

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Alonso Sánchez Coello
(Valencia 1531/32 – 1588 Madrid)

*Portrait of a young noblewoman
wearing fine jewels and a black
dress with gold embroidery in
the form of sheaves of wheat and
a high white ruff collar*

oil on panel
35.2 x 25.3 cm.;
13 7/8 x 10 in.

Provenance

The Farnese Collection of the Dukes of Parma and Piacenza;¹
M. Pontremoli, France (according to a label on the back of the old frame);²
With Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd, London, 2014, from whom acquired by the present owner.

Literature

G. Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma: storia di una collezione*, Bologna 1987, p. 258, no. 566.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

Born near Valencia, Alonso Sánchez Coello was educated in Portugal under the care of his grandfather, who worked in the service of King Joao III. At the age of about 20, having attracted the attention of the King, Sánchez Coello was sent to Flanders to train in the studio of Anthonis Mor. He returned to Portugal in 1552, with Mor, when the latter was commissioned by Charles V to paint the various members of the Portuguese royal family. Sánchez Coello stayed on in Lisbon after Mor's departure and was working for the court until, in 1555, he moved to the old Castilian capital, Valladolid, in the service of Juana (1535 – 1573), sister to Philip II and widow of Joao, son and heir of Joao III, who had died after falling off his horse in 1554. In 1551, Charles V had decreed the succession, passing the Habsburg monarchy to his brother Ferdinand and the Spanish throne to his son Philip II. Infanta Juana was made Regent of Spain by Philip II when he left to marry Mary Tudor in 1554, with whom he reigned jointly in England until her death in 1558. After Philip II returned and when Mor left Spain definitively in 1560, Sánchez Coello took his place as Court Painter, *Pintor de Cámara*, as recommended by the Infanta Juana. He followed the King from Toledo to Madrid, which he, Philip, was in the process of permanently establishing as the Spanish capital. Sánchez Coello lived in the *Casa del Tesoro* and enjoyed status and favour, as well as a considerable fortune. Philip II became godfather to two of his children and granted him a position and influence greater than that of any other contemporary artist.

As well as being a portrait painter, Sánchez Coello was responsible for many of the numerous religious paintings commissioned by the King for the various new Royal palaces and churches. Interestingly, as Jonathan Brown has pointed out, his religious work sometimes lacks 'the immediacy and incisiveness of his images of individual persons...', but in his altarpieces for the basilica of the Escorial, he effected a 'remarkable synthesis between the divine and the human' by appearing to use real, or at least very naturalistic, men for his saints clothed in rich vestments, 'a striking departure' and one that would be 'an inspiration to the next generation of Spanish artists'.³ Philip II was an avid patron of the arts, who like his father had depended upon Mor for representations of himself and his family but had also adopted Titian as a form of court painter abroad. Sánchez Coello easily inherited Mor's mantle and brought his own distinctive qualities to royal portraiture. Coello studied the works of Titian, which he encountered in the collections of both Charles V and Philip II, and

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

while his precision of technique and exceptional skill at representing faces, clothing and jewels came initially from Mor, he himself developed a greater realism and an intensity of colour, in part through appreciation of the Venetian master. As Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez described, Sánchez Coello's style is a 'synthesis of the objectivity of the Flemish tradition...with the sensuality of Venetian painting...'⁴

This refined and beautifully preserved portrait of a young woman in full court dress belongs to the central period in Sánchez Coello's career, when he was entirely active as painter for the Portuguese and Spanish royal families. This dating is borne out by the details of the costume. The high lace ruff, tight collar and richly embroidered black dress compare very closely with the costumes worn by other court figures painted by Sánchez Coello during this time; for example, the 1571 portrait of Anna of Austria (1549 – 1580), niece and fourth wife of Philip II, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum (fig. 1), Vienna, and the portrait in the Prado Museum (fig. 2), Madrid, of Isabel de Valois (1546 – 1568), also known as Elizabeth, daughter of Henry II and Catherine de Medici and Philip II's third wife.⁵ Interestingly, the faces of both of these sitters are imbued with colour, as in the present work. This fashion was popular among women at the Spanish court during the period, the use of rouge on the cheeks and lips being thought a homage to the Virgin Mary.⁶

