



Portrait Of A Gentleman With Periwig And Blue Cloak C.1695-1710; Attributed To Thomas Murray



7 650 EUR

Signature : Attribué à Thomas Murray (1663-1734)

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 80

Height : 93

Depth : 7

Description

This accomplished oil-on-canvas portrait was almost certainly commissioned to assert social identity, respectability, and continuity. Such portraits were typically displayed in principal rooms of country houses or town residences, functioning as statements of lineage and status. The sitter appears to be a member of the professional or landed gentry, rather than a courtier or aristocrat. He may plausibly have been a lawyer, landowner, administrator, or merchant-gentleman--someone whose position depended upon education, property, and reputation rather than inherited title alone. Life for such a man around 1700 was shaped by a period of profound political and social transition. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had established a constitutional monarchy, strengthening

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Parliament and redefining loyalty and authority. Under William III and later Queen Anne, England was increasingly engaged in continental conflict, culminating in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). At the same time, commerce expanded, London grew rapidly, and polite culture--clubs, coffeehouses, and professional networks--played an ever greater role in shaping elite male identity. A gentleman of this class would likely have divided his time between estate management or professional duties, participation in local governance or parish affairs, and periodic engagement with the cultural and political life of London. The portrait is attributed to Thomas Murray (1663-1734), the Scottish-born painter who enjoyed a successful career in London during the late Stuart and early Georgian periods. Murray trained under John Riley, one of the leading portraitists of his generation, and, like his master, specialised primarily as a face-painter. Contemporary sources indicate that Murray frequently worked within a collaborative studio practice, painting the head while assistants completed wigs, drapery, and backgrounds. The present work accords closely with this documented method. The handling of the sitter's face is refined and restrained. The flesh is modelled through soft tonal transitions rather than linear definition, producing a calm, dignified expression. Heavy upper eyelids, muted highlights, and the carefully controlled construction of the nose and mouth are all characteristic of Murray's securely attributed portraits and of the broader Riley tradition. The upper eyelid is heavy and slightly swollen, with a soft crease rather than a drawn line whilst the lower lid is defined by a cool grey-blue tone (likely black + lead white), not by a line. The eye socket is built tonally, not architecturally. The mouth is particularly telling: the upper lip is thin and tightly controlled, the philtrum is understated, almost suppressed, the lower lip is modelled with red lake + white, and softly glazed. This technique is very characteristic of Murray's heads,

and since it is finished with greater care than the surrounding elements, while the wig, blue drapery, and dark recessive background are executed more schematically, this reinforces the likelihood of collaborative production typical of Murray's professional practice. This quiet, disciplined manner distinguishes the painting from the more assertive and theatrical style of Sir Godfrey Kneller, whose work dominated court portraiture at the time. The sitter's costume and hair provide a secure date of c. 1695-1710. He wears a full-bottomed curled wig, still fashionable at the turn of the century but already softened from the rigid, architectural wigs of the 1670s and 1680s. The narrow white cravat corresponds to late William III and early Queen Anne taste, before the emergence of broader and more relaxed neckwear after about 1715. Draped across the figure is a rich blue mantle, likely painted with smalt, a pigment widely used in late 17th-century England and now characteristically subdued through age. Blue drapery of this type conveyed dignity, loyalty, and social standing, and was frequently employed in portraits of gentlemen of means. On the reverse of the canvas are several later labels, including a handwritten inscription naming "Thomas Murray" accompanied by incorrect life dates. These annotations were most likely added in the 19th or early 20th century, a period when works were frequently re-identified during estate inventories, sales, or family reorganisations. The inaccurate dates may reflect imperfect knowledge or reliance on secondary sources, and possibly confusion between sitter and artist--an error not uncommon in later provenance traditions. While these labels cannot be treated as documentary proof, they suggest a persistent association of the work with the name Thomas Murray and do not contradict the stylistic and chronological evidence supporting the present attribution. The painting survives in a fine carved and gilded period frame, richly ornamented with scrolling foliage. Frames of this quality were integral to the original

presentation of portraits in elite interiors, enhancing both their visual impact and their function as symbols of permanence and authority. Taken together, the stylistic evidence, technical handling, costume analysis, and later attributional history support the identification of this painting as a portrait attributed to Thomas Murray. As such, it stands as a compelling and historically resonant example of English portraiture around 1700, offering insight into the professional practices of a significant painter and the social world of the gentleman he portrayed. Measurements: Height 93cm, Width 80cm framed (Height 36.5", Width 31.5" framed)