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Portrait Of Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich, Future Emperor Paul I Of Russia C.1780, Oil On Canvas



8 850 EUR

Signature : D'après Alexander Roslin (1718-1793)

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 65

Height : 81

Depth : 7

Description

Portrait of Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich (1754-1801), later Emperor Paul I of Russia After Alexander Roslin (1718-1793) Oil on canvas, c.1780 This is an exceptionally handsome and historically resonant eighteenth-century portrait, uniting the immediacy of an intimate likeness with the authority of one of the defining dynastic images of Imperial Russia. Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich, the future Emperor Paul I, turns towards the spectator with a composed, almost conversational expression, his youthful face emerging softly from the restrained brown background. The rich scarlet of his coat, the deep blue of the sash and the flashes of gold, lace and jewelled decoration give the picture remarkable visual distinction, while the oval format concentrates attention upon the sitter's face and

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magnificent ceremonial attire. Painted during the eighteenth century, the present work is a contemporary reduced version of Alexander Roslin's monumental state portrait of 1777, now in the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Roslin's full-length original measures approximately 265 by 168 centimetres; here, its essential elements have been reformulated as a more intimate portrait suitable for display within an aristocratic residence, diplomatic household or private cabinet. Pavel is dressed in the height of European court fashion of the later 1770s. His scarlet habit à la française comprises a close-fitting coat and elaborately embroidered waistcoat, enriched with scrolling metallic ornament, floral motifs and a sequence of large decorative buttons. The shoulder is finished with a densely worked epaulette-like band, while a white linen stock and delicate lace jabot frame the face. His powdered hair is dressed in the fashionable bag-wig, drawn back and tied with a broad black silk ribbon. Although the costume is unmistakably Russian in its dynastic significance, its cut and ornament belong to the international language of court dress then prevailing from Versailles and Vienna to Stockholm and St Petersburg. In Roslin's original full-length composition, the costume was completed by matching scarlet breeches, silk stockings, buckled shoes, a sword and a plumed tricorne, all identifying Pavel as both a prince of the blood and a cultivated participant in the ceremonial life of Europe's great courts. Across his breast passes the broad blue watered-silk sash of the Imperial Order of St Andrew the First-Called, the senior Russian order of chivalry established by Peter the Great. The sash, conventionally worn from the right shoulder towards the left hip, proclaimed the sitter's position at the summit of the imperial hierarchy. Superimposed upon it is the red-enamelled cross of the Order of St Anna, surrounded in the portrait by scintillating, jewel-like highlights. The cross had a particular dynastic resonance: the order had been founded

by Pavel's paternal grandfather, Duke Karl Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp, in memory of his wife Anna Petrovna, daughter of Peter the Great. Pavel's display of the two orders therefore asserted not only rank and honour, but his descent from the founder of Imperial Russia and his inheritance through the Romanov and Holstein-Gottorp lines. Contemporary portraits similarly identify Pavel through the blue sash and star of St Andrew and the red cross of St Anna. Born in St Petersburg in 1754, Pavel Petrovich was the only son of Grand Duke Peter Fyodorovich, later Emperor Peter III, and Grand Duchess Catherine Alexeyevna, the future Catherine the Great. Through his father he was a great-grandson of Peter the Great and inherited the Romanov and Holstein-Gottorp bloodlines; through his mother, born Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, he was connected to the extensive network of German princely houses that shaped eighteenth-century European dynastic politics. His childhood was dominated by the uncertainties of imperial succession. Soon after his birth, the Empress Elizabeth removed him to her own household and assumed control of his upbringing. Educated under the statesman Nikita Panin, Pavel studied history, geography and mathematics and became fluent in Russian, French and German. He was eight when his father ascended the throne in 1762, only to be deposed by Catherine within months and to die shortly afterwards in confinement. Although Pavel remained the acknowledged heir, Catherine ruled for another thirty-four years and excluded him from meaningful political authority. He was therefore publicly honoured as the future sovereign while being denied the practical experience of government. In 1773 he married Princess Wilhelmina Louisa of Hesse-Darmstadt, who converted to Orthodoxy as Grand Duchess Natalia Alexeievna. She died in April 1776 after a prolonged labour, together with her stillborn child, leaving Pavel widowed and the succession unsecured. A second marriage was arranged

