens for the Oratorians in Rome, in which the painting was rejected by his patrons due to unfavorable lighting conditions.[40] Despite all the care taken, the *Nativity* did not arrive in as pristine a shape as the Fermans expected; they later complained of "some small defects in the picture," due most likely to its mishandling upon arrival, as Ricci's instructions reached the recipients after the painting had been delivered.[41] The episode thus testifies to the risks of long-distance transportation

Fig. 4. Peter Paul Rubens, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1608 (Fermo, Pinacoteca civica). Photo: © 2021. Foto Scala, Firenze.

and the importance of proper delivery to the aesthetic appearance of the finished work.

Deciding on a route

Designing an itinerary was another crucial aspect of transporting artworks, one at which Rubens likewise excelled. The artist always thought seriously about roads and pathways; references to the quickest, most secure roads to destinations appear frequently in his correspondence. His familiarity with route design was indebted to Antwerp's prominence as an international shipping center, though his awareness (conceptual and experiential) of geopolitics was equally instrumental in this respect.[42] If packing offered Rubens a chance to deal with the burden of his art, with all its mechanical and physical limits, determining a route compelled him to think strategically about space and time—the spatial ramifications of his network as well as the temporal constraints of reaching a specific destination.

Generally speaking, Rubens's shipping strategies seem not to have followed a seasonal pattern, as his paintings traveled mostly overland and were therefore less threatened by the hazards (wind and currents) affecting navigation.[43] Nonetheless, weather conditions did considerably condition the quality and length of transit. In a letter of December 1624, for example, Rubens alerts his correspondent to allow at least fifteen days for the cart transporting his paintings to cover the distance between Paris and Brussels, "since the roads are all torn up and ruined."[44] Interestingly, the same route is covered in eight and a half days in January 1627, "due to the bad condition of the roads and the slow pace of the carriage."[45] In general, road conditions are frequently reported as they could affect the state of, or delay in, communications, including those related to espionage. Thus in his letter to Marquis Spinola of June 1626, for example, Rubens informs the Spanish general that dispatches from an informer in Zeeland could take longer to arrive "due to the difficulty of the passage."[46]

When shipping his works, Rubens routinely relied on professional couriers or merchant-carriers, and it is certainly no coincidence that some of his most important patrons belonged to these professional categories.[47] Couriers followed regular routes, whose distances had been converted into measured units of time needed to cover them and thus guaranteed the date of delivery. Among the names that recur in his correspondence are Antoine Muys (alias Antoine Souris), "chief carrier to Paris," the agent and go-between Michel Le Blon, the "Antonii," who operated routes on the Italian peninsula, and the Annoni, an Italian firm that specialized in the trade of goods between Milan and the Low Countries.[48] As mobile figures negotiating between geographical areas, merchants served as commercial and cultural intermediaries who participated in the large networks that distributed goods and thus connected the principal centers of continental Europe. In short, they functioned as agents of connectivity. When the Duke of Neuburg complained to Rubens about the delays of the paintings sent him, the painter replied that the works had been entrusted to a trustworthy merchant (Jeremias Cocq), adding that he could also provide "a list of all the names of the merchants to whom they are addressed, from place to place."[49] Similarly, in his account of his first trip to Madrid in 1603, Rubens enumerated the merchants who had demanded freight fees for the multiple legs of the

journey between Mantua and Livorno.[50] Occasional travelers could be employed to transport less valuable objects, as Rubens explicitly directed when requesting the latest issue of the political gazette *Mercure Français*.[51] Other professionals involved in the transportation of goods included drivers (*carrettiere*), boatmen (appreciated particularly for low cost service), muleteers, and generic porters, whose humble and manual activity was sometimes ridiculed or even equated with a lack of expertise in painting.[52]

Like all imported goods, paintings were nominally subject to customs duties when entering a foreign state.[53] As with the cargo of paintings destined for Great Britain in 1618, so in other cases Rubens seems to have applied for exemptions or assisted his go-betweens in procuring free passage.[54] On some occasions, he was exempted from duties on account of the diplomatic nature of the cargo, as during his trip to Spain in 1603, when the Duke of Florence "graciously surpassed our expectations by exempting us from all tolls and duties," and also protected the convoy "against the officiousness of the tax collectors who insisted upon opening our trunks" (though small tips, Rubens adds, were nevertheless generously handed out to revenue officers).[55] The same magnanimity was not granted him upon his arrival in Spain, the final destination of his journey. As Rubens reports to the Duke of Mantua, the crates were carefully inspected at Alicante, and a total of 300 crowns in customs duty was requested by the officials.[56] Taxes could easily equal or surpass the entire cost of transportation (in this case, Rubens affirms, travel expenses amounted to 200 crowns), making the careful assessment of routes and national boundaries a crucial step of any itinerary.[57] Although this never seems to have happened to Rubens, it was not uncommon for couriers to provide greedy and unscrupulous officials with a payment in kind, using objects and paintings as compensation for duties.[58]

