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Portrait Of An Elegant Lady With Pet Dog C.1690-1700; Studio Of Godfrey Kneller, Oil On Canvas



12 750 EUR

Signature : Studio of Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723)

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 116

Height : 140

Depth : 9.5

Description

This handsome late-Stuart portrait is an especially engaging example of the grand English female portrait at the turn of the eighteenth century: elegant in scale, courtly in manner, and unusually appealing in its combination of aristocratic display and domestic intimacy. The young sitter is presented in a wooded landscape, seated with quiet assurance, her pale face and softly powdered complexion luminous against the dark foliage beyond. Resting against her lap is a small pet dog, whose alert presence gives the portrait a note of movement and affection. The result is not merely a formal likeness, but a carefully composed image of beauty, rank, refinement and cultivated sensibility. The painting belongs to the dominant tradition of English elite portraiture established by Sir Godfrey Kneller and his studio

Dealer

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in the decades around 1700. Its imposing 50 x 40 inch format was one of the standard large-scale portrait sizes used for country-house display, substantial enough to confer social presence while intimate enough to suit a private interior. Within this format, the sitter is shown three-quarter-length, placed before trees and evening sky, and dressed in a mode of elegant semi-informality that was especially favoured for female portraits of the late Stuart period. The picture was evidently intended to project more than personal appearance. It presents the sitter as a woman of fashion and gentility, poised between the public claims of lineage and the private virtues of affection, constancy and grace. The costume supports a date of about 1690-1700, with the balance of evidence pointing most persuasively to the 1690s. The sitter wears a warm golden-brown gown or mantle over a white shift or chemise, the neckline broad and low, the sleeves full and loosely gathered. This is not literal everyday dress, but the highly painterly "undress" of late-seventeenth-century portraiture: a deliberately softened and idealised version of contemporary fashion, designed to evoke ease, beauty and aristocratic leisure. The mantua had become the dominant form of fashionable female dress in the 1690s, while the chemise or smock remained the essential underlayer. In portraits, however, such garments were frequently transformed into a language of draped silk, exposed shoulder, open neckline and flowing sleeve, hovering between contemporary fashion and classical idealisation. The sitter's softly massed curls, pale complexion and small red mouth likewise belong to the visual vocabulary of the 1690s, before the harder, more architectural fashions of the later Queen Anne and early Georgian decades took hold. The dog is central to the painting's effect. Small dogs in female portraiture were not casual studio accessories. They could operate as emblems of fidelity, constancy, affectionate domesticity and refined leisure. In the present work the dog presses into

the sitter's lap while she touches it lightly with one hand, transforming the picture from a purely dynastic likeness into an image of character. It suggests tenderness without sentimentality, rank without stiffness, and private feeling within the formal conventions of aristocratic portraiture. For a young woman of the English gentry or nobility around 1690-1700, this balance would have been highly desirable. The portrait speaks the language of marriageability, household virtue, social confidence and cultivated taste. Although her name is lost, the sitter's world can be reconstructed with some confidence. A portrait of this size, ambition and type would almost certainly have represented a woman from the aristocracy, landed gentry or wealthy professional elite. She may have been painted shortly before marriage, at the time of marriage, or in the early years of married life. Such portraits were frequently commissioned to celebrate alliance: between families, estates, fortunes and political interests. The sitter's beauty and refinement are foregrounded, but so too is her role within a wider dynastic structure. In late-seventeenth-century England, a woman of her class would have been expected to preside over household management, kinship networks, hospitality, correspondence and the social education of children. Her portrait would have hung not simply as decoration, but as a visual assertion of family continuity. Her life would likely have moved between a country seat and the metropolitan world of London. The English elite of the 1690s increasingly inhabited both spheres. The country house remained the centre of lineage, land and inherited authority, while London offered access to court, Parliament, legal business, commerce, portrait painters, dressmakers, theatres and luxury goods. A woman such as this sitter may have travelled to London for the social season, for family negotiations, for shopping and portrait sittings, and then returned to a house where her portrait would become part of a broader ancestral display.

