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Jonathan Richardson The Elder, Portrait Of Mary Hooper (née Davie), English Oil Portrait C.1715



14 250 EUR

Signature : Jonathan Richardson the Elder (1667-1745)

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 126

Height : 153

Depth : 10

Description

This portrait is of particular historical interest as a large-scale female portrait by Jonathan Richardson the Elder with a securely identified sitter, from a known heiress family, painted by a major English intellectual artist, and an exceptionally coherent provenance with unbroken recognition of identity. It was part of a collection of family portraits and heirlooms and descended from the sitter within the family for nearly 300 years. That combination is rare. The portrait also illuminates the role of women as transmitters of property and social continuity and exemplifies the cultural values of the professional and landed elite in early eighteenth-century Britain. Its survival, condition, and documentation make it an unusually complete and compelling record of its time. The sitter is shown seated in a

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three-quarter-length format, turned gently to her left and engaging the viewer with a calm, composed gaze. She wears a blue silk gown arranged in broad, fluid folds over a pale chemise, the neckline cut low across the shoulders in keeping with early Georgian fashion. The drapery is handled with confident breadth, its silvery-blue tonality offset against a warm-toned landscape background, suggesting an outdoor setting at dusk. Her hair is dressed close to the head, softly waved and drawn back without excessive ornament, reflecting contemporary taste for natural elegance over Restoration exuberance. Jewellery is notably restrained, underscoring dignity and status through composure rather than display. The costume, hairstyle, and painterly handling securely date the portrait to c. 1715-1725, a transitional period following the death of Queen Anne and the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty. The near life-size scale of the canvas signals a commission of considerable ambition and expense, intended for prominent display within a country house interior. The painting bears an inscription identifying the sitter as Mrs Hooper and a signature reading Richardson pinx. From a technical and stylistic standpoint, the work aligns convincingly with the hand of Jonathan Richardson the Elder. The modelling of the face demonstrates Richardson's characteristic method: thin, carefully layered paint produces a cool, luminous complexion, while the eyes are rendered with psychological attentiveness rather than theatrical brilliance. The mouth is delicately shaped, imparting a sense of restraint and inward reflection typical of Richardson's most accomplished portraits. This sober psychological realism distinguishes his work from the more courtly idealisation favoured by Sir Godfrey Kneller and his studio. The handling of the drapery and background is broader and more fluent, suggesting possible studio participation--entirely consistent with Richardson's documented practice on larger commissions--while the head and hands exhibit

the degree of finish and sensitivity associated with his own hand. The discreet use of pinx (pinxit) accords with Richardson's known signature conventions. Taken together, the inscription, scale, painterly technique, and intellectual gravity of the likeness support a confident attribution to Jonathan Richardson the Elder, possibly with studio assistance in subsidiary passages. It is documented, in 1931, that the sitter is Mary Hooper, born Mary Davie (baptised on 22 April 1688). She was the eldest daughter and co-heiress of Sir William Davie, 4th Baronet of Creedy, Devon, and his first wife Mary Steadman, the sole heiress to the estate of Downside, in the parish of Midsomer Norton, Somerset. Sir William Davie died without male issue, leaving his daughters as substantial heiresses and precipitating complex legal and estate arrangements typical of early eighteenth-century landed families. Mary's inheritance, drawn from both paternal and maternal lines, made her a woman of considerable property and consequence. She married Nicholas Hooper, Esq., of Raleigh, Devon, son of Sir Nicholas Hooper, a distinguished lawyer and Tory Member of Parliament for Barnstaple. The marriage united inherited land with legal and political influence, situating Mary at the intersection of wealth, law, and governance in the West Country. This portrait was almost certainly commissioned shortly after Mary Davie's marriage to Nicholas Hooper, or in close connection with the consolidation of her inheritance, and was most likely displayed in the Great Parlour (sometimes called the Great Room or Best Room) at Raleigh, Devon (the Hooper family seat) where portraits of mistresses of the house were commonly hung to visually reinforce who presided over the household, especially true for heiresses, whose identity carried legal and dynastic weight. Portraits of this scale functioned as visual affirmations of lineage, property, and social standing. Mary's life would have been centred on

