Peter Paul Rubens 

* Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), a Flemish Baroque painter, was a master of dynamic composition, bold color, and sensuality, blending Italian Renaissance influences with Northern naturalism. Returning to Antwerp in 1608 after extensive travels, he became court painter to Spanish governors of Flanders and prominent patrons like Charles I of England and Marie de' Medici of France. Renowned works such as *Raising of the Cross* and *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* showcase his expertise in religious, mythological, and hunting scenes, as well as his signature depictions of voluptuous nudes. Beyond art, Rubens was a skilled diplomat, negotiating on behalf of the Spanish Netherlands during their conflict with the Dutch Republic and earning nobility in 1624. A learned art collector and savvy businessman, Rubens' profound influence on Northern European art endures, paralleling the legacy of his contemporary, Rembrandt van Rijn.

**PAINTINGS**

**The Fall of Phaeton (Rubens, 1604-1605)**

* The artwork shows the ancient Greek myth of Phaeton (Phaethon), which is a common subject in visual arts. Rubens painted this myth at its most dramatic moment, with Zeus hurling thunderbolts on the right side. These thunderbolts create a bright contrast that highlights the horror on Phaeton's face, as well as the faces of the horses and other figures, while keeping the overall scene dark. The female figures with butterfly wings represent the hours and seasons, and they react in fear as the normal cycle of night and day is disrupted. The large astrological circle in the sky is also affected. The grouping of bodies forms a diagonal oval in the center, splitting the canvas into dark and light sides. The arrangement leads the viewer’s eye to move around that oval continuously.

**The Circumcision of Christ (Rubens, 1605)**

* Commissioned by Marcello Pallavicino, a prominent vestryman of the Casa Professa of the Jesuits in Genoa, this artwork reflects a rich tapestry of influences. It draws heavily from the refined Mantuan paintings that flourished in the court of Vincenzo Gonzaga, showcasing a remarkable mastery of perspective with its strikingly foreshortened viewpoint that engages the viewer’s eye and immerses them in the scene. The composition not only highlights the artistic techniques of the period but also encapsulates the cultural interplay between the Jesuit community and the artistic currents of the time.

**St. George and a Dragon (Rubens, 1606-1610)**

* The painting was created in Genoa, a city that honors Saint George as its patron. At the time, Rubens was in Italy enhancing his artistic skills under the guidance of his mentor, Otto van Veen. There is considerable speculation among scholars that the artwork was initially commissioned for the Church of Sant’Ambrogio, which is dedicated to Saint George. However, the patron never received the piece, as the artist kept it until his death in 1640. Eventually, Felipe IV acquired the artwork, and it is now displayed in the Museo del Prado in Madrid.

**The Elevation of the Cross (Rubens, 1610)**

* The Elevation of the Cross is a triptych panel artwork featuring muscular men lifting Jesus on the Cross. This piece strongly reflects the styles of Michelangelo, Caravaggio, and Tintoretto, who all significantly influenced Rubens. He completed this painting after returning to Flanders from Italy following his mother's death in 1608. Along with The Descent of the Cross, it was taken from Belgium by Napoleon but was returned toward the end of the 19th century. Both paintings are currently housed in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp.

**The Four Philosophers (Rubens, 1611-1612)**

* From left to right, the scene features Peter Paul Rubens, flanked by his brother Philip Rubens, the renowned painter. Next to them stands Justus Lipsius, a prominent scholar of the time, followed by Joannes Woverius, a noted academic. In the background, one can see a striking bust of Seneca, crafted by Peter Paul himself. This bust is now thought to be a reinterpretation of an imaginary Hellenistic portrait that originally depicted the Greek poet Hesiod, adding an intriguing layer of historical connection to the artwork.

**Medusa (1617-1618)**

* Medusa has been depicted in art for centuries, dating back to Ancient Greece, through various mediums including paintings, sculptures, pottery, and metalwork. In early representations, she is commonly shown with snakes for hair, a gaping mouth, and sharp teeth, often facing the viewer head-on. Although the depiction of Medusa has evolved over time, her direct gaze towards the observer has remained a constant element.

**Abduction of the Daughter of Leucippus (1618)**

* The painting illustrates the mortal Castor and the immortal Pollux as they abduct Phoebe and Hilaeira, the daughters of Leucippus. Castor, recognized for his horse-taming abilities, is depicted wearing armor, while Pollux, depicted as a boxer, has his upper body bare. Their horses further distinguish them: Castor rides a well-behaved horse supported by a putto, while Pollux's horse is shown rearing. The putto’s black wing symbolizes the eventual fate of the twins. Phoebe and Hilaeira lack distinct features, leaving their identities ambiguous.

**Adoration of the Magi (1618-1619)**

* The artwork features full-length figures spread across the canvas, set against a frieze-like backdrop filled with a diverse crowd of twelve mature male figures. The eldest magus kneels and gently kisses the foot of the Christ Child, who stands on a straw-covered table presented by the Virgin Mary. The Child reaches out to touch the magus's bald head in a blessing. The dimly lit stable is illuminated by beams of light.

**Self Portrait in a Circle of Friends from Mantua (1602)**

* This is the earliest recognized self-portrait by Rubens. It belongs to a specific style of portraits that gained popularity during the 16th and 17th centuries, known as friendship portraits, which showcase informal gatherings of friends or companions. More precisely, it portrays a circle of Stoic friends. The artwork features six men depicted at bust length, shown in profile or semi-profile against a surreal, illuminated marine landscape. A boat or gondola can be seen on the lake.

**Samson and Delilah (1609-1610)**

* The painting captures a dramatic moment in which a servant stealthily shears Samson's long locks, the source of his immense strength, while he lies vulnerable in slumber. The tension in the scene heightens as Philistine soldiers, ominous figures lurking just beyond the open doorway, prepare to seize him in the wake of his betrayal. This compelling artwork was commissioned by Nicholas Rockox, an esteemed alderman of Antwerp, for his elegant town house, reflecting both the grandeur and the gravity of the narrative.

**The Judgement of Paris (1636)**

* They represent his ideal vision of a full-figured female body. The version from 1938 is regarded as the final piece created by Rubens, as he was suffering from gout at that time, which ultimately contributed to his death in 1640. For the female figures, he used his young bride as a model; they married in 1630 when he was 16 years old, and she frequently served as his idealized depiction of femininity.

**Portrait of Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria (1606)**

* The artwork was commissioned by Marquess Giacomo Massimiliano Doria of Genoa and depicts his wife (who was also his cousin) shortly after their wedding in 1605; she was from the notable Spinola family. After he passed away in 1613, she married another member of the Doria family. The piece has been cropped multiple times on both sides, which has altered the garden in the background and cut off the lower part of the figure.