Peter Paul Rubens was a superstar of Baroque culture. He was the painter par excellence of courts and of Catholicism across the whole European continent – and in the New World as well, where his ideas travelled in the form of prints. But Rubens’ superstar status was much bigger than just that of a painter. He was also a diplomat, working to forge the very peace treaties that his artworks advocated. And he was a scholar, fluent in many ancient and modern languages, curious about ancient art and philosophy, a correspondent of some of the greatest minds of his day.

When Rubens died, the King of England said he’d been the most interesting person he’d ever conversed with. Now you too can get to know Rubens!

This course will consider what it meant a person like Rubens to make art; how his art was integrated into the rest of his rich life; what functions it served for him; and how it spoke both to past art and to present politics and philosophy. As Rubens was so much part of the international scene of his day, we will consider his art within the broader visual culture of Europe and, eventually, of the New World as well. We will begin with the Flemish tradition of Pieter Bruegel; follow Rubens to the Italy of Caravaggio; consider Rubens's study of ancient and renaissance art; and explore his studio practice back home in Antwerp. Much of Rubens's later art was connected with his diplomatic missions, which took him to the Spain of Velazquez, the England of Inigo Jones, the Dutch Republic of Rembrandt and the France of Marie de' Medici. We will discuss these diverse visual cultures, and study how Rubens's art interacted with them.