

Alfred Bader

Alfred Bader Fine Arts

[1 Accuse - Professor Ludwig Burchard's
Deliberate mistakes]

[ca. 1960]

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I ACCUSE

PROFESSOR LUDWIG BURCHARD'S DÉLIBERATE MISTAKE

THE TRUE STORY OF "DIANA AND HER NYMPHS
DEPARTING FOR THE CHASE" RUBENS WORKSHOP'S
PIECE BOUGHT RECENTLY BY THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM FOR 550.000 DOLLARS

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PROFESSOR LUDWIG BURCHARD'S DELIBERATE FAULT

At the end of the year 1951, I was given the task of identifying the picture "Diana Hunting" (Diane à la Chasse), whose owner maintained that his grandfather had bought it from a Spanish nobleman.

At the bottom, on the right side, there was marked the number 214. After doing some research, I found this number in the inventory of the Marquis de Leganès of 1655. In this inventory there were 31 Rubens, of which the majority are today in the great museums.

The Marquis de Leganès was a statesman, a man of letters, and a friend of the arts; and above all he was an intimate friend of Rubens and of Philippe the Fourth.

I informed Professor Burchard, absolute authority in this matter, of my discovery.

I received his reply immediately. He congratulated me for having discovered the pedigree of the picture, saying that it was a real piece of luck. In the same letter, he praised the picture and he described the works in which it had figured. However, in studying the letter carefully, I found that he said everything, except that the picture had been painted by Rubens himself.

The difference is important; for pictures painted by Rubens himself are very rare while there are innumerable works done by his workshop. As a matter of fact, his atelier was almost like a factory; certain pupils painted the landscapes, others the animals, the figures, and the still lifes, all this according to a composition which Rubens himself had furnished them. Thus it is that a work of Rubens is to be found in many copies throughout the world.

Professor Burchard has studied this question profoundly; and it has always been his task to determine what part of the work was done by the pupils, and what part by the master himself.

In my reply, I thanked him for the description he had kindly sent me, but I told him that it was not sufficient. I wished him to certify that the picture had been painted by the very hand of Rubens. I therefore informed him that I was awaiting his visit. I put a certain sum at his disposal for the trip, and I proposed a fee to him for his expertise.

From that moment on, Professor Burchard did not again reply to me in spite of my very many letters and innumerable solicitations. Whatever I wrote, silence always followed.

In 1957 I went to see him in London. We discussed my picture again, and he promised me formally that he would come to Paris. In spite of this, he did not come.

The following year, 1958, following several telephone calls between Paris and London, he promised me again that he would certainly come to visit me in the summer when passing through Paris on his way to Switzerland.

He did leave, and he passed through Paris, but he did not come to see me.

Before he left for his return trip, I learned his address in Switzerland. I telephoned his hotel, and I waited, naturally in vain. He came through Paris again, but he never bothered to come to see me.

Earlier, however, while congratulating me in one of his letters on my great find, he had stated: "In order to decide whether your picture is the original or not, it is necessary to see the picture itself".

In the month of September 1958, I sent him a re-

gistered letter, for which I still have the receipt. In this letter I told him that he was purposely avoiding my house because he knew very well that my picture was the original, and that he did not want to recognize this for reasons of which I was ignorant.

One year later, that is around November 1959, I learned that a picture with the same subject, from another collection, had been sold at the Cleveland Museum for the price of 550,000 dollars.

After comparing it with my picture and after showing it to several famous art historians, I obtained their absolute agreement that my picture was the original and that the Cleveland one was a copy.

This supposition was confirmed by the pronouncement of Professor Burchard himself who has said:

"When you are in doubt as to which of the pictures is from the hand of Rubens, all you need to do is take X rays, and the good picture is the one which shows "penti-menti".

In other words, Rubens was a master, not only a great painter but also an esthete. Some time after finishing a work, like a man of good taste, he looked at it again, criticized it, and changed certain parts.

The chemical structure of his colours was such that these changes, in spite of the short time which intervened, become visible under the rays; it is extremely easy to determine what the first idea was and what were the changes he has made.

Now my picture was such that, even with the naked eye, one can notice these changes, the so-called "penti-menti"; with X rays we discovered even more of them, at least ten or so.

These X rays gave us absolute proof that it is my picture which is the original composition. I sub-

mitted my proofs to different experts, who unanimously agreed with my point of view.

The intimate collaborator of Professor Burchard told me:

"I do not understand how Professor Burchard dared to acknowledge the American picture as an original; when I go to London, some time soon, I shall ask him myself why he delivered that certificate."

He added:

"What can I do? I am a pupil and collaborator of Professor Burchard; I cannot turn against him."

I was not ignorant of the disastrous situation in which Professor Burchard found himself. He could no longer acknowledge my picture to be an original since he had already acknowledged the Cleveland one to be such. Besides, he maintained all his life that Rubens never repeated his subjects.

I made a long trip in the Middle-East; and, as soon as I had returned, one of my intimate friends who was familiar with this affair said to me: "I have just returned from London. I spoke to Professor Burchard. Why are you trying to injure him? There is no point to your doing that. Go to London, show him all your documents, and arrange things with him."

He was so insistent that I wrote to him, announcing that I would visit him soon.

