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Divine Interiors

Experience churches in the age of Rubens

Edited by Claire Baisier



Cat. 34

Peeter Neeffs I

Interior of the Cathedral, 1647

Oil on panel, 35.6 × 53 cm, signed and dated centre right on column 'PEETER NEEFFS 1647'

Private collection, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

PROVENANCE

Sir Henry H. Howorth, London; Christie's, London, 14 December 1923, lot 115; acquired by Borenius; Christie's, London, 13 December 1996, lot 37.

LITERATURE

Maillet 2012, p. 288, M-0665.



Fig. 1
Infrared reflectography, Brussels, KIK/IRPA

The painting has been executed on a high-quality oak panel. A monogram on the reverse, stamped twice in relief with the initials 'LS', indicates that the panel was manufactured by Antwerp panel-maker Lambrecht Steens II (active 1640–51).¹ The front of the panel has been carefully smoothed down and prepared with a white ground, most likely chalk bound with animal glue. This has been followed by a streaky grey imprimatura applied evenly with a stiff brush in a horizontal direction. This layer would have offered a lively but neutral tone on which to work and can be glimpsed in places through the thin paint. The artist then established an elaborate one-point perspective framework for the church interior, the central vanishing point indicated by a pin. The incision for this can still be made out in the left archway of the choir screen. From this central point, neatly ruled lines, clearly visible in infrared reflectography (fig. 1), radiate outwards in every direction, setting arcades, galleries and clerestories in the same ordered structure. Ruled lines also indicate the verticals and

horizontals of piers and arches. Working freehand, the artist then used the same drawing material, probably graphite, to indicate in pointed arches and other architectural details. The underdrawing includes no outlines for the sculptures; indeed, the artist seems to have been primarily concerned with the architectural framework.

Neeffs's painting style is smooth and precise, with delicate highlights picking out the architectural features. The scene is enlivened by the later addition of figures and dogs, which have been applied directly on the finished cathedral interior. These are painted in a looser, more animated style than the somewhat formulaic architectural setting, and have been dated to around 1690.

Christina Currie

NOTES

¹ Van Damme 1990, pp. 207–10.