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Portrait Of Lady Lempster - Adriana Verelst (1683-1769)



24 000 EUR

Signature : Adriana Verelst (1683-1769)

Period : 18th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 40 1/3 inches

Height : 49 1/2 inches

Description

ProvenanceChristie's, 20th February 1998, Lot 53Private EstateThe sitter is identified as Lady Sophia Osborne, Baroness Lempster (Leominster) (1661 - 1746), the daughter of Thomas Osborne, First Duke of Leeds, and Lady Bridget Bertie. Her first marriage was to Donogh O'Brien, Lord Ibracken in 1679, who passed away in 1682. She then married William Fermor, First Baron Leominster, in 1691, gaining her the title Baroness Leominster. She and William had five children, including Thomas Fermor, First Earl of Pomfret. The portrait is dated 1685, indicating that this identification was added after the creation of the portrait.During the early 18th century a highly romanticised view of country life reached its peak. Many members of the nobility, particularly women, chose to have their portraits

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painted in shepherdess costume, a break from the conventional norms of formal portraiture. This style developed from 17th century Roman pastoral landscapes by artists like Claude Lorrain and Dutch three-quarter length portraits of shepherds and shepherdesses. These works aimed to evoke themes of Arcadia, poetic escape and landed virtue, with their subjects depicted wearing fashionable and expensive clothing, inconsistent with actual farm work. A knowledge of Latin and Greek pastoral poetry signified education and refinement, desirable qualities for a woman to possess. Life in the country was perceived as peaceful, contemplative and free of hardships, and to be painted in this pastoral style was to create a tangible expression of power and wealth, creating tension between the aristocratic fantasy and the reality of rural life. Lady Lempster has opted for such a depiction. She is shown seated, wearing a white silk gown, head tilted slightly to one side and with a shepherd's crook and wicker hat adorned with flowers in her lap. She sits on a bench, in front of a large tree, an expansive view visible on the right behind her. So ingrained was this style that the crook and hat alone would be enough to suggest Arcadia to the viewer. There is an interesting contrast between the female sitter and the woman artist who painted her. The shepherdess costume was used predominantly in portraits of women sitters, with the aim of expressing virtues such as purity and appropriate education rather than a distinct, individual personality. Portraits of men however, depicted sitters in settings, costume and surrounded by objects that signified their profession and accomplishments. Adriana Verelst was a woman with a career of her own, able to support herself and defying expectations of the time, the conformity of Lady Lempster's portrait emphasising Verelst's own unconformity. Adriana Verelst (c. 1683-1769) was an English portrait artist, and daughter of the portrait painter Herman Verelst. Her exact date and place of birth are unknown, though her parents were

from Vienna. Verelst is a prime example of how women artists were often misrepresented or even erased from the cannon of art history. There have been questions surrounding her biography with the view that her sister, Maria Verelst and fellow portrait artist, did not exist and could be Adriana Verelst herself. Contemporary evidence of Adriana's birth, marriage, career and death exist, however, she has not been included in later art histories. In contrast, there is no contemporary documentary evidence for the existence of Maria Verelst, though she is named in later publications. The name Maria Verelst first appeared in Matthew Bryan's Dictionary of 1816 and it has been argued that his use of the name was a misinterpretation of 'M' being an abbreviation for Maria rather than 'Mademoiselle'. The date of birth and location in Antwerp was given by J.B. Descamps in 1753, though there is no archival evidence of a birth or baptism for Maria in Antwerp at this time. In 1762, Horace Walpole made the link between Maria and Herman Verelst, an Anglo-Dutch painter, as the father of the artist. As Herman had fled from the siege of Vienna in 1683, biographers resonated that with a birth date of 1680, Maria must have been born in Vienna. Biographers also stated that Maria was trained by her uncle, Simon Verelst, a renown painter of flowers and still lifes. The first reference to 1744 as the date of Maria's death was in 1859 in Mrs. Ellet's Women Artists in all Ages and Countries, though no source is given for this date. It has been argued that Maria Verelst is in fact Adriana, claiming that earlier biographies used 'M. Verelst' as Mademoiselle in reference to Mademoiselle Adriana Verelst. If these were in fact two separate women, they would have been sisters. Maira's grandfather, Pieter Hermansz Verelst, was a Dutch Golden Age painter, whose four sons, Herman, Simon, John and William, all also worked as artists. Herman went on to have at least seven children himself, with Lodvick, John, Michael and Adrianna also becoming painters. Along with Maria, Cornelius Verelst is also often

identified as being one of Herman's artist children, however, there is no contemporary proof to support this. This confusion over Adriana's identity and the possible invention of a sister reflects the prejudices that women and women artists faced at this time. The original potential misidentification stems from men artists being referred to by their full names in records, whilst women artists would be referred to by title and surname. This reflects the tendency to present men as individual 'masters', autonomous agents, as opposed to women, who were defined in relation to their male counterparts. Adriana, or Maria, is reduced to a family name, whereas her male relatives are not. Not only does Adriana's legacy have to contend with this lack of transparency, many of Verelst's paintings have been previously misattributed to other male contemporaries, such as Sir Godfrey Kneller. More recent scholarship has delved deeper into Verelst's works, analysing the artist's process and technique in order to distinguish her from other artists from her time. Adriana Verelst (or Maria) and her work has also been subjected to the narrative of women artists being the exception, rather than acknowledging them as part of a broader contribution to art history. One of the few anecdotes we have about the artist is a trip to Drury Lane theatre where she overheard some gentlemen nearby commenting on her beauty in German. She admonished them in German, to which the gentlemen responded by continuing their conversation in Italian. Once again Verelst responded, also in Italian, prompting the language to be switched to Latin. Finally, in Latin Verelst asked 'Do you think you have more right to speak Latin than women, isn't it enough that our female sex is already kept outside of public dignities without being excluded from language as well?'. The gentlemen, apparently so impressed by her mastery of language, asked who she was and upon finding out she was an artist visited her at her studio, each commissioning a portrait from her. Impressive as this anecdote may be, it serves

to reflect how an educated, confident woman, particularly one with a career of her own, was seen as an exception, an anomaly in traditional gender roles. We may never know definitively whether or not Adriana Verelst and Maria are in fact one and the same. However, it is clear that the works attributed to Adriana Verelst are by a highly accomplished woman artist, who held her own in a male-dominated world to gain aristocratic and gentry commissions and forged her own career.