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Anthony Van Dyck
*Portrait of a nobleman, traditionally identified as
Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, c. 1627-32*

ANTHONY VAN DYCK

(Antwerp 1599 - 1641 London)

PORTRAIT OF A NOBLEMAN, traditionally identified as PAOLO GIORDANO ORSINI, Duke of Bracciano, c. 1627-32

Oil on canvas.

188.5 x 135 cm.; 74 by 53¼ in.

Provenance

Possibly identifiable with a portrait recorded as depicting Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, in the inventory of Livio Odescalchi, Duke of Bracciano (1655-1713), compiled in 1713-14 for the Palazzo in Piazza Santi Apostoli, Rome, without attribution to an artist;

Baron E. de Beurnonville;

His sale, Paris, 9-16 May 1881, lot 265;

Count Catieu d'Auvers, Paris;

Mr and Mrs Alfred G. Wilson (1883-1962), Detroit, by 1931;

Matilda R. Wilson (1883-1967), Michigan;

By whom sold, New York, Parke-Bernet, 22 October 1970, lot 10;

With Brod Gallery, London, 1971-75;

New York, Sotheby Parke-Bernet, 16 June 1977, lot 86;

London, Sotheby's, 12 December 1990, lot 71;

American private collection.

Literature

J. Guiffrey, *Antoine Van Dyck: sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris 1882, p. 284, no. 1001;

G. Glück, *Van Dyck: des Meisters Gemälde*, Klassiker der Kunst, Stuttgart 1931, p. 313;

Masterpieces from Detroit Private Collections, Detroit 1949, no. 34;

E. Larsen, *The Paintings of Anthony Van Dyck*, Freren 1988, no. 583;

S.J. Barnes, N. De Poorter, O. Millar and H. Vey, *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, London 2004, vol. III, no. III.A29, listed as whereabouts unknown.

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The attribution of the present portrait to Anthony Van Dyck has been independently endorsed by the Rev. Dr Susan J. Barnes (2011 and 2016), Professor Christopher Brown (2017), and Dr Malcolm Rogers (2017), in written communications.

Van Dyck's full-lengths demonstrate how dramatically he transformed the art of portraiture in Northern Europe in the first half of the 17th Century. In this example, dateable to the artist's second Antwerp period (1627-32) and traditionally thought to show the Italian nobleman Paolo Giordano Orsini (1591-1656), the sitter - full of authority and a sense of *gravitas* - is vividly presented reaching out towards the viewer, with his strongly lit hand appearing to emerge out of the canvas. As suggested by Malcolm Rogers, the sitter's left hand might almost derive from the same study as his *Portrait of a Man with a Gloved Hand* from the Italian period (fig. 1), or the *Peeter Stevens* (fig. 2) and the *Portrait of a Man with his Son* (fig. 3) from the second Antwerp period.

Crucial to conveying this heightened sense of perspective is the briskly painted bright red tablecloth interposing the space between the outstretched hand and the sitter's black-cloaked body. The conceit is typical of the clever illusionism that became a hallmark of Van Dyck's later style and presented a stark contrast to the stiff formality of the type of portrait painting which had, until as recently as the 1620s, dominated artistic taste.

In the first part of his career, Van Dyck rarely tackled full-length compositions. After his move to Genoa in 1621, however, he embraced the format and the opportunities for dramatic invention that it offered. He quickly established his reputation in Italy with a series of flamboyant full-length portraits of the Genoese aristocracy, set in palatial surroundings and often supported by children or servants - see for example his 1627 *Portrait of Marchesa Paolina Adorno Brignolo-Sale*, now at the Galleria di Palazzo Rosso in Genoa (fig. 4). Above all, however, it was the study of Titian that drove Van Dyck to ever more complex compositions, for his sketchbooks from this time are filled with studies after works by the great Italian master. The present portrait can be dated to shortly after Van Dyck's return from Italy in 1627 and carries with it some of the drama of Van Dyck's Italian works. While the Netherlandish fashion for black dress (such as that worn at the Spanish court in Brussels) may have presented Van Dyck and his patrons with fewer opportunities for conspicuous display than the gaudy taste of the Italian courts, the overall dynamism of the composition still allows for a suitably theatrical portrayal.