Although itineraries were normally designed to maximize costs and save time, pre-modern mobility was often unpredictable, and the risk of delays and expensive diversions was considerable. Rubens explicitly refers to such risks when, stopping in Florence on his way to Spain, he acknowledges that he may have taken the wrong route as passages between the Medici port of Livorno and Spain are not as frequent as he expected. Local merchants, he reports, are astonished at his mistake, "saying that we should have gone to Genoa to embark, instead of risking the turnaround route to Livorno without first being assured a passage." A Hapsburg territory within Italy and the entry point for the Spanish road, Genoa was regularly used as a major hub for objects in transit between the Po Valley and Spain. For that reason, it was the most obvious choice of embarkation point on the route between Mantua and the Iberian peninsula.[59] In the early seventeenth-century, however, Livorno was still a relatively small port that served a regional state and had few international connections. The odd choice of city was probably due to the fact that from its founding in 1565, the Tuscan city was often referred to as a *portofranco* (free port) with custom duties less stringent than those of other cities along the Tyrrhenian coast—a feature that made it a very attractive alternative for merchants.[60] This would have allowed for consistent savings even if travel via Bologna and Florence was ultimately longer and more troublesome (the route through the Apennines was often described as "difficult and harsh" by Renaissance observers).[61] Rubens finally

found a passage, but only at the last minute, thanks to the providential intervention of a shipmaster from Hamburg who was transporting cargo from Italy to Alicante, a major trading port in the region of Valencia.[62] What this episode demonstrates, therefore, is that every act of physical transmission is subject to the unpredictable, and that itineraries are the instruments for obviating the perils and complications implicit in all long-distance communication.

The information decay: the *Consequences of War*

What emerges from these examples is a profound sense of anxiety about distance, the space–time dimension that tears things apart, as Fernand Braudel put it—the physical obstacle that imposes delays and disruptions to our otherwise synchronous experience of the world.[63] Whether dealing with his own paintings or with other objects and books that he sent from time to time to his friends and correspondents across Europe, Rubens was exposed to the tyranny of distance and its unpredictability. Things disappeared from his horizon and were subject to what Jennifer Roberts has called "the inconvenience of having to pass through the world," a passage through space that often marked them with ruptures and damages.[64] Withdrawn from Rubens's own authorial sphere, paintings were at the mercy of events and subject to the particular risk regimes of unguarded itinerancy.

One such risk is related to what we may call information decay, which has to do more precisely with the prospect of physical and chemical alterations to objects in transit. Discoloration in particular seems to have been of frequent concern to Rubens, and an especially haunting one for an artist renowned for his magnificent chromatic effects and a brilliant palette.[65] The issue of color stability emerged, for example, when Rubens had to ship to Italy one of his latest masterpieces, the *Consequences of War* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti: Fig. 5), a large canvas measuring 2 by 3.5 meters that he sent to Florence in March 1638.[66] Commissioned by the Medici court portraitist Justus Sustermans, the painting is a complex allegory on the poor state of a continent ruined by the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), an international conflict that was then entering its final phase. The composition is centered on the figure of Mars, god of war, rushing forth and planting his feet on the pages of an open book, while personifications of Harmony, Fertility, and Architecture are hurled to the ground by his irruption, evoking the plunder, outrage, and misery that Europe has been suffering for many years.

The letter announcing the canvas's delivery (dated 12 March 1638, and addressed from Antwerp) is well known to Rubens experts as it includes one of the few extant descriptions of his works penned by the artist himself.[67] In response to a request from his correspondent, the artist provided an account of the figures in his painting, their attributes, and their meanings. Rubens must have been recalling the work from memory, however, as the painting had left the painter's studio at least three weeks prior at the time of his writing. Not surprisingly, a substantial portion of the letter is devoted to the description of the itinerary that the work is undertaking, as well as the conditions and conservation of the painting during the transfer.

After reporting that he has received his payment from "signor Schutter" (alias Andries de Schutter),[68] Rubens explains that

Fig. 5. Peter Paul Rubens, *The Consequences of War*, 1638 (Florence, Galleria Palatina). Photo: AKG Images/Mondadori Portfolio.

the painting had been entrusted to the Annoni, a courier service operating between the Spanish territories of northern and southern Europe.[69] According to the account of Stefano Annoni, the principal of the Antwerp branch, the painting was routed to Florence via Lille. Most likely, this meant that the crate was later forwarded to Paris and reached the Italian peninsula from the west (Mont-Cenis or Marseille, from which there were maritime connections to the Medici port of Livorno).[70] This was not the most straightforward route from the Low Countries to Italy. As evident from Frederick de Wit's 1671 map of the *Passaggio et strada dalli Paesi Bassi per via de Allemagna per Italia* (Fig. 6), the more direct corridors between Antwerp and Italy passed through either the Franche-Comté or the Palatinate, entering Italy via the Gotthard Pass and Lake Como. (Note that the Annoni held a special franchise for traveling along the Gotthard).[71] The choice of the itinerary via Lille (and central France) was probably related to the impracticability of the roads in Germany, although Rubens does not seem fully aware of this: "Please God that it is delivered to you soon and in good condition. I hope that the roads in Germany, since the capture of Hanau and the defeat of the Duke of Weimar, will be cleared of all dangerous obstacles."[72] The artist is referring here to the recent fall of Hanau, a fortified town near Frankfurt that was taken by Imperial forces in 1637, which resulted in a major movement of troops into the region, one that would certainly have impeded the easy passage of any cargo in the area.[73] Relevant too is that a painting allegorizing the European war was ultimately diverted due to the very political situation that it was supposed to stigmatize. Its obstructed trajectory

Fig. 6. Frederik de Wit, *Carta Nova Accurata del Passaggio et strada dalli Paesi Bassi per via de Allemagna per Italia [...]*, 1671. Photo: Universitätbibliothek Basel, Kartenslg Schw A 109, https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-13425.

accentuates and dramatizes the conceptual framework of the painting; indeed, the difficulty of the passage makes more real and present the fragility of the arts that Rubens so eloquently connoted in Mars's martial gait.

