



Portrait Of King Charles I In Armour, Anglo-flemish School, After Anthony Van Dyck 17th Century



8 950 EUR

Signature : École anglo-flamande du XVIIe siècle, d'après Sir Anthony van Dyck

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting

Width : 73

Height : 89

Depth : 6

Description

This handsome and unusually intimate image of King Charles I brings one of Sir Anthony van Dyck's most commanding royal inventions into a scale ideally suited to private display. Against a restrained brown background, the King emerges with remarkable immediacy: his pale face framed by luxuriant dark hair, his polished armour catching flashes of silvery light, and the gold chain and badge of the Order of the Garter providing the principal note of splendour. Stripped of the architectural and ceremonial apparatus found in many royal portraits, the composition concentrates instead upon the qualities that made Van Dyck's image of Charles so memorable -- refinement, chivalric authority and an almost melancholy elegance. The present painting is particularly interesting because the

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accumulated visual and comparative evidence points not towards a much later historicist copy, but probably to the later seventeenth century, when memories of Charles I, the Civil Wars and the restored Stuart monarchy remained powerfully alive. The composition derives from Van Dyck's celebrated portrait of Charles I preserved in the collection of the Duke of Norfolk at Arundel Castle, a work generally dated to about 1635-36. The Government Art Collection identifies the Arundel picture as the prototype for a substantial family of repetitions and records further versions at the National Portrait Gallery, Versailles, Wilton House and Sudeley Castle. In the complete composition Charles appears in armour, holding a commander's baton and resting an arm upon his helmet. The present picture reduces this conception to its most compelling essentials -- the King's head and shoulders, the gleaming armour and the Garter insignia -- creating a more concentrated and personal encounter with the monarch. Charles is shown almost frontally, his head turning only slightly while his eyes look quietly to one side. This subtle displacement is crucial to the portrait's effect: it prevents the image from becoming rigidly heraldic and gives the sitter an unexpectedly introspective quality. A gold chain crosses the breast and supports the insignia of the Order of the Garter, whose badge -- the Lesser George -- represents St George overcoming the dragon. Charles was Sovereign of the Order, and its insignia was more than decoration: it identified him with the ancient chivalric traditions of English monarchy. The King's appearance belongs firmly to the visual culture of the 1630s. The comparatively small turned-down linen collar had displaced the enormous lace collars of an earlier generation, while Charles's shoulder-length natural hair, upward-sweeping moustache and pointed beard represented the elegant masculine fashion of the mature Caroline court. Armour in such a portrait should not be interpreted as documentary evidence that Charles

was preparing for battle. Rather, it belonged to a long aristocratic tradition in which armour conveyed nobility, courage and command. The man represented with such controlled magnificence had not originally been expected to inherit the throne. Charles was born at Dunfermline in Scotland in 1600, the second surviving son of James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, and Anne of Denmark. The death of his admired elder brother Henry, Prince of Wales, in 1612 abruptly transformed the shy twelve-year-old Charles into heir apparent. He succeeded his father in 1625 and in the same year married the French princess Henrietta Maria, sister of Louis XIII. The marriage was initially difficult -- complicated by religion, politics and the Queen's large French household -- but matured into an unusually close royal partnership. Their nine children included two future kings, Charles II and James II, and the intimacy of the marriage was one of the more personal aspects of a monarch who could otherwise appear remote and ceremonious. Charles's great passion was art. His principal London residence, the vast Palace of Whitehall, became one of Europe's most important courtly environments, filled with paintings, sculpture, tapestries and precious objects. He acquired works by Titian, Raphael, Correggio and other Italian masters, employed Van Dyck as his principal portraitist and commissioned Peter Paul Rubens to paint the immense ceiling of Inigo Jones's Banqueting House. Historic Royal Palaces records Charles's collection as numbering approximately 1,400 paintings and 400 sculptures -- extraordinary evidence of the seriousness with which he pursued collecting and patronage. It was into this environment that Anthony van Dyck arrived. Born in Antwerp in 1599, Van Dyck had achieved extraordinary precocity and worked closely with Peter Paul Rubens before travelling through Italy during the 1620s. There he absorbed the lessons of Titian and the great Venetian portrait tradition, particularly its ability to

