



## Portrait Of Philadelphia Parker, Later Mrs Stephen Piper C.1690-95, Oil On Panel, Mignard



5 950 EUR

Signature : Suiveur de Pierre Mignard (1612-1695)

Period : 17th century

Condition : Très bon état

Material : Oil painting on wood

Width : 49

Height : 53

Depth : 7

### Description

Portrait of Philadelphia Parker, later Mrs Stephen Piper (1674-1737) Follower of Pierre Mignard (1612-1695), c.1690-1695 Oil on panel This exquisite late seventeenth-century portrait is a beautifully preserved example of the small-scale courtly cabinet likeness: intimate in format, jewel-like in finish, and unusually rich in surviving documentary identity. Painted on panel and retaining a remarkable freshness of surface, it presents a young woman of striking refinement, her porcelain complexion heightened with rose-pink colour, her blue eyes gently animated beneath fine brows, and her abundant curls falling in carefully ordered ringlets over her shoulders. The painting has all the qualities that make small Old Master portraits especially desirable: elegance, scale, condition, historical identity, and

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an unusually evocative human story preserved through labels, pedigree evidence, parish records, and the sitter's own will. Old labels on the reverse identify the sitter as Philadelphia Parker, daughter of Sir Robert Parker, Baronet, of Ratton in Sussex, and wife of Colonel Stephen Piper. Research now strongly supports this traditional identification, while correcting one inherited error on the label: the stated birth year of 1665 cannot be right. Philadelphia Parker was baptised at Willingdon, Sussex, on 10 December 1674, daughter of Robert Parker and Sarah Parker. This accords with the published pedigree of the Parker baronets of Ratton in John Burke and John Bernard Burke's *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland, and Scotland*, second edition, London, 1841, where Philadelphia is recorded among the children of Sir Robert Parker, 1st Baronet of Ratton, and Sarah Chute, and is stated to have married "Colonel Piper, of Essex." The Parker family of Ratton were an old Sussex family of considerable local standing. Their seat, Ratton, lay in the parish of Willingdon, near Eastbourne, and the family formed part of the established county gentry whose identity was shaped by land, lineage, public office, and advantageous marriage. Sir Robert Parker's elevation to a baronetcy on 22 May 1674, the year of Philadelphia's baptism, marks the family's position within the Restoration social hierarchy. Philadelphia's mother, Sarah Chute, came from another established family, and the repeated use of the name Philadelphia within the Parker line reveals a dynastic naming pattern rather than a mere personal curiosity. The name had earlier entered the family through Philadelphia Lennard, wife of Sir Thomas Parker of Ratton, and its recurrence within the family helps explain both the survival and the later importance of the sitter's identification. The portrait was almost certainly painted before Philadelphia's marriage, when she was a young unmarried woman of the Parker household. If baptised in December 1674, she

would have been around sixteen in 1690 and about twenty-one in 1695. The apparent age of the sitter, together with the portrait's manner, supports a date around c.1690-1695. This is not a literal record of ordinary dress, but a highly fashionable and flattering "court beauty" formula: the sitter is shown with exposed shoulders, a low white chemise, a rose-red mantle gathered by a jewelled clasp, and long falling curls. This visual language had its roots in the celebrated female portraiture of the French and Restoration courts of the 1660s and 1670s, but it continued to be used by later artists because it cast young women in a timeless image of aristocratic grace, beauty, and refinement. In this sense, the portrait deliberately evokes the glamour of an earlier courtly generation while presenting a sitter who came of age in the last decade of the seventeenth century. The attire is therefore best understood as a refined portrait costume rather than everyday clothing. The loose drapery and white chemise belong to the aristocratic *déshabillé* tradition, a mode associated with cultivated informality, sensual elegance, and courtly taste. The jewelled clasp at the breast gives the costume a note of rank and decorative richness, while the masses of curling hair create a visual link with the French court-beauty type popularised by painters such as Pierre Mignard and the Beaubrun brothers. The work clearly belongs to the same visual world: porcelain flesh, heightened blush, small red mouth, falling ringlets, and an idealised feminine presence of distinctly French character.

Philadelphia's marriage is confirmed by a primary source. The register of St Benet Paul's Wharf, City of London, records that Stephen Piper of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Middlesex, bachelor, and Philadelphia Parker of the same parish, spinster, were married on 15 June 1710. This record is especially valuable because it confirms the essential statement preserved on the old labels: that Philadelphia Parker married Stephen Piper. The old label's date of 13 June 1710 may refer to a licence, allegation, or an early family