The new itinerary via France presumably delayed the cargo's expected delivery by some weeks. Rubens again voices his concern in a final postscript, where he warns his colleague of the potential damage that the canvas may have suffered due to the prolonged time it had spent in the case. "I am afraid," writes Rubens,

> that a fresh painting, after remaining so long enrolled and packed in a case, might suffer a little in the colors, particularly in the flesh tones, and the whites might become somewhat yellowish. But since you are such a great man in our profession, you will easily remedy this by exposing it to the sun, and leaving it there at intervals. And if need be, you may, with my permission, put your hand to it and retouch it wherever damage or my carelessness may render it necessary.[74]

This passage is important in that it offers one of the few personal statements that Rubens made on color, a distinctive feature of his artistic language. The Flemish painter comments here on the behavior of whites, whose intrinsic brilliance may dull over time if enclosed in a case. Any defects, he states,

can be corrected with exposure to natural light. Should this prove insufficient, the recipient himself has the permission to deal with any chromatic changes that the painting incurred during transfer.

One wonders if similar observations on the behavior of whites also appeared in the "essay on the subject of colors," a now lost treatise that Rubens wrote at the instigation of his friend Nicolas Peiresc.[75] Nothing is known about the content of the text or the exact nature of Rubens's thoughts on the subject, but it is plausible that, in tune with his contemporaries, he restated here the traditional, pre-Newtonian view of colors as a judicious balance of light (white) and darkness (black).[76] He would probably have agreed with the principles set out in François d'Aguilon's *Opticorum Libri* (1613), according to which, white, being most similar to light, rated the "highest" and served as a symbol of excellence.[77] Rubens may also have sought inspiration in a position attributed to Apelles, who allegedly claimed that a good painter ought to be able to use only four colors: black, yellow, red, and, as one might expect, white.[78] As this view was extremely popular among Italian painters, it cannot be ruled out that Rubens himself may have considered Apelles's palette the definitive authority for his own approach to color, which too lay emphasis on basic hues, and particularly on white.[79]

Colors are primarily vehicles for conveying information about things and their status. In the *Consequences of War*, white lead is employed mostly to paint flesh and faces, create sharp contrasts of light and darkness, and define volumes and contours.[80] The composition centers on the figure of Mars, who "rushes forth with shield and blood-stained sword, threatening the people with great disasters," while his mistress Venus "strives with caresses and embraces to hold him." The oppositional attitude of these two characters is reinforced by the use of different tones, with the flesh of Venus rendered in white and pink paint. This creates a bright, reflective surface that contrasts vividly against the tones used for Mars and his companions on the right, whose darker complexion absorbs light and creates a vast area of shadow. The ultimate effect is that of an atmospheric movement of light and darkness, rendered by the measured application of white pigments, more intense on the left and less conspicuous on the right. The white accompanies the movement, emphasizing the drama of the action. Any alteration to it basically meant a change in the way the narrative was conceived and chromatically connected.

Colors were also a primary touchstone of Rubens's painterly skills. It is reasonable to assume that he regarded white as an identity marker of sorts. White pigments are profusely used for flesh and faces, that is, for those pictorial areas where Rubens's autography was expected. It was common at the time for patrons to stipulate that the master was to paint the figures of the narrative and leave the *parerga* (such as landscape and architecture) to pupils and assistants.[81] In addition, flesh tones were traditionally viewed as a fundamental quality of his art, and Rubens's ability to paint them with swiftness, skill, and freedom, as Roger de Piles put it, always evoked praise.[82] This implies that the white used to define the flesh was not a neutral, preparatory ground, but rather a painterly space in which the author could be found, a signifier of his own presence on the material space of the canvas. Any alteration in this pigment meant, chromatically and metaphorically, an alteration of Rubens's own pictorial identity.

Rubens may have overestimated the risks of transportation as the *Consequences of War* shows no evidence of material alterations on its surface. This episode, however, confirms that the artist had a perfect understanding of the physics of motion. He knew that the appearance of his works could be undermined by transportation and at risk of losing their crucial eidetic information—that the evanescence of the message, as Régis Debray rightly observes, could compromise the act of transmission.[83] Since colors can register particular aspects of a body, they carry indexical connotations; control over their chromatic fluctuations is therefore essential to the intelligibility of their composition.[84] But the stability of color is not simply a matter of material conservation or iconographic legibility; besides preserving the consistency of information, it also preserves Rubens's identity as a maker, despite the movement of the picture and his distance from it. As delegates of their author, canvases should be and appear in the same condition upon their arrival as they were when leaving the workshop before being temporarily locked in a crate.