The sitter has traditionally been identified as Paolo Giordano II Orsini, Duke of Bracciano (1591-1656), although the suggestion has met with reservations in the more recent literature. The identification was excluded by Erik Larsen in his 1988 catalogue, in which the portrait was assigned to Van Dyck's second Antwerp period

but the sitter left anonymous. A similar conclusion was reached in the catalogue raisonné of 2004, where the resemblance to established likenesses of the duke was judged insufficiently convincing. The authors also questioned the presence of the distinctly Netherlandish costume and hat in a portrait supposedly representing an Italian nobleman of Orsini's standing.¹ These objections leave the sitter's identity an open question, and the traditional association with the Duke of Bracciano is best retained with due qualification.

There are, nevertheless, reasons why the identification has persisted. Paolo Giordano was a cultivated patron, himself an amateur artist, who took a particular interest in the commissioning and dissemination of his own likeness. Among the portraits made of him are Ottavio Leoni's engraving of c. 1625 (fig. 5) and a series of sculpted representations associated with Bernini and his circle. The small bronze bust in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, now attributed to Johann Jakob Kornmann and dated c. 1632 (fig. 6), provides a further point of comparison. Of potential relevance is also the portrait of Paolo Giordano Orsini recorded in the 1713-14 inventory of Livio Odescalchi, Duke of Bracciano, at his residence in Piazza dei Santi Apostoli, Rome. Since the inventory gives no artist's name, the possible correspondence with the present painting remains conjectural. It is also worth noting that in the early 18th Century seven works by Van Dyck were recorded at the home of the Bracciano family, Odescalchi Castle, including several unidentified portraits.²

When examined for the 2004 catalogue raisonné, the canvas was in a compromised condition, its original composition obscured by lateral additions, extensive overpainting and successive campaigns of restoration. The subsequent conservation treatment has considerably clarified its appearance, recovering the original proportions and revealing passages of handling previously concealed beneath later interventions. Particularly significant are the pentimenti in the positioning of the legs and the disposition of the costume, which furnish evidence of revision during the painting's execution and lend further support to its assessment as an original conception. Following restoration, the attribution to Van Dyck received independent endorsements from Susan J. Barnes (2011 and 2016), Christopher Brown (2017) and Malcolm Rogers (2017).³

¹ E. Larsen, *The Paintings of Anthony Van Dyck*, Freren, 1988, no. 583; S. J. Barnes, N. De Poorter, O. Millar and H. Vey, *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, New Haven and London, 2004, no. III.A29.

² A portrait in grisaille by Van Dyck of a Bracciano sitter, now lost, was sold from the collection of Joan de Vries in The Hague in 1738.

³ Written opinions of Susan J. Barnes (2011 and 2016), Christopher Brown (2017) and Malcolm Rogers (2017), as recorded in the present factsheet.



Fig. 1. Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of a Man with a Gloved Hand*, circa 1621–1623, oil on canvas, 125 x 94 cm, private collection.



Fig. 2. Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of Peeter Stevens* (c. 1590–1668), 1627, oil on canvas, 112.5 × 99.4 cm, The Hague, Mauritshuis.



Fig. 3. Anthony van Dyck, *Portrait of a Man with his Son*, c. 1628–1630, oil on canvas, 204 x 137 cm, Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 4. Anthony Van Dyck, *Marchesa Paolina Adorno Brignolo-Sale*, 1627, oil on canvas, 288.5 x 199 cm, Genoa, Galleria di Palazzo Rosso.

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Fig. 5. Ottavio Leoni, *Portrait of Paolo Giordano Orsini*, 1624-1625, engraving, 14.3 x 11.1 cm, London, British Museum.