The sitter's lavish jewellery, composed of groups of pearls and single, faceted precious stones in elaborate gold settings, as well as the delicate headdress which combines precious stones and seed pearls with filigree gold mimicking hair, all underline her status. The jewelled collar and necklace are parallel in sumptuousness and extremely close in design to those worn by queens and princesses of the Portuguese and Spanish court. See, for example, the portrait of Infanta Juana by Anthonius Mor, prior to her being widowed, now in the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, or the double portrait of the Princesses Isabel Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela (daughters of Philip II and Isabel de Valois) in the Royal Collection, London, dated to around 1571 (fig. 3).⁷ In terms of quality and style, Bill Jordan makes particular comparison with two portraits by Sánchez Coello, also in the Royal Collection, of the Habsburg Archdukes Rudolph and Ernest of 1567/8 (figs. 4 & 5), described

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

by Alfonso Perez Sánchez in his list of notable works as ‘the two intense, half-length portraits...both dated 1564’.⁸

Professor Giuseppe Bertini, who has published extensive studies of the Farnese collections, has kindly identified the present work in an inventory of *circa* 1680 as one of the pictures in the Camera di Venere del Cantone of the Palazzo del Giardino in Parma: the no. 155, written in red wax on the back of the panel, is described in the inventory as ‘*Un quadro alto oncie otto, largo oncie cinque e tre quarti in tavola. Una testa di donna giovine con ornato di gioie e perle, frappa al collo, vestita di nero con ricamo, di Mano Fiamenga no.155.*’⁹ These measurements, when converted from the Parmese to the Metric scale, correspond exactly to those of the present painting. As Bertini notes, it is not surprising that the identity of the young woman was unknown to the authors of the Farnese inventory; indeed a portrait of Charles V, now amongst the Farnese paintings in the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, which hung in the same room and is of a similar scale, is described as ‘*ritratto d’un giovane con berretta nera in capo, tosone al collo*’. While noting that it has not been possible to connect the remaining numbers on the back of the panel to other inventories, Professor Bertini confirms that the number 472 written in white paint is consistent with the numbering on the back of Correggio’s *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine*, which also hung in the Palazzo Giardino and is now in the Museo di Capodimonte,¹⁰ while the letters *LB* followed by a number are found again on several other paintings in Naples and perhaps correspond to the initials of one of the curators of the Farnese collection.¹¹ Bertini further notes that in the course of the 17th century, the Palazzo del Giardino in Parma was where Ranuccio II exhibited his best paintings from the family collections.¹²

It has not been possible to determine in what circumstances the present portrait left the Farnese collection. The majority of the works belonging to the Farnese are now in the Capodimonte, the Palazzo Reale (also in Naples), or the Galleria Nazionale in Parma. For a number of paintings, however, some of which have wax seals and numbering similar to the present work, it has been possible to document the moment in which they left the collection. Certain paintings were sold from the collection by Francesco, the son of Ranuccio II, to raise funds to buy other works, such as the four panels by Jacopo Bertoia now in the Christ

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

Church Picture Gallery, Oxford.¹³ In 1735, the Bourbon King, Charles III, son of Philip V and his second wife, Elizabeth Farnese, transferred a considerable part of his inheritance of the Farnese collections to Naples in order to decorate his new palaces. Following the sack of the Palazzo di Capodimonte by French troops in 1799, a substantial number of paintings came on to the market, many of which entered important English collections.¹⁴ Of the paintings which were not transferred to Naples, a number remained in the Palazzo Ducale in Parma and some of these were sold during the Napoleonic period (Parma was formally annexed to the French Empire in 1808).¹⁵ The present work was discovered in France. It had a late 19th-century carved and gilded frame, which bore a cartouche inscribed in Gothic lettering: *1510 F. Clouet dit Jehannes 1572 Clouet*. This more recent provenance suggests that the picture may indeed have left the Italian Peninsula during Napoleonic times, thereafter entering collections in France, where at some point it was part of an unidentified exhibition, loaned from the Pontremoli collection and transported by the French company, Chenue (according to labels on the old frame).