Conclusion

In this essay, mobility has been addressed through the lens of the itinerary paradigm, one that follows the physical traces of transit—i.e. its "literal" occurrence—and stresses the distributive processes that artists had to organize in order to move their creations. From this perspective, mobility is not an abstract response to an object's exoticism, but a set of logistical operations meant to ensure the full potential of the image. Performed through a series of social and mechanical actions, mobility aims at maintaining an aesthetic continuum over a long distance. This entails a certain degree of spatial intelligence, organizational discipline, and social networking. It also requires familiarity with customs formalities and packing procedures. Rubens had a perfect understanding of all these facets of the profession. His letters reveal a man equally at ease with both the words of geopolitics and the everyday language of couriers and tools collectors.

This essay has also highlighted that movement is not neutral in its effects on pictures. Under specific circumstances, mobility extends creation beyond the limits of the workshop; it participates in artistic production in that it can bring about unplanned damage that can substantially alter the perceptual impact of pictures. Transit brings out the bulky materiality of pictures, their weight and size, the fact that they are made of perishable and mutable materials that are susceptible to injury and change when set in motion.[85] As Christopher Heuer has recently pointed out paraphrasing Alois Riegl, "the 'object' status of an artwork is most present when it moves around, while the 'image' status emerges only when that artwork is allowed to rest."[86] Itineraries are the logistical instrument used to protect the object status, so that the image can emerge. From this perspective, Rubens's strategies for moving his pictures can be seen as an informed effort to protect the materiality and visibility of his pictures against the contingencies of physical dislocation.

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Notes

1. Since the early 2000s, the social sciences have seen much theorization of mobility, the critical emergence of which was first described by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," *Environment and Planning*, 38 (2006), pp. 207–226. In setting forth their manifesto, the authors emphasize mobility as opposed to sedentarism, which "treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placeness" (p. 208). Among the most representative works building on this agenda are Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London, 2006); John Hurry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge and Malden, MA, 2007); Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (London 2011); and Thomas Nail, *Being and Motion* (Oxford 2018).

2. For a critical perspective on this issue, see Elizabeth Rodini, "Mobile Things: On the Origins and the Meanings of Levantine Objects in Early Modern Venice," *Art History*, 41 (2018), pp. 247–265.

3. See David Y. Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven and London, 2014); see also Saloni Mathur (ed.), *The Migrant's Time. Rethinking Art History and Diaspora* (New Haven and London, 2011).

4. For a recent critical assessment of the processes of distribution that serve as intermediate steps between creation and consumption, see Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski (eds.), *Signal traffic. Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (Urbana–Chicago–Springfield, 2015), esp. p. 5.

5. Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie, "Making Things out of Objects That Move," in Eaed., *Things in Motion. Object Itineraries in Anthropological Practice* (Santa Fe, 2015), pp. 3–19, esp. 12. See also Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss, "Introduction: Biographies, travels and itineraries of things," in Iid. (eds.), *Mobility, Meaning and Transformations of Things. Shifting contexts of material culture through time and space* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 1–14; Juliane Noth and Joachim Rees, "Introduction," in Karin Gludovatz, Juliane Noth and Joachim Rees (eds.), *The Itineraries of Art. Topographies of Artistic Mobility in Europe and Asia* (Paderborn, 2015), pp. 9–32.

6. See Andrea Emiliani, *Federico Barocci (Urbino, 1535–1612)* (Ancona, 2008), I, p. 313 ("per haverla armata come machina da guerra").

7. See Nils Büttner, "Rubens auf Reisen," in Harald Pechlaner and Elisa Innerhofer (eds.), *Künstler Unterwegs. Wege und Grenzen des Reisens* (Baden-Baden, 2018), pp. 129–147. The large mobility and cosmopolitanism of artists from the Low Countries is highlighted also by contemporary sources: see Lodovico Giucciardini, *Descrittione di tutti li Paesi Bassi* (Antwerp, 1567), p. 101.

8. Arjan van Dixhoorn, "The Values of Antwerp and the Prosperity of *Belgica*. Political Economy in Guicciardini's *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* (1567)," in Christine Göttler, Bart Ramakers and Joanna Woodall (eds.), *Trading Values in Early Modern Antwerp* (Leiden, 2014), pp. 9–37.

9. Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven–London, 1995), p. 50.

10. On the logistics of the European warscape of the seventeenth century, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659. The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge, 1972).

11. Rubens's correspondence was first collected by Max Rooses and Charles Ruelens, *Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses œuvres*, 6 vols. (Antwerp, 1887–1909). Here, I made extensive use of the English translation, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, transl. and ed. by Ruth Saunders Magurn (Evanston, 1991), hereafter cited as *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens.*

12. A similar observation has been made in connection to Rubens's friend, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637), whose correspondence, often focused on tasks and problem solving, has aptly been compared to what we call "merchant letters:" Peter Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World* (Cambridge–London, 2015), esp. pp. 54–59.

13. On encasement as both a material and theoretical problem, see Gerhard Wolf, "Image, Object, Art: Talking to a Chinese Jar on Two Human Feet," *Representations*, 133 (2016), pp. 152–159; Id., *Die Vase und der Schemel. Ding, Bild oder eine Kunstgeschichte der Gefässe* (Dortmund, 2019). See also Amy Knight Powell, "A Short History of the Picture as Box," *Representation* 141 (2018), pp. 95–130.

