

KLAAS MULLER

J A N B O E C K H O R S T

Henri IV at the Battle of Ivry

In 1622, Maria de' Medici signed a contract with Rubens for two series of twenty-four paintings. The first series depicted her own life story, the other the heroic deeds of her husband: Henri IV. As was his custom, Rubens worked on this commission together with some of his pupils and assistants.

The successful king had been assassinated 12 years earlier whilst riding through Paris in an open carriage. He had brought an end to the fierce civil war between Protestants and Catholics and did not shy away from doing the heavy lifting on the battlefield himself. What was intended to be a tribute to one of France's bravest leaders turned out to be a damp squib. Due to turmoil at court, the series about the famous battle near Paris remained unfinished.

This dynamic and finely worked drawing captures the dramatic moment of the Battle of Ivry (1590), where King Henri IV led his forces to a decisive victory during the French Wars of Religion. Executed in pen and brown ink and enriched with watercolour and gouache, the composition is animated by vigorous movement and strong contrasts of light and shadow. The artist heightens the scene with touches of white and red wash, emphasizing the glint of armour, the energy of the horses, and the intensity of the clash.

The central figure of Henri IV, mounted and illuminated, commands the composition, surrounded by swirling troops and fallen adversaries. Ethereal figures above the battlefield introduce a sense of divine favour, a motif often associated with royal propaganda of the period. Despite its relatively intimate scale, the sheet conveys remarkable grandeur and narrative force, making it a compelling example of late 16th- to early 17th-century battle imagery.

Pen and Brown ink, watercolour and gouache, heightened with white and red wash on paper, 200 x 291 mm (7 ⁷/₈ x 11 ¹/₂ inches)



Artist description:

Jan Boeckhorst was a German-born Flemish Baroque painter and draughtsman who worked most of his career in Antwerp. He was a versatile artist who produced history paintings, genre scenes and portraits in a style influenced by the trio of leading Antwerp painters Peter Paul Rubens, Anthony van Dyck and Jacob Jordaens. Boeckhorst also worked as a designer of cartoons for tapestries.