

Peter Paul Rubens

Siegen 1577 – Antwerp 1640

Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides

c. 1635–1638

Oil on canvas

The Painting

This painting depicts the demigod Hercules as he carries out his eleventh labor: gathering the golden apples from the Garden of the Hesperides.

Who are the characters?

- **Hercules**
 - Depicted as a muscular and powerful man.
 - He has just slain the serpent Ladon, which he crushes with his left foot.
 - He leans on a wooden staff with his right arm while picking the golden fruits.
- **The little winged putto**
 - Appears on the right side of the painting.
 - Helps Hercules by placing the skin of the Nemean lion on his shoulders.
 - May symbolize love, like a small Cupid.

Some Meanings

- The **lion skin** and the **club** are Hercules' typical attributes, obtained after his first labor.
- The **golden apples** represent immortality and the reward for the hero's efforts.
- The **defeated serpent** symbolizes victory over evil and obstacles.

Look at the Painting!

Rubens uses a mature and distinctive style:

- The **thick brushstroke** creates forms that dissolve into touches of light and color.
- The **brown tones** dominate the composition, with shading that creates depth.
- The hero's **muscular tension** shows a balance between opposing forces.
- The **background**, with trees and a cloudy sky, creates a dramatic atmosphere.

Did you know...?

Classical Inspiration

Rubens was inspired by the famous sculpture of the **Farnese Hercules**, a Hellenistic statue he studied during his stay in Rome. However, he altered the pose: in the sculpture, Hercules hides the apples behind his back, whereas here he is gathering them from the tree.

A Work of Maturity

This painting belongs to the artist's final years. The style is influenced by the late Titian, whom Rubens studied during his stay in Spain. The painting remained in private Genoese collections until 1981, when it entered the Galleria Sabauda.