14. *Letters of Peter Paul* Rubens, 1–12. The cargo was for the most part composed of copies after Raphael and Salviati made in Rome by Pietro Facchetti, who dispatched them to Mantua in December 1601 in four tin cases: Antonino Bertolotti, *Artisti in relazione coi Gonzaga duchi di Mantova nei secoli XVI e XVII* (Modena, 1885), p. 34. On Rubens's diplomatic mission to Spain, see also Mark Rosen, "The Medici Grand Duchy and Rubens's First Trip to Spain: A New Document," *Oud Holland* 121 (2008), pp. 147–152.

15. Needless to say, the attention to the effects of shock, vibration, and changes in temperature and relative humidity are also crucial factors for today's art transportation. See Marion F. Mecklenburg, "Technical Assessment of Cultural Objects in the Planning of Transport," in Ida Antonia Tank Bonken, Susan Braovac, Tone Marie Olstad, and Anne Apalnes Ørnhøi (eds.), *Moving Collections. Processes and Consequences* (London, 2012), pp. 1–8.

16. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 8. Rubens himself later took responsibility for the restoration; see Jeremy Wood, "'Damaged by Time and Rubens.' Rubens's Restorations and Retouchings," *Apollo* 142 (1995), pp. 16–23. A

similar episode befell the dispatch of Caravaggio's *Fortune-Teller* and other Italian paintings from Rome to France in 1665: the paintings arrived wet and covered in mold due—according to Gianlorenzo Bernini—to "the joins in the cases not having been filled with pitch, which would have prevented the water from entering;" Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Diary of the Cavalieri Bernini's Visit to France* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 232.

17. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens,* 45.

18. In one case, Rubens explicitly asks one of his interlocutors (sir Dudley Carleton) to put at his disposal the "wooden cases" of a previous shipment of marbles that were "useless to you, but of great convenience to me" (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 30). For more on the Carleton exchange, see Robert Hill and Susan Bracken, "The ambassador and the artist: Sir Dudley Carleton's relationship with Peter Paul Rubens: connoisseurship and art collecting at the court of the early Stuarts," *Journal of the History of Collections* 26 (2014), pp. 171–191. See also Alexandra Libby, "The Master as Manager: Rubens and the Carleton Exchange," in Sasha Suda and Kirk Nickel (eds.), *Early Rubens* (Munich–London–New York, 2019), pp. 73–81.

19. I am referring here to Antoine Watteau's *Enseigne de Gersaint* (1720), whose rite of "entombment" of the divine King Louis XV in a crate has been interpreted as a "demise of the old political order" (Robert Neuman, "Watteau's L'Enseigne de Gersaint and Baroque Emblematic Tradition," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 104 (1984), pp. 153–164), but is also striking today for its reference to art as a portable, vulnerable commodity. For the practice of filling well tied-up cases with straw and flax, see Anabel Thomas, *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 202.

20. "Il quadro comperato sta a disposition del signor Pietro Pavolo, quanto all'essere inviato, ma egli per assicurarlo da patimento fa lavorar non so che cassa, che farà tardar necessariamente sin doppo le feste il metterlo in via … " (Raffaella Morselli, *Tra Fiandre e Italia: Rubens 1600–1608. Regesto biografico–critico* (Roma, 2018), p. 269). The crate was shipped 2 weeks later (p. 270).

21. *Letters of Peter Paul* Rubens, 58; in a previous letter to Peiresc announcing the delivery of the device's design, Rubens observes that he has been preparing a "complete instrument … with a case" (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 52).

22. On Rubens's supports, see Nico Van Hout, *Rubens Unveiled. Notes on the Master's Painting Technique* (Antwerp, 2012), esp. 45–47. Scholars agree that Rubens pushed the boundaries of a painting's size, a development that had cultural, devotional, and material motives. For the execution of monumental altarpieces in Rubens's studio, see Hélène Dubois, "'*Come s'usa fare non volendo ingannarsi*': the Execution of Large Altarpieces on Canvas in Rubens' Studio," in Joost van der Auwera and Sabine von Sprang (eds.), *Rubens: A Genius at Work* (Tielt, 2007), pp. 160–163.

23. Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, Firenze 1568, I, p. 53. Relevant to problematizing this passage is David Y. Kim, "Why Weight? The Heaviness of Art and Narrative Force," in Id. (ed.), *Matters of Weight. Force, Gravity, and Aesthetics in the Early Modern Period* (Emsdetten, 2013), pp. 9–34, esp. 25.

24. On Rubens's strategies for executing large-scale works, see K. Bulckens, "The Bigger Picture: Rubens and his Workshop during the Twelve years' Truce," in *Early Rubens* (as in note 18), pp. 85–101.

25. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 30.

26. *Letters of Peter Paul* Rubens, 59.

27. *Letters of Peter Paul* Rubens, 143. On this episode, see J. G. van Gelder, "Rubens Marginalia III," *The Burlington Magazine* 122 (1980), pp. 164–168. Rubens may be referring here to the canvas version today at the St. Louis Museum of Art.

28. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 32.

