



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

CATHERINE NUTTING

MA (University of Victoria, 2007)

BA (University of Victoria, 2005)

BA (University of Toronto, 1991)

**“Rubens and the Stoic Baroque: Classical Stoic Ethics, Rhetoric, and
Natural Philosophy in Rubens’s Style”**

Department of Art History and Visual Studies

Friday, December 15th, 2017

10:00 a.m.

Fine Arts Building

Room 109

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Erin Campbell, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Catherine Harding, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, UVic (Member)

Dr. Sarah Beam, Department of History, UVic (Outside Member)

Dr. Gregory Blue, Department of History, UVic (Additional Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Robert Williams, Department of Art History, University of California, Santa Barbara

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Lynne Young, School of Nursing, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

Rubens is defined as a painter; he should be also defined as an art theorist. My dissertation investigates how Rubens's *oeuvre* is connected with the classical Stoicism that was one of the defining features in his life. It would be possible to trace Rubens's commitment to Stoicism in his subject matter, but I investigate it in his style, taking a Baxandalian approach to inferential criticism. Following Robert Williams' theory that Early Modern art became philosophical, I believe that style can connote art theoretical interests and philosophical models, and that in Rubens's case, these included the classical Stoic.

I consider that Rubens's stylistic choices relate in part to the classical Stoic philosophy that was current in Early Modern Antwerp. I investigate Rubens's signature style, including his formal choices and his varied brushwork, in terms of his familiarity with classical Stoic theory. I describe the central tenets of Stoicism; how Stoic thought was accessed in Rubens's Antwerp; and how classical Stoics and Early Modern artists alike theorized that style related to viewer response, to meaning and knowledge, and to evolving worldview. My dissertation investigates to what extent Rubens's style shares aspects of Stoic philosophy not only as it influenced Early Modern religion, science, and art theory, but also as it inhered in the classical texts that Rubens read. In the first half of the seventeenth century, classical Stoicism was a key contributor to worldviews, but this is under-represented in the scholarship. In fact, classical Stoicism was integral to early seventeenth-century knowledge, and to art theory and practice.

The chapters of my dissertation mirror the division of Stoic philosophy into Ethics, Logic, and Physics. In Chapter One I treat Stoic moral philosophy as an influence in the design of Rubens's paintings, consider similarities between classical and Early Modern interest in viewer/reader response, and argue that Baroque artists could use style to avoid dogma while targeting viewer's personal transformation. In Chapter Two I focus on Rhetoric, a section of the Stoic philosophy of Logic. Stoic Logic privileged truth: that is, it centred on investigating existing reality. As such, Stoic rhetorical theory and its vestiges in classical Stoic literature promoted a style that is complex and nuanced. I relate this to Early Modern interest in *copia*, arguing that this includes Rubens's painterly style which, apropos *copia*, should be better termed the Abundant Style. In Chapter Three I discuss the Early Modern artistic interest in creating a unified visual field in terms of Stoic Natural Philosophy. The Stoics defined the natural world as eternally moving and mixing; with force fields, energy, and elements in constant relationships of cause/effect. The Stoic concept of natural sympathy, was a notion of material/energetic interrelatedness in which the world was seen as a living body, and the divine inhered in matter. I conclude that Rubens's painting in a life-affirming, almost tactile, style relates to classical Stoicism's optimism – about human nature, the individual's capacity to transform, and about the natural world that frames all human activity.