Although clearly a depiction of a member of a royal household and despite its fascinating provenance, the identity of this young woman remains tantalizingly unresolved. The Farnese family had extremely strong links with the court of Spain; Margaret of Parma, illegitimate daughter of Charles V, married Ottavio Farnese and their son Alessandro Farnese (1545 – 1592) was brought up in Spain and in 1565 married the Portuguese princess, Maria d'Aviz (1538 – 1577), daughter of Prince Eduardo d'Aviz (brother of Joao III) and his cousin, Isabella de Braganza. Their lavish wedding took place in Brussels, according to the wishes of Filippo II and after long negotiations in Madrid. Identifying the sitter as Maria d'Aviz works well with the Farnese provenance, and with the presence of Sánchez Coello in Portugal and Madrid, but Maria d'Aviz was 27 at the time of her marriage and our sitter is considerably younger. The painting would therefore need to have been painted in the period from 1552 to 1555, when Sánchez Coello was in Lisbon painting members of the Portuguese royal family, and perhaps sent later to the Farnese court at the time when marriage negotiations began. For this dating, a stylistic comparison may be made with the painting in the Belgian Embassy in Madrid (oil on panel, 80 x 63 cm.) generally accepted as by Sánchez Coello and recently identified as a likeness of Juana de Portugal of 1553.¹⁶ The only two securely identified

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

depictions of Maria d'Aviz, versions of the same image, both of which are in Parma, show a somewhat harsher looking face, considerably older, more elongated, with larger features, thinner, arched eyebrows and a more accentuated nose.¹⁷ There is however a significant resemblance between the young woman in the present portrait and a painting in the Prado now definitively identified by Annemarie Jordan as being of the widowed Isabella di Braganza, mother of Maria d'Aviz.¹⁸

That the portrait was intended as a nuptial image seems extremely likely. As kindly suggested by Annemarie Jordan, the style of hair is that of an unmarried woman and the wheatsheaves embroidered on her dress are most probably emblems of fertility, while the tiny silver branches can be regarded as symbols of strength and virtue. The painting is highly realistic: each eyelash has been delineated, while the soft shading around the mouth and nose suggests a slight downturn above her upper lip, and her dark eyebrows and pale chestnut hair are unusual and striking. It is clearly a painting executed from life and it is worth noting that no other version of the likeness has so far been found.¹⁹ This is not the case for many of the other portraits of Spanish, Portuguese and Habsburg royalty, which exist, in some cases, in numerous examples, both as autograph works by the original artist, be that Mor, Sánchez Coello or Sofonisba Anguissola (who joined the court of Philip II as painter and lady-in-waiting to his wife Elizabeth de Valois), or copies by members of their workshops. As noted by Pérez Sánchez, comparatively few of Sánchez Coello's paintings have survived, although there is abundant documentation concerning the many works paid for by the King, and portraits by him of people unconnected to the court are rarer still.

We are extremely grateful to Annemarie Jordan Gswchend, Professor Clare Robertson, Professor Giuseppe Bertini, Bill Jordan, Professor Joanna Woodall, Eileen Ribeiro, Lucy Whitaker and Anna Reynolds for their generous assistance with this note.

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 1. Alonso Sánchez Coello, *Anne of Austria, Queen of Spain (1549 – 1580)*, 1571.
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 2. Alonso Sánchez Coello (often attributed to Sofonisba Anguissola), *Isabel de Valois holding a Portrait of Philip II*. Museo del Prado, Madrid

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 3. Alonso Sánchez Coello and workshop, *Isabel Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela, Daughters of Philip II, King of Spain*, c. 1571. Royal Collection, London

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 4. Alonso Sánchez Coello, *Rudolf II, Emperor of Austria (1552 – 1612)*, 1567.
Royal Collection, Windsor Castle

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Figure 5. Alonso Sánchez Coello, *Archduke Ernest of Austria (1553 – 95)*, 1568.
Royal Collection, Windsor Castle