The 10 February, I had hardly entered the room when Professor Burchard said to me before having even seen my documents:

"One could say that your picture was the first, Rubens having sketched and abandoned it. He then painted a second canvas, which is at present in the

Cleveland Museum. Later he took up your picture again, corrected it, and made it more beautiful."

This proposition was acceptable to me. It completely saved my picture insofar as he acknowledged that mine was the first sketch, while it offered Burchard the possibility of maintaining that the American picture was also an original. Thus his honor was safe.

As soon as I returned to Paris, I made a résumé of our whole conversation, and I sent it to him by registered letter. He made me wait fifteen days for his answer.

Finally, he denied that he had stated that my picture was the first. He said that, on the contrary, my painting was the second and that in Cleveland was the first. But he added that, according to the photographs, my picture must be of rather good quality.

He said that it would be worthwhile to send it to London to him so that he could study it.

After two weeks of reflexion B. had to admit that his explanation that my picture was a first version which was abandoned and later recommenced did not hold water.

The explanation was illogical, a crude homemade explanation visibly invented for the occasion. B. feared that I might get in touch with the Cleveland Museum itself using his very paper.

I thereupon sent him another letter, accusing him of having completely failed in his duty since, for nine years, in spite of all my entreaties, he had refused to inspect my picture, had refused to compare my picture with the one sold to the Cleveland Museum thus defrauding the American state of 550,000 dollars since the sold work could only be a copy or, at best, a work of the atelier, that he had deliberately and coldly decided that the Cleveland

picture would be the authentic one even if there should exist another and better work which had a pedigree from its birth on.

It was not an error of an art historian, but rather the gesture of a dishonest man who profited from his name to rob the American state of 550,000 dollars.

In the meantime, I succeeded in obtaining the manuscript inventory of the collection of the Marquis de Leganès — some 1360 chefs-d'œuvres of the greatest artists of the time — wherein it was definitely specified that the Diana leaving for the hunt was from the hand of Rubens. Among the 31 pictures of that master, mine was the most expensive, 4,400 reales, four times more expensive or the double of all the others.

This proves the importance Rubens attached to that picture and, having paid such a price, the Marquis de Leganès expressed his homage to the artist.

If you contemplate the Cleveland Diana, you will see that, contrary to all the women of Rubens, that one has lost her Flemish heaviness. She has become gracious, light, almost a "pin up girl" like a work of the eighteenth century. Moreover, how is it that a picture this important appears 185 years after its birth?

A nice job, well done. The copyist took enough time to make it perfect. "Imitations have been made at every epoch".

The intimate acquaintances of Mr. Burchard assure me that he has a long routine: when he is attacked, he does not reply, and he waits for the storm to pass over so that he can begin again his degrading machinations.

His actions have been those of a dishonest man. I have told him this so that he could sue me for libel,

including damages. But whether I insult him orally or by letter, he does not make a move. He wraps himself in silence and inertia.

To find a way out of this impasse and to force him to speak, I have chosen this means in sending you this small brochure in order to compel him to litigation. This will be, I hope, the end of the reign of Mr. Burchard.

I accuse B. of having been guilty of an abuse of confidence, of having issued a certificate of approval of a picture which he knew from the beginning was a copy.

Chance has willed it, before I have finished my accusation, that the February number of the bulletin of Cleveland Museum has fallen into my hands. **To my great surprise what do I read? That Max Rooses, the greatest connoisseur of Rubens who has ever existed, was unenthusiastic about the Cleveland canvas** because, stated Burchard, Rooses knew this picture only from an engraving. Well, I have just checked the books of Rooses, notably vol. III, pp 71—80. Here it is stated that it is **"a pretty piece of work done by his pupils"**. There is no error because Rooses publishes with the text an excellent photo of this very picture, and not of the engraving. In the résumé of his catalogue Rooses repeats that the work is not by the hand of Rubens.

Contrary to the affirmations of B. we can prove that Rooses was very well acquainted not with the engraving but with the picture itself, and studied it at length.

Before the hearing of the case, before the submission of other proofs, **you must read, gentlemen, this part of Rooses' book, in order fully to realise the deliberate guilt of Burchard.**

I have always tried to understand the strange, incomprehensible, attitude of Burchard.

It is he who proposed the solution according to which my picture would be the "first version". Why, therefore, has he denied his own words, when we were both of us in unreserved agreement on this question?

It is also the same article in the same journal which has provided the solution to this enigma.

The true reason was much less complicated than my suppositions.

Our meeting took place at Burchard's home on 10 February at 4 in the afternoon. It is probable that at that moment he wrote to the Cleveland museum to inform them that the first version was not that of Cassel but mine.

Alas, he was to learn that the journal for the month of February was already printed, and that nothing could now be changed. Since it was no longer possible for him to admit that there were two versions, only one solution remained: to deny what was agreed between us. And why not? What could this little art dealer do against him?

Everything I assert here I shall prove when the case is heard — by indisputable facts. In the meantime I take all moral and material responsibility for my accusations, I am not unaware of their gravity. This case can end only in the severe condemnation of Professor Ludwig Burchard's.

Paris the 10 April 1960

JEAN NEGER.