The wooded landscape behind her does not identify a specific estate, but it evokes landed possession and cultivated retirement. It places her within the ideal world of the English country house, even if the painting itself may have been made in Kneller's London studio. The historical moment in which the portrait was painted gives it further resonance. The 1690s followed the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, which brought William III and Mary II to the throne and altered the balance of power between crown and Parliament. England was also engaged in war with France, while the financial structures of the modern state were beginning to take shape, including the founding of the Bank of England in 1694. For the political and landed classes, portraiture mattered intensely in this climate. It provided visible evidence of stability, legitimacy and continuity at a moment of constitutional, religious and financial transformation. The elite did not commission portraits merely to record faces; they commissioned them to embody status, allegiance, taste and permanence. Kneller and his studio are known to have employed this composition as a recognised type: a young lady in a golden or yellow-brown gown, seated in a wooded landscape, with a small dog on or beside her lap. Kneller's studio practice depended upon the adaptation of successful compositional formulae for different sitters. The present canvas should therefore be understood as a variant within this established Knellerian repertory and it appears that Kneller and his assistants used this composition more than once for fashionable female sitters in the 1690s. The art market of late Stuart London was well suited to this demand. By the 1690s Sir Godfrey Kneller had become the most important portrait painter in England, succeeding Sir Peter Lely as the dominant image-maker of the court and aristocracy. Born in Lübeck and trained within the broader North European artistic tradition, Kneller came to England in 1676 and quickly established himself as the painter of kings, queens, courtiers,

politicians and fashionable society. After Lely's death in 1680 he rose to unrivalled prominence, becoming Principal Painter to the Crown and producing the celebrated series of female court portraits known as the Hampton Court Beauties for Queen Mary II. His success was not only artistic but organisational. Kneller's studio developed a highly efficient system of portrait production in which successful poses, draperies, landscape settings and formats could be repeated, varied and adapted for different patrons. The handling also supports an attribution to the studio of Kneller rather than an unqualified autograph attribution. The face has the pale, smooth, idealised quality associated with Kneller's female sitters: almond-shaped eyes, delicately arched brows, a small mouth, softly modelled cheeks and an air of controlled aristocratic reserve. The hair is broadly and vaporously painted, the drapery arranged in rich masses of brown, gold, and white, and the landscape treated as a tonal stage rather than a topographical setting. These are all recognisably Knellerian features. The most accurate and defensible attribution is therefore "Studio of Sir Godfrey Kneller," circa 1690-1700, and perhaps more narrowly circa 1693-1700. This wording gives full weight to the painting's visual and compositional connection with Kneller and it is persuasive because the picture relates so closely to a documented studio type and to the large-scale elite portrait production for which Kneller's London workshop was renowned. As a gallery picture, the work has considerable strengths. It offers the scale and authority of a grand English country-house portrait, but with an unusually charming and accessible subject. The sitter is young, beautiful and engaging; the dog adds warmth and symbolism; the costume is rich and highly decorative; and the wooded landscape gives the composition depth and atmosphere. The connection with Kneller's studio places the work within the most important portrait-making enterprise in England at the turn of the eighteenth century, while the comparison with other

documented works of the same composition provides strong scholarly support for the dating and attribution. Even without a recovered name, the painting evokes a vivid social world: the world of late Stuart marriage, lineage, country-house display and metropolitan fashion. Its appeal lies precisely in this combination of beauty, history and decorative power. It is not simply a portrait of an unknown lady, but a sophisticated survival from the culture of English elite portraiture around 1700, painted in the orbit of the artist who defined that culture. Large, elegant, richly coloured and emotionally engaging, it offers collectors the presence of a grand late-seventeenth-century portrait together with the intimacy of a sitter whose hand, glance and faithful companion still make the image feel personal more than three centuries later. Measurements: Height 140cm, Width 116cm, Depth 9.5cm framed (Height 55", Width 45.5", Height 3.75" framed)