29. While the exact meaning of the *Perseus* is still elusive, its relevance to the practice of drying has been suggested; see Jeffrey M. Muller, "The "Perseus and Andromeda" on Rubens's House," *Simiolus* 12 (1981–1982), pp. 131–146.

30. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 196.

31. A vigorous case for the identification has been made by Michael Jaffè, "Rubens to Himself: The Portraits Sent to Charles I and to N.–C. Fabri de Peiresc," in Mina Gregori (ed.), *Rubens e Firenze* (Florence, 1983), pp. 19–32. See also David Jaffè, *Rubens. Self Portrait in Focus* (Bowen Hills, 1988), pp. 59–63.

32. In a letter of 24 August, Peiresc voices his concerns that the painting may have been held up in transit by the plague raging at Lyon: quoted in Michael Jaffé, "Rubens to Himself" (as in note 31), p. 26.

33. On Peiresc and the plague, see Miller, *Peiresc's Mediterranean World* (as in note 12), pp. 229–234. On this episode, see also Aikaterini Georgoulia, *The Physicality of Rubens' Human Bodies: Visuality and Medicine in Early Modern Europe* (Ph.D. dissertation, York, 2014), pp. 69–70.

34. On the installation and support of an altarpiece in general, see Therese O'Malley, *The Business of Art. Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 85–86. For a nearly contemporary example of a contract explicitly requiring the presence of the master at the installation site (that is, Ludovico Carracci in the case of the *Conversion of Saint Paul* for San Francesco in Bologna, 1587–1588), see Richard E. Spear and Philip Sohm, *Painting for profit. The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters* (New Haven and London, 2010), p. 162.

35. One notable exception is the unveiling of the altarpiece of S. Maria in Vallicella, for which the physical presence of Rubens is attested even in his own correspondence: "It

will be necessary to me to retouch my picture in its place before the unveiling; this is usually done in order to avoid mistakes" (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 16).

36. On the *Adoration*, see Hans Devisscher and Hans Vliege, *Rubens. The Life of Christ before the Passion. The Youth of Christ* (London 2014), pp. 48–55.

37. Contemporary evidence shows that the altar and tabernacle were already in place at the time that Rubens received the commission, and that details on the required dimensions and light were provided by the patrons' representative in Rome: see Michael Jaffé, "Peter Paul Rubens and the Oratorian Fathers," *Proporzioni* 4 (1963), pp. 209–241, esp. p. 222.

38. Michael Jaffé, *Rubens and Italy* (Ithaca, 1977), p. 94; see also Raffaella Morselli, *Tra Fiandre e Italia* (as in note 20), p. 304.

39. See Anthony Blunt (ed.), *Nicolas Poussin. Lettres et propos sur l'art* (Paris, 1964), p. 140 (letter to Chantelou, 23 March 1648), in which Poussin invites his correspondent to use water to gently wash off the paper used to protect the recently shipped *The Sacrament of Marriage* (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland); he recommends the same procedure in a letter of January 1644 (p. 97).

40. On this aspect, see Justin Underhill, "Peter Paul Rubens and the Rationalization of Light," *Konsthistorisk Tijdskrift/Journal of Art History* 87 (2018), pp. 1–22.

41. See Raffaella Morselli, *Tra Fiandre e Italia* (as in note 20), pp. 304–305.

42. For an introduction to overland transportation and inland navigation in Europe, see George Livet, *Histoire des routes et des transports en Europe* (Strasbourg, 2003). For Rubens's activities as a diplomat, see Ulrich Heinen, "'Versatissimus in Historiis et Re Politica': Rubens' Anfänge als Diplomat," in *Wallraf-Richarts-Jahrbuch* 63 (2002), pp. 293–318.

43. See Peregrine Horden and Micholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A study of Mediterranean history* (Oxford–Malden MA, 2000), pp. 137–38.

44. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 59.

45. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 97.

46. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 83.

47. As in the case of the *Massacre of the Innocents* (now Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario), which is first recorded in the house of Giovanni Antonio Carenna, a business partner of the Annoni (or Dannoni).

48. See *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens* 58, 126, and 242, respectively. For the Antonii, see Raffaella Morselli, *Tra Fiandre e Italia* (as in note 20). For greater detail, see also Paul Sellin, "Michelle Blon and England, 1632–1649. With Observations on Van Dyck, Donne, and Vondel," *Dutch Crossing* 21.2 (1997), pp. 102–125.

49. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 42.

50. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens,* 4: "The freight charges have been estimated to our advantage, as one will see from the contracts, written for the most part in the handwriting of Martellini in Ferrara, Rossi in Bologna, Capponi and Bonsi in Florence … and Ricciardi in Pisa."

51. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 114.

52. See *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 107, 48, 1, and 145, respectively ("he understands no more about painting than a street porter").

53. For an insightful discussion on a specific case study (late 15th-century Roman customs registers), see Arnold Esch, "Roman Customs Registers 1470–80: Items of Interest to Historians of Art and Material Culture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995), pp. 72–87.

54. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 34. A similar thing occurred also in 1626 (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 126).

55. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 1.

56. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 7. Taxes were paid to "signor Andrea Ullio," an Italian merchant who appears to have anticipated part of the amount owed to customs. The name of this merchant reappears elsewhere in the diplomatic correspondence of the Medici: Suzanne B. Butters, "The Uses and Abuses of Gifts in the Worlds of Ferdinando de' Medici (1549–1609)," *I Tatti Studies* 11 (2007), pp. 243–354, esp. 352.

57. See also *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 1, where Rubens notes that without the free toll, "taxes would have cost more than the entire journey."

58. Philip Cottrell and Rosemarie Mulcahy, "Succeeding Titian: Parrasio Michiel and Venetian Painting at the Court of Philip II," *The Burlington Magazine* 149 (2007), pp. 232–245, esp. p. 236.

59. Confront the case of the six canvases meant for the secretary of Charles V, the Spaniard Francisco de los Cobos, that in February 1533 were transported from Mantua to Genoa via the Po and the Tanaro river: see Diane Bodart, *Tiziano e Federico II Gonzaga. Storia di un rapporto di committenza* (Rome, 1998), pp. 262–263. A similar case occurred in 1605 with Federico Barocci's *Nativity* (Madrid, Prado Museum), which was sent from Urbino to Spain via Genoa: see Georg Gronau, *Documenti artistici urbinati* (Florence, 1936), p. 174.

60. On the policies of trade in Livorno, see Thomas A. Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Maritime Republic, 1559–1564* (Baltimore and London, 2005), esp. p. 155. See also, from an art historical perspective, Mark Rosen, "Pietro Tacca's *Quattro Mori* and the Conditions of Slavery in Early Seicento Tuscany," *Art Bulletin* 97 (2015), pp. 34–57, esp. pp. 36–39.

61. During this journey, Rubens frequently complains of the restricted budget at his disposal: see for example *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 4, in which the existence of "critics of the voyage" is disclosed. Although he had no explicit orders to visit the Grand Duke Ferdinand I de' Medici (see *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 2), he was ultimately

invited to a private audience with him (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 3). On the Apennine route, see Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* (as in note 43), p. 131.

62. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 3.

63. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York–London, 1972), pp. 355–393. For a recent discussion on the paradigm of distance in information theory, see Filippo de Vivo, "Microhistories of Long-Distance Information: Space, Movement and Agency in the Early Modern News," *Past and Present* 14 (2019), pp. 179–214. Additional remarks on distance, which, according to Fernand Braudel, was "public enemy number one," can be found in Geoffre Parker, *The Spanish Road* (as in note 10), p. 42. Contemporary philosophy has theorized distance in terms of delay and deferral, suggesting that these concepts play an essential, productive role in the creation of meaning; see Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Sign* (Evanston, 1973), pp. 129–160. For an important application of the notion of delay/deferral in recent art historical analysis, see Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions. The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 2014), esp. pp. 1–11.

64. Jennifer Roberts (as in note 63), p. 1.

65. For a detailed discussion of the disputes on color in the seventeenth century and the role of Rubens, see Bernard Teyssèdre, *Roger de Piles et le débats sur le coloris au siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1965).

66. Didier Bodart (ed.), *Rubens e la pittura fiamminga del Seicento nelle collezioni pubbliche fiorentine* (Florence, 1977), pp. 226–230; Marco Chiarini and Serena Padovani, *La Galleria Palatina e gli Appartamenti reali di Palazzo Pitti* (Florence, 2003), II, p. 352; Ulrich Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy at War (1637/1638)," *Nederlands Kunshistorisch Jaarboek* 55 (2004), pp. 196–225; Gudrun Raatschen, "Malerei triumphiert über den Krieg," in Gerhard Finckh and Nicole Hartje–Grave (eds.), *Peter Paul Rubens* (Wuppertal, 2012), pp. 321–329.

67. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 242. The original is lost, and only survives in the transcription made by Filippo Baldinucci in his *Notizie de' professori del disegno*, 21 vols. (Florence, 1767–1774), XV, pp. 40–44. On the letter as ecfrasis, see also Hans-Joachim Raupp, "Rubens' Kriegsallegorie und sein Erläuteringsbrief an den Florentiner Hofmaler Justus Sustermans," in *Wallraf-Richarts-Jahrbuch* 70 (2018), pp. 233–266.

68. Ulrich Heinen, "Rubens' Bilddiplomatie im Krieg (1637/1638)," in *Mars und die Musen: Das Wechselspiel von Militär, Krieg und Kunst in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 151–178, esp. p. 166.

69. On the Annoni, see Giovanna Tonelli, "The Annoni and the Carenna in Seventeenth-Century Milan," in David Jaffè (ed.), *Rubens's Massacre of the Innocents* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 154–192. The Annoni were also instrumental in transporting Jan Brueghel's paintings from Antwerp to Milan; see Stefania Bedoni, *Jan Brueghel in Italia e il Collezionismo del Seicento* (Florence–Milan, 1983), esp. pp. 103–146.

70. On Stefano Annoni, see Giovanna Tonelli, *Investire con profitto e stile. Strategie imprenditoriali e familiari a Milano tra Sei e Settecento* (Milan, 2015), esp. pp. 84–86.

71. Silvio Leydi, *Gli Annoni.* Conductores mercantiarum de partibus Flandrie in Italia. *Una famiglia Milanese tra Cinquecento e Seicento* (Milan, 2015), esp. pp. 21–26.

