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***From Italy to Antwerp:  
Rubens' Massacre of the Innocents  
in the Art Gallery of Ontario.***

The *Massacre of the Innocents* by Rubens in the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, is a summation of his experience of Italy, painted following his return from an extended stay there, in the period around 1610 precisely when he established his dominance in Antwerp. This monumental panel, with its violent and gruesome subject matter, served as a demonstration piece for its approach to style and narrative. This paper explores the Italian influences, ancient and modern, on Rubens' panel. Through the absorption of foreign visual references, Rubens surpassed local sixteenth-century tradition for the representation of this subject in the public precedent by Frans Floris in the Antwerp Town Hall. The *Massacre* also realised on a monumental scale what for Raphael was only a small paper print of the subject - the ambition to enlarge and supply a surrogate for a never executed Renaissance masterpiece, to fulfil that fictional promise. That desire alone perhaps justified the choice of a not especially common subject. The dialogue between a monumental painting and several engravings of the same subject is evidence for the high respect given to prints in the period, in both Italy and Northern Europe. The likely patron, an Italian merchant long resident in Antwerp is also relevant in this regard because this was an international painting, addressing different tastes equally. The *Massacre* is a compellingly hybrid painting that does not, however, truly resemble any Italian work of art, and in its specifically Flemish aspects it survived the otherwise irresistible force of Italy. To stress: these include the painting's uncomfortably graphic realism and concentration on textures as well as background. The original placement of the panel, elevated as a chimney piece respecting the custom in Antwerp and the implications for how the composition was viewed illusionistically, needs to be acknowledged. If the Toronto *Massacre of the Innocents* is a profoundly retrospective object, it would also prove to be a visual index for Rubens' mature career.

**David Franklin**



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