family estates in Devon and Somerset, with periods spent in London, where her husband's legal and parliamentary connections were based. As a wealthy gentlewoman she likely: oversaw servants/tenants/household accounts, directed charitable giving in local parishes, managed food production, storage, and distribution, acted as informal mediator in tenant disputes, and maintained kinship networks across Devon, Somerset, and Kent. Women like Mary were often described as "retired" or "private," yet they were the operational core of estate life. Her lifetime encompassed significant historical change, including the Union of England and Scotland (1707), the Hanoverian succession (1714), the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745, and Britain's rise as a global commercial and imperial power. The portrait thus stands as a visual document of early Georgian identity at a moment when authority increasingly rested on property, law, and intellect. Mary died on 16 May 1762 at the age of seventy-four. Mary Hooper's life is a story of inheritance managed rather than squandered, of alliances carefully chosen, and of a woman whose identity was strong enough to endure in paint and memory for over three centuries. One of the most telling "anecdotes" is not an event, but a fact: her portrait was not discarded, overpainted, or anonymised. Instead, her name was preserved, her likeness passed through generations, her identity mattered enough to be recorded - this suggests that Mary Hooper was remembered as a founder figure within later family lines, a woman whose inheritance mattered, and someone seen as worthy of preservation, not replacement. In early modern family culture, that is no small distinction. This portrait is an exceptional survival of early eighteenth-century English portraiture: a rare large-scale female work by Jonathan Richardson the Elder, preserving the sitter identification and an unusually complete, multi-generational provenance. Combining intellectual gravity with aristocratic scale, it captures a moment when

inherited wealth, legal power, and cultural aspiration converged in the emerging Georgian elite. Few portraits of this period unite such artistic quality, historical specificity, and documentary depth. Broome Park, Barham (Kent)--the long-time seat associated with the Oxenden family line--was notable not only for its 1630s house and historic parkland, but also for an extensive display of ancestral portraits. Jonathan Richardson the Elder was among the most influential English portrait painters of the early eighteenth century and a central figure in London's artistic and intellectual life. Trained under John Riley, he established a successful practice catering primarily to the professional and landed elite--lawyers, physicians, scholars, clergy, and politically engaged gentry. Beyond his work as a painter, Richardson was a theorist, writer, and collector. His *Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) was one of the earliest and most influential works of English art criticism, shaping taste and discourse for a generation. Richardson moved in literary and philosophical circles and exerted lasting influence through his teaching, notably as the father and mentor of Jonathan Richardson the Younger. His portraits are celebrated for their psychological depth, sobriety, and moral seriousness, favouring intellectual presence over courtly display. These qualities are fully realised in the present work. Provenance: Probably commissioned by and originally in the possession of the sitter, Mary Hooper (née Davie) (1688-1762); Thence by descent to her half-sister, Frances Davie (1697-1748), who married Sir George Chudleigh, 4th Baronet; Thence to their daughter, Margaret Chudleigh (the sitter's niece), who married Sir Henry Oxenden, 6th Baronet (1721-1803), of Deane Park, Wingham, Kent; Thence by descent to their son, Sir Henry Oxenden, 7th Baronet (1756-1838), at Deane Park and Broome Park, Kent; Thence by descent in the Oxenden family, Deane Park and Broome Park, Kent; Muriel Dixwell-Oxenden, Lady Capel Cure (1869-1968),

Broome Park, Kent;Her sale, London, Christie's,  
20 November 1931, lot 82, bought by Mitchell  
(probably the London dealer John Mitchell,  
founder of John Mitchell Fine  
Paintings);Reputedly Isabella Robertson Christie  
(1861-1949), Cowden Castle, Scotland;Allegedly  
sold in her sale, Cowden Castle, Dowell's Ltd.,  
Edinburgh, May 1950;Achille Gallo (1895-1962),  
New Orleans, Louisiana;By descent through the  
Estate of William and Beverly (Gallo) Caulfield,  
New Orleans, LouisianaMeasurements:Height  
153cm, Width 126cm, Depth 10cm framed  
(Height 60.25", Width 49.5", Depth 4" framed)