combine grandeur with apparent informality. Returning to England in 1632, he was appointed Principal Painter in Ordinary to Charles I and knighted soon afterwards. Van Dyck transformed the appearance of the English court. His influence did not end with his death in 1641. It passed through Sir Peter Lely and Sir Godfrey Kneller and remained fundamental to British portraiture well into the eighteenth century. The prototype of the present portrait was created during the most outwardly magnificent, but politically dangerous, years of Charles's reign. By about 1635-36 the King had governed without Parliament for several years. His court at Whitehall projected order, hierarchy and divinely sanctioned monarchy even as disputes over taxation, religion and the extent of royal authority were becoming increasingly serious. Within little more than a decade England would descend into Civil War. Charles was defeated, imprisoned, placed on trial by his own subjects and condemned for high treason. On 30 January 1649 he was executed outside the Banqueting House at Whitehall. The execution also helps explain why portraits such as the present work continued to be produced. During Charles's lifetime important royal likenesses were necessarily replicated. Portraits were instruments of government, diplomacy, dynastic identity and patronage; approved images were required for royal residences, aristocratic houses, ambassadors and foreign courts. A successful composition by Van Dyck could therefore generate studio repetitions, independent copies and engravings while the original sitter was still alive.

Professional copyists formed an important part of this visual economy. Henry Stone, for example, is specifically recorded as a portrait painter and copyist who frequently copied Van Dyck, while the Flemish-born Remigius van Leemput produced reduced copies of important royal pictures; his celebrated 1667 copy of Holbein's Whitehall mural was made for Charles II and preserved a composition subsequently destroyed in the Whitehall fire. After 1649, however, the

meaning of such copies altered. Charles's death generated an extraordinarily powerful culture of commemoration. The Eikon Basilike, published immediately after the execution and presenting the King as a suffering Christian ruler, became one of the publishing phenomena of the age, while Royalists increasingly regarded Charles as a martyr. When his son returned from exile in 1660 as Charles II, portraits of the dead king acquired renewed dynastic significance. They could evoke loyalty to the restored monarchy, commemorate the sufferings of the royal family and proclaim continuity between the Caroline court destroyed by the Civil War and the restored Stuart dynasty. It is within this Restoration and post-Restoration environment that the present picture can most plausibly be situated. The modelling of the eyes and nose is more firmly drawn than in the master's autograph work, the hair forms a relatively dense dark mass, and the metallic reflections of the armour are translated in broader, more emphatic passages. These are precisely the sorts of differences one would expect when an established court image was recreated by another accomplished painter. At the same time, nothing visible in the photographs compels an eighteenth-century date. The style is entirely compatible with the later seventeenth-century tradition of copying Van Dyck, and the balance of the evidence currently suggests a date around 1670-1700. The history of these repetitions illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing the individual hands responsible for the numerous professional copies of Van Dyck's royal portraits. The present work is therefore best described as Anglo-Flemish School, probably late seventeenth century, after Sir Anthony van Dyck, a formulation that acknowledges both its likely period and the unusually international character of portrait production in Stuart England. The probable date also places the painting within a fascinating moment in the British art market. Charles I's magnificent collection had been inventoried and

dispersed after his execution, with masterpieces sold to collectors across Britain and continental Europe. Following the Restoration, Charles II attempted to recover many of his father's pictures, while artists and collectors simultaneously rediscovered the visual culture of the pre-war court. Copies themselves could acquire importance where originals were inaccessible, dispersed or already famous. The market for royal portraiture therefore sat at the intersection of connoisseurship, dynastic memory and politics. A portrait of Charles I after Van Dyck was not simply decorative: in the decades following the Restoration it carried historical and sometimes ideological resonance. The portrait is presented in a substantial carved and gilded wood frame of Baroque character, enriched with dense scrolling foliage, floral and shell-like ornament, pronounced corner elements and a narrow leaf-moulded sight edge. Its broad golden surface is particularly effective against the restrained browns, blacks and steel-grey tones of the painting, lending the relatively intimate portrait the architectural presence expected of a royal image. What makes this picture particularly appealing is the unusual combination of historical importance, manageable scale and visual authority. It is a portrait of one of the most compelling and controversial figures in British history, based upon an invention by the artist who did more than any other to define the appearance of the Stuart monarchy. Yet unlike the monumental state portraits normally associated with Van Dyck's Charles I, this reduced format brings the King unusually close to the viewer. More than three centuries after it was probably painted, the portrait still performs the function for which such images were created: it makes the absent king vividly present. It combines the romance of the Caroline court, the tragedy of the Civil War and regicide, the culture of Royalist remembrance and the enduring prestige of Van Dyck's portraiture in a single highly evocative

Old Master painting

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