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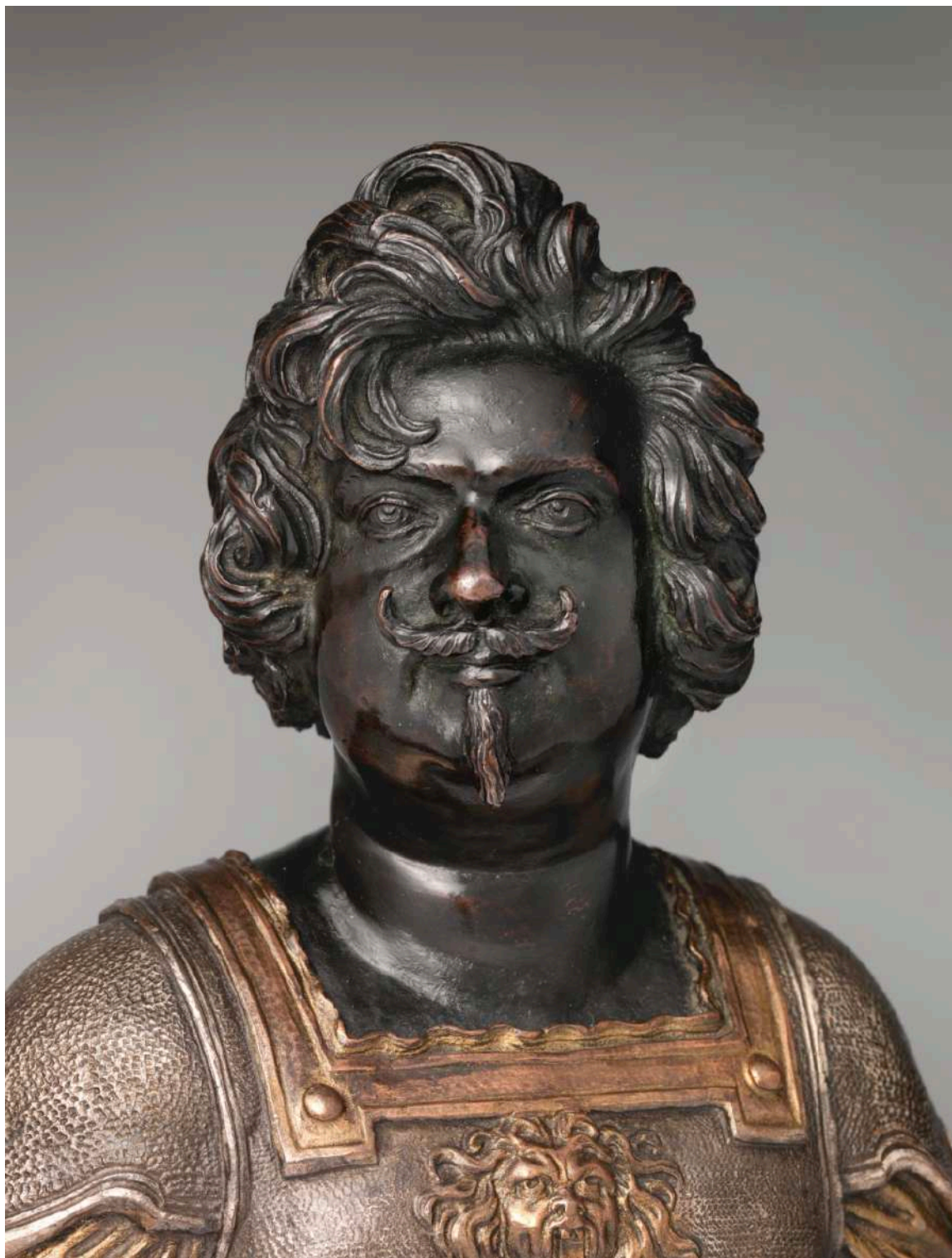


Fig. 6. Johann Kornmann, *Bust of Paolo Giordano Orsini*, c. 1632, Bronze, partially silvered, 18.1 × 15.2 × 6.4 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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