

## PETER PAUL RUBENS AND STUDIO

(Siegen 1577 - Antwerp 1640)

*The Triumph of Justice*  
Oil on canvas, 145 x 170 cm

### EXPERTISE

Nicola Spinosa, written communication, 14 December 2013

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The present painting by Peter Paul Rubens, the great Flemish Baroque painter, and a small contribution from his workshop, depicts a rare and interesting subject: an allegory of justice and peace under the dominion of Venus and Minerva. The two seated goddesses, with Venus upon a globe, hold hands while a youth offers a sceptre and bears a cornucopia, above which two flying *putti* carry fruit and red drapery. The youth holds down under his knee a drunk Silenus, symbol of irrational violence and dominated by wisdom (Minerva) and love (Venus).

This significant and fine painting belongs to a particular moment in Rubens' career when the great artist began a series of mythological and allegorical works with subjects such as Venus and Adonis, Prometheus and Ganymede. The present work is stylistically close to Rubens' celebrated masterpiece, the *Four Parts of the World* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), executed between 1615 and 1616 and reproduced on various occasions (even if the prime version, once in the collection of Queen Christina of Sweden, is now lost). Rubens' *Union of Earth and Water* (Prado Museum), a representation of prosperity and abundance, is also comparable both stylistically and thematically to the present painting.

It was during the second decade of the seventeenth century that Rubens began to work on the famous cycle of paintings for Maria de' Medici, now in the Louvre, to which belongs an interesting study in oil on panel depicting *The Crowning of Abundance* (Accademia di San Luca, Roma). The overriding theme of this picture is

the cornucopia. It is possible that Rubens executed the present allegory during the same period, perhaps with the collaboration of a still-life specialist such as Frans Snyders. While Rubens would often delegate particular aspects of his compositions to members of his workshop, the compact and coherent composition of the present *Allegory of Justice* also makes it possible that the cornucopia and the fruit were executed by the master himself. It is plausible that the present work could have formed part of the celebrated mythological and allegorical cycle, which explored themes of peace and abundance.

The quality of the treatment of paint in the present work - crisp, clear, harmonious and enriched with pure colours, which are in full evidence due to the excellent condition of the painting – are indicative of an early phase in Rubens's career, when he was still influenced by his Italian experience. Here, however, the artist has reinterpreted the Southern tradition, injecting it with a new baroque flamboyancy.