



**Erasmus Quellinus**

1607 - Antwerp - 1678

*The Triumph of Galatea*

Oil on canvas 132 x 215 cm

Signed on one of the blades of the wheel: 'E. Quellinus f.'

Datable end 1660s or early 1670s

**Provenance**

Michael Bryan, by whom sold at the below sale

Sale London (Bryan), 27 April 1795, lot 19 ('The Triumph of Galatea')

Sale Brussels (Man), 28 April 1818, lot 19 ('Superbe tableau sur toile, représentant la naissance de Venus, voguant sur mer, entourée de ses tritons'), sold to the flower painter and art dealer Pieter Joseph Thijs (1749 - 1823), by whom sold at the below sale  
Sale Brussels (Mastraeten), 26 May 1826, lot 5 ('Le triomphe de Galaté'), bought by Quillin

Guillaume Verbelen, by whom sold at the below sale

Probably Brussels 8 October 1833, lot 394 ('Le Triomphe d'Amphitrite'), sold to Felix Leroy

Collection G.B. Goldschmidt, Frankfurt

Sale Vienna (Friedrich Schwartz), 11 March 1907, lot 38, ill. (as 'Triumphzug der Venus' and as signed)

Sale London (Sotheby's), 28 April 1971, lot 65

Collection Baron Louis Empain, Brussels

Sale Brussels (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten), 14 June 1977, lot 27, ill. (as 'Triomf van Neptunus')

Private collection, Wichelen, from at least 1986 onwards

**Exhibited**

Taichung, Taiwan Museum of Art, *The Golden Age of Flemish painting*, (cat. by D. Liu & F.W. Sin) 1988, pp. 75, 76, ill. (as 'Triumph of Venus')

Cassel, Musée départemental de Flandre, *Érasme Quellin dans le sillage de Rubens*, (cat. by J.-P. De Bruyn et al.) 2014, nr. 1.19, pp. 92, 93, ill. (and illustrated on the cover as well as on the back cover)

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## Literature

- M.-L. Hairs, *Dans le sillage de Rubens: les peintres d'histoire Anversois au XVIIe siècle*, Liège 1977, p. 113
- J.-P. De Bruyn, 'Biografische gegevens over de Antwerpse kunstenaar Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678)', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1981), p. 182
- J.-P. De Bruyn, 'Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678). Een stijlkritische benadering', *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1984), pp. 313, 314, ill.
- J.-P. De Bruyn, 'De samenwerking van Peter Boel en Erasmus II Quellinus', *Jaarboek van het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1985), pp. 280-284, ill.
- J.-P. de Bruyn, *Erasmus Quellinus. De schilderijen met catalogue raisonné*, Freren 1988, nr. 203, p. 243, ill. (and on the cover; as in collaboration with Peeter Boel)
- J.-P. De Bruyn, 'Erasmus II Quellinus (1607-1678): addenda en corrigenda', *Jaarboek Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen* (1990), p. 307, ill

Galatea sits on a triumphal porpoise-drawn chariot and wears a gilt belt just under her bosom and a gilt bracelet round her right arm, a silk drapery partly covers her naked limbs. Her gaze is turned upward and she plays with a seemingly endless string of pearls, part of which adorns her blond hair. A string of white and pink roses is blown in her direction by a personification of wind. On the chariot a white dove is perched and another flies up. An armed Cupid flutters in the sky. Galatea is accompanied by tritons, sea gods and pretty Nereids.

The versatile and prolific pupil of Rubens Erasmus Quellinus painted Biblical scenes, allegories an incidental genre scene, portraits and he worked on elaborate decoration programs. He often collaborated with other artists. This dazzling mythological scene is painted all by himself and as one of his masterpieces features on the cover of the artist's monograph with catalogue raisonné and it adorns the covers of no less than two exhibition catalogues.<sup>1</sup> The scene is exuberant, joyous and sensual. Shown is the triumph or apotheosis of Galatea, a subject related to a famous episode from Ovid's well-known *Metamorphoses* (XIII; 738ff).

Ovid tells the story of the beautiful nymph Galatea, daughter of the sea god Nereus and the sea nymph Doris, who loves Acis, the son of Faunus and the river-nymph Symaethis. Their luck is short-lived as the one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus heavily falls in love with Galatea. When Galatea remains impervious to his courting efforts and turns him down, the love-smitten and jealous giant takes revenge and he kills Acis by hurling an enormous rock to him. Galatea then transforms dying Acis' blood into an immortal river god.