within months. His new bride was Duchess Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg, daughter of Friedrich Eugen, later Duke of Württemberg, and Friederike Dorothea of Brandenburg-Schwedt. Raised at Montbéliard in a cultivated German princely household, she converted to Orthodoxy as Maria Feodorovna and married Pavel in October 1776. The union strengthened Russia's links with Württemberg and Brandenburg-Prussia, but also became an enduring domestic and cultural partnership. Maria was intelligent and artistically gifted, practising drawing, embroidery, ivory carving and hardstone work, while collecting books and decorative art and later supporting charitable and educational institutions. The couple had ten children, nine of whom survived childhood. Their eldest son, Alexander, succeeded Pavel as Emperor Alexander I and ruled during the Napoleonic era; their younger son Nicholas later became Emperor Nicholas I. Constantine Pavlovich became a prominent military figure and briefly stood at the centre of the succession crisis of 1825. Their daughters married into leading European dynasties: Alexandra into the Austrian imperial family, Elena into Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Maria into Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Catherine into Württemberg and Anna into the Dutch royal house. Through their children, Pavel and Maria extended Romanov influence across much of Europe. The birth of Alexander in 1777 secured the succession and prompted Catherine to give the couple the estate that became Pavlovsk, south of St Petersburg. Its Neoclassical palace, begun by Charles Cameron in the early 1780s, became closely associated with Maria's artistic interests, family life and refined sociability. Gatchina, by contrast, reflected Pavel's more martial character. There he developed his own court and pursued his interests in military organisation, ceremony and administrative discipline. In 1781-82 Pavel and Maria travelled through Europe as the Count and Countess of the North, visiting royal courts, artists, manufactories and antiquities collections.

They acquired paintings, furniture, bronzes, sculpture, textiles and porcelain, helping to make Pavlovsk one of Russia's most sophisticated expressions of international Neoclassical taste. Yet Catherine continued to restrict their independence, taking charge of the upbringing of Alexander and Constantine just as Empress Elizabeth had once removed Pavel from his own parents. This repetition deepened the estrangement between mother and son. Pavel finally succeeded Catherine in 1796, aged forty-two. His reign lasted little more than four years, but his Act of Succession of 1797 established male-line primogeniture and ended much of the uncertainty surrounding the Russian imperial succession. His attempts to regulate the court, army and administration, and to reverse elements of Catherine's policies, alienated powerful members of the nobility and officer corps. In March 1801 he was assassinated during a palace coup at the Mikhailovsky Castle and was succeeded by Alexander. This knowledge lends the portrait particular poignancy: Pavel appears not as the embattled emperor of his final years, but as the elegant young heir at a moment when marriage, dynasty and the anticipated birth of a son seemed to promise stability and renewal. Roslin's portrait should be understood within this urgent dynastic context. The Swedish painter had travelled to St Petersburg in 1775 at the personal invitation of Catherine II and was commissioned to paint monumental state portraits of the Empress, Pavel and Maria Feodorovna. The pendant portraits of the young couple presented the heir and his new wife as the polished, fertile and internationally connected future of the Romanov dynasty. Roslin recorded in 1777 that the ruling family had ordered multiple copies. At least six versions of Pavel's portrait and twelve of Maria's are known, and such replicas were distributed as courtly and diplomatic gifts. A pair was presented to James Harris, later First Earl of Malmesbury, then the British ambassador to Russia. The existence of

