



## Portrait Of Isabella, Duchess Of Grafton (c.1688-1723) C.1691; Studio Of Sir Godfrey Kneller



### Description

Portrait of Isabella, Duchess of Grafton  
(c.1688-1723) circa 1691  
Studio of Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723)

This magnificent large-scale swagger portrait is a repetition from Kneller's studio of which the prototype was amongst the series of "beauties" at Hampton Court. Painted circa 1691, its extravagant grand manner is distinctive of Kneller's work from this period, where the use of full-length swaggering poses and a heightened sense of movement and physical presence were employed.

In 1690 Mary II commissioned Kneller to paint a series, in Defoe's words, 'of the principal Ladies attending upon her Majesty, or who were

14 850 EUR

Signature : Atelier de Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723)

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Length : 8

Width : 129

Height : 155

<https://www.proantic.com/en/462606-portrait-of-isabella-duchess-of-grafton-c1688-1723-c1691-studio-of-sir-godfrey-kneller.html>

### Dealer

**Titan Fine Art**

Quality British and European Fine Art, 17th to 20th century

Mobile : +44 (0) 7875 412 111

Londres SE26 4NT

frequently in her Retinue'. The set of eight portraits were aptly named The Hampton Court Beauties and were the most glamorous ladies from the court of William III. Still to this day they remain at Hampton Court. According to Horace Walpole Mary II was advised by Lady Dorchester against the idea of having the most beautiful of her court painted: 'Madam, if the King were to ask for the portraits of all the wits in his court, would not the rest think he called them fools?'. The portrait of the Duchess of Grafton, painted January of 1690, the same year that her husband died, was the first in the series of Beauties. The Wardrobe Accounts for Michaelmas 1691 include a payment of £400 to "Sir Godfrind Kneller Our Principal Painter for Eight pictures drawne att Length".

The Lady Isabella Bennet (1667-1723), only daughter and sole heir of Henry Bennet, 1st Earl of Arlington, was precontracted in marriage to Henry Fitzroy, Earl of Euston, later 1st Duke of Grafton K.G. (1683-1690), the second illegitimate son of King Charles II, by Barbara Villiers, Countess of Castlemaine, in 1672, when five years old. The marriage took place on 6 November 1679 and was witnessed by the diarist John Evelyn who commented that 'the sweetest, hopefulest, most beautiful child, and most virtuous too, was sacrific'd to a boy that had been rudely bred...[she] will in few years be such a paragon, as were fit to make the Wife of the greatest Prince in Europe'" although he added that he was 'exceedingly handsome, by far surpassing any of the king's other naturall issue' (John Evelyn, Diary, I, 184). Her husband died from wounds sustained during the siege of Cork, and she married secondly Sir Thomas Hanmer, 4th Baronet.

Artists often produced more than one version of a painting. Clients could commission several versions, perhaps for their different homes, or for their children or friends. Portraits were first and

foremost mementos and it was not uncommon, even for men, to give their portrait to a friend. There could be a demand for a particular painting and, as such, artists were only too happy to replicate it. It was not unusual for portraits of well-known individuals such as royalty to be replicated more than ten times, sometimes within the same period or several years later. The studio practice of some of the great and prolific artists also repeated poses that were popular, having sets of stock poses. The two great portrait painters of the second half of the 17th century in Great Britain, Lely and Kneller, employed various specialists, to take care of the landscapes, costumes, draperies, and if needs be animals, flowers and fruit as well as the accessories in the portraits, allowing the masters to concentrate solely on the faces and hands. This enabled the portrait painters to run an efficient and prolific studio. The younger Willem van de Velde headed a virtual assembly line with assistants like his son Cornelis van de Velde (1675-1729) and the Dutchman Johan C. van der Hagen (1645-c.1720). Many of his seascapes are thus largely or wholly their work. If any picture became particularly popular, they would run off three or four copies or versions in the studio, and in some cases even ten or more. Today these works of art are highly valued.

Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723) was born in Germany but trained in Amsterdam and studied in Italy before moving to England in 1676. Towards the end of the century, after the deaths of Peter Lely and John Riley, Kneller became the leading portrait painter in Britain and the court painter to English and British monarchs from Charles II to George I. He dominated English art for more than thirty years. His over 40 "Kit-cat portraits" and the ten "beauties" of the court of William III are most noteworthy. He ran a large, busy and successful studio in London and employed many assistants thereby establishing a routine that enabled a great number of works to be produced.

His name became synonymous with British portraiture at the time and he rose to great notoriety; and there were countless other artists that strove to emulate his style. He received a knighthood from the King, an honour that had never been given to an artist. He died of a fever in London in 1723 and a memorial was erected in Westminster Abbey.

In Kneller's will he left 500 unfinished pictures to his chief assistant Edward Byng (c.1676-1753) who in Kneller's words had "for many years faithfully served me". Byng lived with him at a house in Great Queen Street. Kneller gave him a pension of £100 a year, and entrusted him to complete these pictures, for which he was to receive the payments for them. Kneller had been paid only by half for these; whether his clients were not as expeditious to pay as they were to sit or whether Kneller's death came first, the reason being unknown. Byng also inherited drawings in Kneller's studio, many now in the British Museum. He later lived at Potterne, near Devizes, where he died in 1753 and was buried. His brother Robert was also a painter and many works have been jointly attributed to both brothers. According to Edward's will his estate was divided after his sister Elizabeth's death between his nephew's William Wray, Robert Bateman Wray and Charles Wray (not, as some have suggested, to Robert Bateman Wray and his sister Mary).

Provenance: On the reverse of our portrait contains a label stating "Painted by Sir Godfrey Kneller being duplicate of one at Hampton Court bequeathed by Sir GK to his pupil Edward Byng, brother of Eliz. Byng who married Rev. William Wray Rector of Broadchalk Wiltshire".

Measurements: Height 155cm, Width 129cm, Depth 8.5cm framed (Height 61", Width 50.75", Depth 3.25" framed)