

Sir Anthony van Dyck

(Flemish, 1599–1641)

Anthony van Dyck, a true genius at portraiture, revealed the aspirations of his sitters. He often flatteringly elongated his subjects and portrayed them sharply from below to enhance their stature. With elaborate settings, symbolic accessories, and suggestions of movement, Van Dyck made his sitters seem at once grand and alive, inaugurating a style of formal portraiture that is still emulated today. Van Dyck's elegant likenesses were sought eagerly in the Low Countries as well as in Italy and England, where he was knighted. His mythological and religious scenes were also greatly admired and profoundly influenced later generations of artists.

This chronological sheet discusses sixteen canvases by Van Dyck that customarily hang in Gallery 42 and the adjoining Gallery 43, where you may take this guide for reference.

ANTWERP: 1599–1621. As the fourteen-year-old son of a wealthy textile merchant, Van Dyck entered the studio of Sir Peter Paul Rubens, Europe's most distinguished artist. The precociously talented Van Dyck quickly became Rubens' most valued assistant, all the while painting portraits as well as religious and mythological pictures on his own.

Portrait of a Flemish Lady (probably 1618) follows a traditional format for the sitter's direct gaze, erect posture, and opposed hand positions. The portrait is enlivened, however, by Van Dyck's deft highlights on the jewelry, gold embroidery, lace cuffs, and millstone collar. In 1618 Van Dyck registered as a master in the Antwerp Painters' Guild. The nineteen-year-old prodigy was then entitled to accept his own commissions, possibly accounting for a sudden burst of activity noticeable in the late 1610s.

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1940.1.14

Isabella Brant (1621) depicts the first wife of Peter Paul Rubens. Just before Van Dyck left Rubens' studio for Italy, he presented this portrait to his mentor as a gift. The setting is the Italianate garden entrance to Rubens' mansion, an Antwerp landmark designed by the owner himself as one of northern Europe's first classically styled structures. In this affectionate portrait, Van Dyck moved a statue of Minerva to an imaginary position behind Isabella's right shoulder, suggesting a link between his beloved sitter and the classical goddess of wisdom. Isabella Brant died in 1626, and four years later Rubens married the sister of the woman discussed in the next entry.



Oil on canvas, 1.530 x 1.200 m (60 1/4 x 47 1/4 in.)
Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.47

Susanna Fourment and Her Daughter (1621) is Van Dyck's first known double likeness of an adult and a child, a portrait type he would continue to develop throughout his career. In this carefully balanced design, mother and daughter greet the viewer. With both of her tiny hands, Clara grasps the hand of her mother, who was widowed in 1621. The crimson drapery descends gently behind the sitters, as though to shelter them from the distant rainstorm. Susanna was related by marriage to Rubens' first wife, Isabella Brant, who is the subject of the previous painting. The widowed Rubens later married Susanna's sister Helena Fourment.

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.48

ITALY: 1621–1627. After a short stay in England, Van Dyck went to Italy in 1621. He traveled widely but was most

deeply affected by the dramatic works of Titian and Veronese that he saw in Venice. Van Dyck made Genoa his second home, decorating the patricians' lavish palaces with religious paintings and portraits that conveyed the sitters' prominence.

Marchesa Balbi (about 1623) was commissioned by a member of a large Genoese family with banking and commercial interests in Antwerp. In this work Van Dyck took advantage of the austerity of Genoese attire. No matter how sumptuous the fabrics, adults were permitted to wear only black and white. In a bravura display of lighting, Van Dyck defined the marchesa's stark outfit with a cascade of gold embroidery that glistens in the shadows. Beneath these striking tones and textures, Van Dyck elegantly elongated her anatomy. Her skirt and lace ruff disguise legs and a neck half again as long as any conceivably normal proportions.

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.49

Marchesa Elena Grimaldi Cattaneo (1623) depicts the aristocratic mother of the children portrayed in the next two paintings. With superb animation, the marchesa strolls before an imposing colonnade and turns to confront the viewer, whose presence she has just sensed. Van Dyck represented her cuffs in a bright red to match the parasol, making a triangular configuration of color around her self-assured face. In reality, the cuffs must have been white like her collar. The scarlet sunshade attracts attention to the head, much as a halo would in a religious image. Enhancing her almost supernatural status are the reverent eyes of her servant.



Oil on canvas, 2.410 x 1.330 m (95 1/8 x 52 1/2 in.)
Widener Collection 1942.9.92

Filippo Cattaneo (1623) and the companion painting of his sister Maddalena are Van Dyck's only known pair of children's portraits. In response to dynastic concerns of Genoese patricians, the artist began to portray individual children in Italy. An inscription on the wall at the left gives the boy's age as four years, seven months. Regardless of his innocent charm, the child assumes a posture of authority as his father's heir. One arm is cocked on his hip, and the other firmly controls an iron chain restraining a mastiff puppy.