Ovid does not describe the scene Quellinus depicts, but in his famous 1514 fresco in the Loggia di Galatea in the Palazzo Farnesina in Rome Raphael famously represented Galatea's Triumph next to a scene of a gloomy Polyphemus holding the pipes with

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which he would, as Ovid relates, serenade Galatea, executed by Sebastiano del Piombo.<sup>2</sup> Strongly echoing Raphael and Del Piombo, Annibale Caracci combined a flute playing Polyphemus and Galetea's triumph harmoniously into one scene in his fresco, executed between 1597 and 1607 in the Galleria Farnesina (Palazzo Farnese, Rome).<sup>3</sup>

Raphael's *Triumph of Galatea* was an instant success and praised by Giorgio Vasari in his *Vite* and then in 1604 by Karel van Mander, Dutch lines Quellinus will have read and have had in mind when he set to work on the present painting. Raphael's composition became widely known through prints reproducing his fresco. No less than seven different prints were made after it within four decades after its completion, Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of 1515 or slightly later being one of the first. An excellent later engraving is the one by Hendrick Goltzius.<sup>4</sup> Quellinus probably made use of these prints but his composition is wholly his own. Numerous other artists, most of them Italian and French, would treat this theme in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To name a few: Andrea Casali, Corrado Giaquinto, Luca Giordano, Nicolas Poussin and Eustache Le Sueur. A few Dutch artists also favoured it, such as Abraham Bloemaert and Adriaen van Nieulandt. The latter's fanciful painting in the Rijksmuseum includes Acis sitting next to his beloved Galetea in the triumphal sled.<sup>5</sup> Quellinus depicted the theme at least twice. One other still preserved example is in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich but contains parts by the studio.<sup>6</sup>

The Quellinus scholar Jean-Pierre De Bruyn has dated our painting around 1655/60 in his 1988 monograph. In his entry in the recent exhibition catalogue, however, he put the date of execution somewhat earlier, around 1645. This shows how arduous it is to accurately date Quellinus' works on the basis of the painting style alone. In fact, Galatea's hairdo reflects the fashionable à la Sévigné style, worn during the late 1660s to mid-1670s.<sup>7</sup> This horizontally orientated hairstyle is characterized by a large protruding chignon and corkscrew curls, often hanging down on either side of the head. No doubt, Quellinus painted his imposing canvas during these years. It has been remarked that in his later years Quellinus returned 'a more robust Rubensian style', and our painting seems a case in point.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously Quellinus' masterpiece will have been a prestigious commission. Although we have found a few hitherto unnoticed descriptions in old sales catalogues that allow us to follow the trace of the picture's provenance further back in time, the identity of the first proud owner remains shrouded in the mists of time.

Erasmus Quellinus was the eldest son and namesake of his father Erasmus Quellinus the Elder (c. 1584 - 1640), a sculptor from Liège. The family was extremely artistically gifted. Erasmus' young brother Artus Quellinus the Elder (1609 - 1668) became one of the leading sculptors of the Low Countries. After some initial training with his father, Erasmus was a pupil of the great Rubens from about 1629. In 1633/34 he registered with the Antwerp guild of Saint Luke. Around the same time he married Catharina de

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Hemelaer. On 1 December 1634 their son Jan-Erasmus was baptized, who also would become a painter. In the following years Erasmus would assist Rubens on many projects, such as the decorations for the *Pompa Introitus Ferdinandi* in 1635 and in 1637 the *Torre de la Parada*. In these years up to circa 1642 he was also active as a printmaker, especially as a designer of book illustrations and of frontispieces for the Plantin publishing house. Erasmus Quellinus also held literary aspirations and in 1643 he became a member of the rhetoricians chamber 'de Violieren'. During a sojourn in 1646-47 in Liège the work of the Liègeois Gérard Douffet (1594 - 1660/61) and Bertholet Flémal (1614 - 1675) had a profound impact on the development of his style, which became increasingly classicizing. Upon his return to his native Antwerp Erasmus was appointed the city's official painter, resulting in a series of grand commissions. His fame had meanwhile also spread to the northern Netherlands and in 1656 he executed two ceiling paintings for the new Amsterdam Town Hall while his already-mentioned brother designed the sculptural program for the same building. His first wife having died the artist in 1663 married Françoise de Fren, sister-in-law of the painter David Teniers the Younger. By the time he died, probably of the plague, he was a wealthy man owning an extensive art collection.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Initially it was believed that our painting was produced in collaboration with the animal painter Peeter Boel (1622 - 1674), for which see Hairs 1977 (see under literature). It was thought he would have executed the dolphin-like sea creatures. Jean-Pierre De Bruyn recently rightly emphasized the entire painting is by Quellinus, See his entry in the 2014 exhibition catalogue.

<sup>2</sup> See: J. Kliemann & M. Rohlmann, *Wandmalerei in Italien: die Zeit der Hochrenaissance und des Manierismus 1510-1600*, Munich 2004, pp. 194-213.

<sup>3</sup> See Kliemann & Rohlman (note 2), pp. 462ff.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Goltzius' print see: H. Leeftang et al., *Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617): tekeningen, prenten en schilderijen*, exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 2003, nr. 45, pp. 139-141.

<sup>5</sup> Inv. SK-A-1582. See for this painting and a concise entry: J. Bikker et al., *Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam*, 2 vols., Amsterdam 2007, vol. 1, pp. 297, 298.

<sup>6</sup> De Bruyn 1988 (see under literature), nr. 167, p. 222.

<sup>7</sup> For dating seventeenth-century painting on the basis of the hairdo depicted and for further references to à la Sévigné see: E. Schavemaker, 'What Hair Can Reveal Schalcken's Chronology and Hairstyles as a Dating Aid', *Wallraf-Richartz-Yearbook. Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte LXXVIII* (2016), pp. 43-54.

<sup>8</sup> For this quote see: P.C. Sutton et al., *The Age of Rubens*, exh. cat. Boston, Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Toledo Museum of Art, 1993, p. 378.