72. *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 242.

73. See the contemporary account in Battista Nani, *The History of the Affairs of Europe in this Present Age* (London, 1673), p. 433: "*Werdt* after this draws near to Hanau, and *Weimar* hastes with speed to its succours, wherein he was not able to succeed." It appears that the fall of the city had caused an increase of military engagements in the regions of France-Comté and Alsace. On this context, see also Ulrich Heinen, "Rubens' Pictorial Diplomacy" (as in note 66), pp. 199–200.

74. See Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie* (as in note 67), p. 179.

75. The delivery of the essay is announced in his letter to Peiresc of 16 March 1636 (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 238). The topic had been introduced in a previous missive of 16 August 1635 (*Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 237), but already in May 1635 Peiresc mentioned to Jacques Dupuy that Rubens had begun "a discourse on colors" (see *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, p. 505, note 5).

76. In his letter of March 1636, Rubens shows some interest for the ideas of the Jesuit Francis Line (1595–1675), who later in his life became a critic of Newton's theory of color (see Conor Reilly, "Francis Line, Peripatetic (1595–1675)," *Osiris* 14 (1962), pp. 222–253). Here Rubens seems to support the view that colors are a property of things, and not the result of an interaction between objects and light. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art. Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven–London, 1990), esp. pp. 274–278.

77. See Charles Parkhurst, "Aguilonius' Optics and Rubens' Color," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 12 (1961), pp. 35–49, esp. 45. As is well known, Rubens provided the drawings for the book's illustrations.

78. John Gage, "A Locus Classicus of Colour Theory: The Fortunes of Apelles," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 44 (1981), pp. 1–26.

79. On the Apelle's palette, see Philip Sohm, "Palettes as Signatures and Encoded Identities in Early–Modern Self–Portraits," *Art History* 40 (2017), pp. 995–1025.

80. Nico van Hout, “Reconsidering Rubens’s Flesh Colour,” in *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 37 (2001), pp. 7–20.
81. The degree of Rubens’s participation in his compositions varied according to the subject, importance, and cost of the commission. In his famous letter to Sir Dudley Carleton of 28 April 1618, Rubens outlined some examples of collaborative efforts with his assistants, who were often employed as specialists in specific compositional domains such as landscape, animals, or still-life, and whose share remains visible and detectable: see *Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, 28. On Rubens’s workshop practices, see Arnout Balis, “Rubens and His Studio: Defining the Problem,” in *Rubens. A Genius at Work* (as in note 22), pp. 30–51. See also Michael Jaffé, *Rubens. Catalogo Completo* (Milan, 1989), pp. 7–36, and Nils Büttner, *Herr P.P. Rubens. Von der Kunst, berühmt zu warden* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 109–127.
82. Roger De Piles, *Dissertation sur les ouvrages des plus fameux peintres* (Paris, 1681), pp. 36: “Il est vray cét excellent home a peint les objets qu’il a réprésentez d’une grande force, d’un grande union, et leur a donné un gran caractére de vérité, principalment aux carnations qu’il a imitées avec beaucoup de soins et de recherches, et que par cette exactitude il a mérité la palme dans le genre des portraits.”
83. Régis Debray, *Transmitting Cultures* (New York, 2000), p. 4.
84. Indexicality refers here to “the point where signification breaks down and the picture is connected to the moment that produced it,” but includes also the circumstances of its fabrication or transportation. For a recent art historical appraisal of indexicality, see Christopher Woods, “Theories of Reference,” *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), pp. 22–25.
85. Heidegger indirectly recognized that an artwork’s existence was detectable in its movability: “A painting – for example van Gogh’s portrayal of a pair of peasant shoes – travels from one exhibition to another. Works are shipped like coal from the Ruhr or logs from the Black Forest. (…) Every work has this thingly (*Dinghafte*) character. (…) But perhaps we find this very crude and external approach to the work offensive. It may be the conception of the artwork with which the freight-handler or the museum charlady operates, but we are required to take the works as they are encountered by those who experience and enjoy them (*erleben und genießen*)” (Martin Heidegger, *The Origins of the Work of Art*, p. 3).
86. Christopher Heuer, *Into the White. The Renaissance Arctic and the End of the Image* (New York, 2019), p. 168.

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Summary

The history of art has been engaged with mobility for centuries. The study of movement, its limits and potential, is a fundamental principle of the discipline. A fascination with, and rejection of movement lies at the core of much of its narrative. However, recent art historical analysis, which is concerned primarily with the travels of artists (as described, for example, in biographical accounts), overlooks both the intrinsic itinerancy of their objects and the intricacies of their transference. This paper aims to fill this scholarly lacuna by focusing on the case of the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), one of the most eminent artists of his generation to fully exploit the new technologies of transportation on a pan-European scale. His abundant correspondence, which counts over 250 letters, reveals precious details about packing and unveiling procedures, strategies for speeding up cargoes, careful assessments of the quickest and more secure roads, names and functions of custom agents, packers, drivers, couriers, and postmen—in other words, all the details concerning the mechanics of mobility in an increasingly itinerant world. This article analyzes this logistics concoction in order to better understand the impact of distance on itinerant matter in the Early Modern period.

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