

The Eye of Paris and the Shield of Medusa: Themes of Ocular Anatomy and Self-reflexivity in Rubens's Judgment of Paris of 1636.

Rubens's Judgment of Paris served as a vehicle for the articulation of themes of sight and vision, as is proved by its inclusion in Jan Brueghel's Allegory of Sight and Smell of 1618 in which a version of the Judgment is placed next to other works such as Christ Healing the Blind. Later in the same century, Fréart de Chambray when commenting on Raphael's Judgment of Paris, which influenced Rubens's Judgment, stated that Paris shown in profile with one eye to the viewer represented the pyramid of vision with an eye at its point. This paper situates Rubens's Judgment of Paris in that ocular tradition; but also in the context of anatomy because the Judgment of Paris concerns itself with the way the eye of Paris anatomises the female body. Drawing on my own research into the phenomenon of ocular anatomy, I attempt a reading dealing not only with the theme of the male eye anatomising female flesh, but also with the self-reflexive gaze directed back onto the viewer and the painter. This, I argue, is suggested by the prominent representation of Medusa's shield next to the displayed body of Minerva. At the time Rubens was painting, Minerva and Medusa appeared in illustrations to baroque anatomical textbooks as metaphors for *Anatomia*, -the personification of anatomy- and its self-reflexive quality, symbolised by the gorgon's shield and mirror. Moreover, 17th century anatomists would have known of a philosophical tradition linking Medusa's mirror with male fears of menstruation. By superimposing themes of ocular anatomy and this medical discourse over Rubens's Judgment of Paris, I hope to show that the painting could be informed by anatomical knowledge contained in textbooks and manuals of the 1620s and 1630s.

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