transcription, but the parish register gives the actual marriage date as 15 June. The fact that both bride and groom were then recorded as of St Martin-in-the-Fields places them in one of the most fashionable areas of late Stuart London, a parish associated with the West End, court society, and the expanding aristocratic geography around Whitehall, St James's, and Westminster. Stephen Piper himself adds considerable historical interest to the portrait's later story. He was a military man and gentleman whose career connects Philadelphia's biography to the wider political world of late Stuart and early Georgian England. Described in family and monumental sources as Colonel Stephen Piper, he was associated with Essex, particularly Ashen, and with the world of court and military service. Accounts of his life connect him with Roger Palmer, Earl of Castlemaine, during James II's embassy to Rome, and later with service under William III and Queen Anne. His career therefore crossed one of the most turbulent periods of English political history: the Catholic court of James II, the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the reordering of allegiance under William and Mary, and the militarised politics of Queen Anne's reign. By the time of his marriage to Philadelphia in 1710, England had passed through revolution, continental war, and a profound reshaping of court culture. Yet aristocratic and gentry families continued to use portraiture as they long had done: to preserve likeness, proclaim lineage, mark alliance, and present themselves within the language of cultivated rank. After their marriage, Philadelphia became Mrs Stephen Piper and entered the world of the Piper family of Essex. Stephen was connected with Ashen, where he appears to have retired into the role of country gentleman and local office-holder. Such a trajectory--from court and military service to estate, parish, and county authority--was characteristic of many successful late Stuart officers and gentlemen. Philadelphia's own later life is illuminated by her will, a particularly

valuable survival because it confirms her married identity and residence. In that document she appears as Philadelphia Piper, widow, "now in the parish of St Margaret Westminster at Knightsbridge." The will gives an intimate glimpse of her circumstances in later life: a genteel widow maintaining a household, disposing of personal effects and securities, remembering servants and connections, and requesting a decent but very private burial. It also preserves continued links with the Parker family, including reference to John Parker, reinforcing the connection between the woman named in the will and the Parker lineage recorded on the verso labels and in the printed pedigree. Stephen Piper predeceased Philadelphia by some sixteen years, dying on 16 February 1721/2, aged sixty-six, and was commemorated at Ashen in Essex, where he had established himself as a country gentleman after a career of military and courtly service. His monument records that he died without issue, a detail that gives added poignancy to Philadelphia's portrait, for their marriage produced no direct descendants through whom her likeness might naturally have passed. Philadelphia survived him as a widow and appears in her own will as "Philadelphia Piper," then living at Knightsbridge in the parish of St Margaret Westminster; the old label on the reverse records her death on 15 February 1737, which is best rendered in modern form as 15 February 1737/8, and states that she was buried at Ealing. Her will's request for a decent but very private burial accords closely with the restrained dignity of her later life, closing the documentary arc from the young Parker daughter presented here in courtly beauty to the widowed Mrs Piper of Westminster. The references to St Martin-in-the-Fields at the time of marriage and to Knightsbridge/St Margaret Westminster in the will place Philadelphia within the social geography of elite London. This is an important part of the portrait's appeal. She was not merely a provincial Sussex heiress recorded in a pedigree,

but a woman whose documented life moved between Ratton, London, and the Essex world of her husband. Her portrait, probably painted when she was a young woman in the 1690s, belongs to the moment before that marriage, when likenesses of daughters of prominent families were often made as objects of beauty, dynastic record, and social presentation. In a period when marriage was both personal alliance and family strategy, such an image would have operated as more than decoration. It was a statement of lineage, refinement, eligibility, and taste. The painting's later history is also preserved in part by the reverse of the panel. In addition to the biographical labels identifying Philadelphia Parker and recording her marriage and death, an older fragmentary paper label reads "To go to Mrs Gould, Fulbeck." This appears to be a nineteenth-century routing, delivery, or ownership label, and provides an important later provenance clue. Fulbeck, near Grantham in Lincolnshire, was closely associated with the Fane family and with a long tradition of family portrait preservation. Whether Mrs Gould was herself connected with Fulbeck Manor or with another household in the village remains to be established, but the label clearly places the portrait in connection with a Mrs Gould of Fulbeck, probably during the nineteenth century. It suggests that the painting was either owned by, consigned to, returned to, or sent to her, and it opens a promising avenue for further research into the portrait's descent through family or local networks. The present portrait is therefore unusually compelling. It unites a highly attractive French courtly image with a substantially documented sitter: Philadelphia Parker of Ratton, daughter of a Sussex baronet, later wife of Colonel Stephen Piper, and widow of Knightsbridge. Its old labels are not anonymous or fanciful additions; they are supported by pedigree evidence, baptismal indexing, the primary marriage register, and Philadelphia's own will. The correction of the erroneous 1665 birth

date does not weaken the identification; rather, it clarifies the sitter's chronology and places the painting more convincingly around c.1690-1695, when Philadelphia was a young woman of marriageable age and the idealised court-beauty formula remained an elegant and prestigious mode of female portraiture. As a work of art, the panel offers all the qualities collectors seek in late seventeenth-century portraiture: beauty, refinement, condition, scale, documentary identity, and social resonance. Its small format gives it great intimacy and displayability, while its French courtly manner distinguishes it from more conventional English Lely-school portraits. The sitter's pale radiance, rose mantle, jewelled clasp, and cascading curls preserve the ideal of aristocratic femininity at the end of the Stuart century. At the same time, the archival evidence restores her as a real woman of family, marriage, property, widowhood, and memory. It is this combination--visual charm and historical recoverability--that gives the portrait its particular strength.

Provenance:- (Possibly) with Mrs Gould, Fulbeck, Lincolnshire, according to an old label on the reverse inscribed "To go to Mrs Gould, Fulbeck";- Private collection

Measurements: Height 53cm, Width 49cm framed (Height 20.75", Width 19.25" framed)