Footnotes

¹ The panel bears the wax seal of Ranuccio II Farnese (1630 – 1694) and four inventory numbers, one in red wax: *i55*, the second in grey-white oil: *472*, a third in black: *LB #43* and the fourth: *265* in thinner black. Recorded in the *circa* 1680 inventory of the Farnese collections in the Palazzo del Giardino, Parma, as being in the ‘Camera di Venere del Cantone’: ‘Un quadro alto oncie otto, largo oncie cinque e tre quarti in tavola. Una testa di donna giovine con ornato di gioie e perle, frappa al collo, vestita di nero con ricamo, di Mano Fiamenga n.155.’ See G. Bertini, *La Galleria del Duca di Parma: storia di una collezione*, Bologna 1987, p. 258, no. 566.

² Possibly Emanuel Pontremoli (1865 – 1956): a French architect, archaeologist and director of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, who was married to Suzanne Hecht.

³ See J. Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1500 – 1700*, New Haven and London 1998, p. 56.

⁴ See E. Perez Sanchez, in *The Dictionary of Art*, (ed.) J. Turner, Oxford 2003.

⁵ See M. Kusche, *Retratos y Retradores: Alonso Sánchez Coello*, Madrid 2003, p. 307, fig. 266 and p. 215, fig. 179, the portrait there given to Sofonisba Anguissola.

⁶ Emails from Eileen Ribeiro, Annemarie Jordan and Anna Reynolds, 2012.

⁷ See Kusche 2003, p. 81, fig. 38 and p. 315, fig. 274. For the use of filigree gold in a headdress, see the *Portrait of D. Joana de Austria with a Page* in A. Jordan, *Retrato de Corte em Portugal, O Legado de António Moro (1552 – 1572)*, Lisbon 1994, p. 34, fig. 5.

⁸ See: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/4/collection/405798/rudolf-ii-emperor-of-austria-1552-1612> and <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/3/collection/405797/archduke-ernest-of-austria-1553-95>, as well as Perez Sanchez 2003.

⁹ See Bertini 1987, note 1.

¹⁰ See Bertini 1987, p. 157, no. 220.

¹¹ Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, *La collezione Farnese. La scuola emiliana: i dipinti. I disegni*, Naples 1994, p. 140; S. Cassani & N. Spinosa, *La collezione Farnese. I dipinti lombardi, liguri, veneti, toscani, umbri, romani, fiamminghi. Altre scuole*, Naples 1995, pp. 19, 96, 123, 133, 177, 199 & 200. See also Bertini 1987, pp. 50ff.

¹² This extensive information was provided by Professor Bertini in a series of emails from January – March 2012.

¹³ G. Bertini, ‘A note on Bertoia’, *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXVII, 1985, p. 448.

¹⁴ W. Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting, with a chronological history of the importation of pictures by the Great Masters into England since the French Revolution*, London 1824.

¹⁵ G. Bertini, ‘I quadri farnesiani nell’appartamento di Dorotea Sofia di Neoburgo nel Palazzo Ducale di Parma’, *Aurea Parma*, LXXX, 1996, pp. 271-276.

¹⁶ See Kusche 2003, p. 86, fig. 44. Interestingly the sitter holds an elaborate set of reins, and wears a coat, in a rather masculine manner, one perhaps indicative of her imminent appointment as Regent.

¹⁷ In the Pinacoteca Stuard and the Pinacoteca Nazionale, both in Parma. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_of_Portugal,_Hereditary_Princess_of_Parma, the portrait in the Pinacoteca Stuard is an oil on canvas and is attributed to the workshop of Anthonis Mor. The Pinacoteca Nazionale image is a miniature.

¹⁸ See Jordan 1994, p. 37, fig. 8, and for comparison p. 44, fig. 19; and for a portrait of Maria d’Aviz’s father, Infante Don Duarte (Edward) de Portugal, see p. 96, fig. 59. See also Kusche 2003, p. 84, fig. 43, for the portrait of Isabella di Braganza in the Prado.

¹⁹ From a series of notes on the painting kindly supplied by Annemarie Jordan in July 2012.