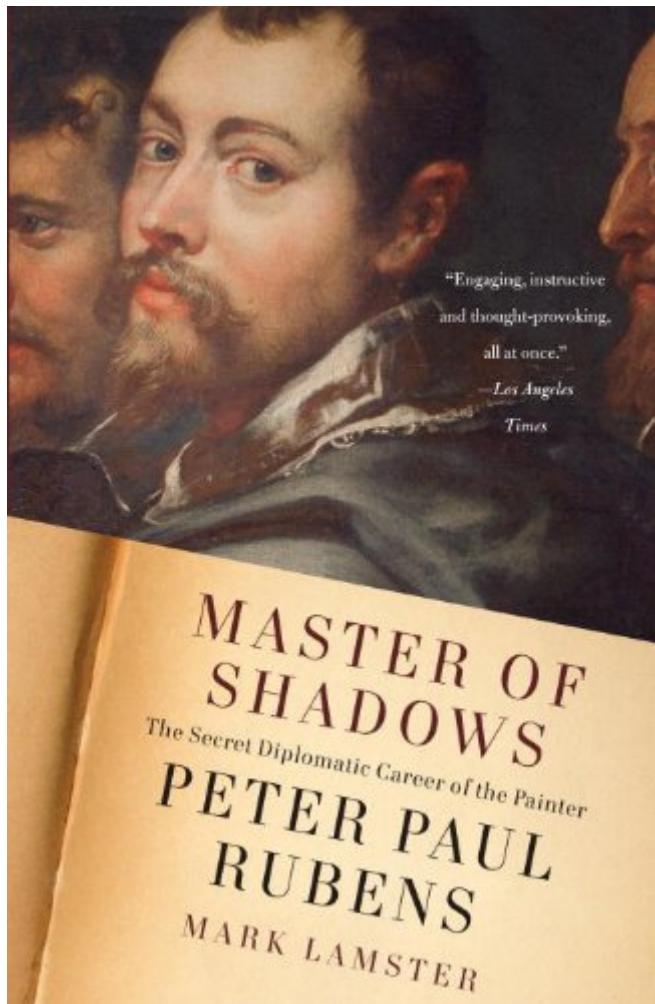


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Master Of Shadows: The Secret Diplomatic Career Of The Painter Peter Paul Rubens



Synopsis

Although his popularity is eclipsed by Rembrandt today, Peter Paul Rubens was revered by his contemporaries as the greatest painter of his era, if not of all history. His undeniable artistic genius, bolstered by a modest disposition and a reputation as a man of tact and discretion, made him a favorite among monarchs and political leaders across Europe and gave him the perfect cover for the clandestine activities that shaped the landscape of seventeenth-century politics. In Master of Shadows, Mark Lamster brilliantly recreates the culture, religious conflicts, and political intrigues of Rubens' time, following the painter from Antwerp to London, Madrid, Paris, and Rome and providing an insightful exploration of Rubens' art as well as the private passions that influenced it. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

If I described this book as a detailed biography of the great Baroque painter, you might wonder whether it could sustain your interest for a book-length read. But then you might miss this highly entertaining and skillfully written book---not only a master painter, serious scholar, and astute businessman, Rubens was also a diplomat and spy who traveled in the upper echelons of European

society and royalty. Against the backdrop of the Spanish Inquisition, the Eighty Years' War, and other historical events filled with intrigue, war, big personalities, and, yes, sex, the author tells a great tale of an extraordinary man in extraordinary times. Deftly written with great humor and care, Master of Shadows is a hard-to-put-down page-turner once you start. If only all "art history" was this much fun; hopefully Lamster will move on to other artists, assuming their stories are as fascinating as this.

While most everyone has heard the term 'Rubenesque' few people are directly familiar with Rubens work. As the author points out, he has no iconographic 'mona lisa' or other defining work. Fewer still are familiar with this diplomatic career. That is the focus of Lamster's book. He does a job creating an overview of the complex geopolitical picture of Europe -- the stage for Ruben's diplomatic drama. . despite packing in a lot of names, places, treaties, the narrative flows nicely - not an easy task for a writer! This is a nice, concise story of Rubens involvement in negotiations and diplomatic missions and how it naturally flowered out of his artistic career. Side note: The books is what it says it is - it is NOT a biography that focuses on his artistic career-- so please no comments about 'i wish he had talked more about his painting' - on that note what he does mention about his artistic career and paintings is interesting and helps the story move along. I am knocking off one star for the last chapter a sermonizing, politically correct 'epilogue'. tiresome.

In this book Mark Lamster talks about the machinations, secret diplomacy, arrangements and connections of the painter Peter Paul Rubens. His was a whirlwind career, playing out in Amsterdam, Brussels, Paris, Madrid, Mantua, London and everywhere in between in the service of the Spanish Habsburgs; most often under cover of a painting commission. As a painter he "picture[d] the most powerful men and women of his day, and the institutions they controlled, not necessarily as they were, but as they wished to be seen." Lamster brings Rubens to life - :"tall and physically attractive", with friends and connections everywhere. - yet, I was left not really knowing much more of Rubens than when I started this book. Sometimes I found myself wondering where the many quotes really came from - maybe it was a Kindle edition - but there really were no references. Some were given in the appendix, but not really enough to follow up.

Lamster is a great story teller. Staying true to the historical facts he managed to get me hooked from the first pages. Not an easy task considering the convoluted political situation at the time of Peter Paul Rubens. Lamster Master of Words.

I am an artist in oils and have read nearly all there is written on P.P. Rubens. I have seen and copied many of his works and studied his techniques and his methods. In all the study and information there was always the mention of his diplomatic capabilities and endeavors. Yet, with the exception of Schama's "Rembrandt's Eyes", I have never read anything that so concisely and "readably" (I know not a word) delves into his activities with and integration of the times and commissions of those events. This was truly surprising for me, I almost could not put it down. It is rare to get true "Art History" that blends life with craft mixed with emotion and symbology, this work is not that but a wonderful rounding of the remarkable actions of a man striving to believe in the possible. For me, it enhanced the paintings that much further..... an act that I thought was no longer possible. Thus it is a true gift. It is true that if one knows the histories and actions and paintings already that the read is probably not tedious (if it is at all, as others have said). I would want the author Mr Lamster to know that his work has actually given me further inspiration as an artist and a person. Ruben's is/was for lack of a better phrase a "Renaissance Man" of the first order, capable of being Husband, Father, CEO, Artist, Shopkeeper, Diplomat, Wordsmith, Mediator, Peacekeeper, Philanthropist, et all. Someone known yet not understood in recent centuries and so much more than an "esque". Thank you for the work and toil it must have been to complete. It is rare indeed for me to review anything. This is deserving of high praise.

A well written, well paced, thoughtful book. The author isn't an intellect on the same order as Rubens' talent, but that can't really be expected. In this case it isn't all that desired... Master of Shadows is more of a reportage. And a really good reportage it is, of an age when artists led interesting lives. If you're looking to spend some afternoons in an escapist fantasy that has some anchors in art history, this is the read for you.

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