numerous eighteenth-century replicas was therefore not accidental or merely commercial: repetition was integral to the commission's political purpose. Each version extended the official image of succession from the imperial palace into allied courts, embassies and aristocratic collections. The present portrait belongs to that wider culture of dynastic dissemination. Rather than reproducing Roslin's entire monumental setting, with its architectural balustrade, extensive Neva prospect, sword, hat and full ceremonial costume, the painter has selected the head and upper body and adapted them to an oval. This transformation changes the character of the image. The grandeur of the original remains legible in the orders, costume and confident turn of the figure, but the reduced composition produces a greater sense of proximity to Pavel himself. The face becomes dominant, and the future emperor appears less as a remote emblem of state than as a recognisable young man. The type also circulated through prints: an oval engraved version published in 1781 and now represented in the British Museum demonstrates how rapidly Roslin's conception entered the broader visual culture of late-eighteenth-century Europe. The artistic economy in which the portrait was created differed substantially from the modern open market. In Catherine's Russia, the most prestigious portrait production was sustained by imperial commissions, aristocratic patronage and diplomatic gift-giving. Roslin's success was extraordinary: during approximately two years in Russia he received around seventy-five commissions, many of which had to be completed after his return west. The appetite for his work reflected both the wealth of the Russian court and its determination to present itself through the most polished international style available. Alongside imported masters such as Roslin, Russia was developing its own institutional artistic culture. The Academy of the Three Noble Arts had been founded in St Petersburg in 1757

and was elevated by Catherine in 1764 to the Imperial Academy of Arts. It recruited European teachers, trained Russian painters, architects and sculptors, sent talented students to France and Italy, commissioned works and organised exhibitions. When this portrait type was devised, the Academy's great Neoclassical building was still rising beside the Neva, a visible expression of Russia's ambition to become not merely a consumer of European art, but one of its principal centres. The apparent serenity of the portrait also contrasts compellingly with the political and physical upheavals surrounding its creation. Russia had recently emerged victorious from the Russo-Turkish War, and the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774 gave the empire an enduring strategic foothold on the Black Sea and greatly expanded its influence in southeastern Europe. At home, the vast Pugachev rebellion of 1773-75 had shaken Catherine's government and invoked the name of Pavel's dead father, Peter III, as a symbol of legitimate authority. The provincial reforms introduced in 1775 were partly intended to strengthen administration and improve the state's reach throughout its enormous territories. St Petersburg itself remained vulnerable: in September 1777 the Neva rose more than three metres, causing one of the most destructive floods in the city's history. Against this setting of imperial expansion, internal unrest, administrative reform and natural disaster, Roslin's composed image of the heir offered a reassuring statement of continuity, civilisation and hereditary order. Alexander Roslin was exceptionally well suited to such a commission. Born in Malmö in 1718, he travelled through Germany and Italy before settling in Paris in 1752, where he established himself as one of Europe's most sought-after society portraitists. His patrons included sovereigns, diplomats, aristocrats, financiers and leading cultural figures, and his reputation rested upon his ability to combine a flattering, psychologically engaging likeness with an almost tactile command of silk,

velvet, lace, embroidery and jewellery. His portraits communicate status through material splendour, yet their sitters frequently retain a relaxed intelligence and human presence. The invitation to Catherine's court represented the culmination of his international career, and his Russian portraits rank among the most imposing products of the cosmopolitan court culture of the later eighteenth century. Roslin returned to Paris after travelling through Warsaw and Vienna and remained there until his death in 1793. The painting is complemented by a period gilded frame whose warm, time-softened surface provides an historically appropriate setting for the oval canvas. Its enclosing curve reinforces the concentration of the composition, while the gilt perimeter catches the surrounding light and forms an effective transition between the sitter's dark background and the interior in which the portrait is displayed. The frame contributes materially to the work's decorative unity without detracting from the brilliant scarlet, blue and gold of the costume. This distinguished portrait consequently offers an uncommon convergence of aesthetic beauty, historical importance and secure iconographic identification. It depicts one of the most consequential figures in European dynastic history; it derives from a celebrated museum prototype by one of the eighteenth century's foremost international portraitists; and it was itself painted during the period in which Roslin's official composition was being actively replicated and disseminated. The celebrated sitter, unmistakable insignia, rich court dress, engaging expression, elegant oval format and period gilded frame give the work exceptional visual presence. At the same time, its connection with the Hermitage portrait and the carefully orchestrated representation of Romanov succession provide a depth of narrative seldom encountered in a purely decorative portrait. It is at once an impressive work of eighteenth-century portraiture, a tangible document of imperial image-making and a highly sophisticated object for display--equally

compelling within a traditional collection or as a commanding historical counterpoint in a contemporary interior. Measurements: Height 81cm, Width 65cm framed (Height 32", Width 25.5" framed)