Widener Collection 1942.9.93

Maddalena Cattaneo (1623), standing before a velvet cushion and holding an apple, a symbol of fertility, creates a demure foil to her brother's more defiant image. Although the children's likenesses are companion pieces of identical size and similar

interior setting, they do not correspond in format to their mother's portrait, discussed above. The pair of children's pictures may have hung together but apart from Van Dyck's *Elena Grimaldi* in the Cattaneo palace.

Widener Collection 1942.9.94

The Prefect Raffaele Raggi (about 1625) is identified by a crest at the upper right. This image is Van Dyck's first portrait of a deceased sitter. In 1528 this prefect had gained the Raggi family's admission into the nobility of Genoa, and his descendants must have requested this posthumous portrait to emphasize their lineage. Van Dyck, however, did not attempt to create an actual ancestor likeness; he undoubtedly used a living model to add vivacity to the face. Moreover, the armor is that of Van Dyck's own time, not of the early sixteenth century when the subject lived.

Widener Collection 1942.9.90

Giovanni Vincenzo Imperiale (1626) bears a coat of arms and a dedication giving the sitter's age as forty-four. A commander of the Genoese navy, he sits beside a window, through which may be seen a fleet of warships. Unlike the military portrait of Prefect Raphael Regius, this painting emphasizes the subject's administrative duties and financial success by means of his civilian garb and the letter he holds.

Widener Collection 1942.9.89

A Genoese Noblewoman and Her Son (about 1626) exemplifies Van Dyck's innovative designs. The majestic figures of mother and child are isolated by the artist's use of architectural forms. The woman, seen in impersonal profile, sits in a darkened portico, while the boy directly confronts the viewer from his position in front of a vast sky—possibly implying his destiny to go out into the world. Despite the intimacy of their clasped hands, both mother and son seem hauntingly aloof, especially when compared to the frisky dog.

Widener Collection 1942.9.91

ANTWERP: 1627–1632. After six years in Italy, Van Dyck returned to Flanders as an artist with an international reputation. Religious paintings were in demand in Antwerp, a fervently Catholic city that was a stronghold of the Counter-Reformation.

Lady with a Fan (about 1628) depicts the daughter of a Genoese admiral and the wife of Spain's ambassador to Genoa. Her marriage, which took place in Madrid in 1628, may have been the occasion for this portrait. Both her Italian father and her Spanish husband served official duties in the Netherlands, and her costume with its slashed sleeves is northern European in style. With his brilliant use of neutral tones in white, gray, and black, Van Dyck minimized the sitter's fleshy corpulence.

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1957.14.1

The Virgin as Intercessor (1628/1629) demonstrates Van Dyck's powerful ability to devise new religious interpretations. With upturned eyes and open arms, Mary welcomes rays of



heavenly light. Ten infant angels fly around her praying figure; some hold the instruments of Christ's Passion, including the crown of thorns and the cross. The intimate character and domestic scale of this altar picture suggest that it was intended for a private chapel. The wreath of roses held near the Virgin's head may refer to Saint Rosalie, whose holy relics were sent to Antwerp as protection against the plague. Van Dyck belonged to the Jesuit confraternity that brought Rosalie's relics from Sicily in 1629.

Oil on canvas, 1.181 x 1.022 m (46 1/2 x 40 1/4 in.)
Widener Collection 1942.9.88

ENGLAND: 1632–1641. In London on 5 July 1632, Charles I knighted Van Dyck as “principalle Paynter in Ordinary to their Majesties.” For the British court, Sir Anthony van Dyck created works that conveyed the king's role as an absolute monarch. On two occasions, the celebrated artist received royal permission to return to the Continent. Van Dyck died in London, only forty-two years old, in 1641; the next year saw the stirrings of the English Civil War.

Philip, Lord Wharton (1632) was one of Van Dyck's first private commissions after he arrived in London in March 1632. Casually bracing a shepherd's crook in his arm, the nineteen-year-old aristocrat engages in a pastoral masquerade. The relationship of the handsome youth to the Arcadian landscape suggests a philosophical attitude that pervaded Charles I's court. A classical concept of ideal love had come to encompass, through Christian interpretation, the idea that physical beauty was a means of spiritually approaching God.

Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.50

Queen Henrietta Maria with Sir Jeffrey Hudson (1633) portrays the wife of Charles I with her trusted confidant, a fourteen-year-old midget. This court attendant, by contrast,



makes his twenty-four-year-old mistress appear much taller and more commanding than her actual petite size. Sister to Louis XIII of France, the Catholic queen wears a satin hunting dress; her crown nestles inside a brocade drapery to one side. The exotic orange tree, besides its obvious expense, implies purity and love, but the monkey might allude to erotic passions.

By gently laying her hand on the animal, the queen may embody virtue restraining passion. The monkey, named Pug, was the pet of Jeffrey Hudson, who accompanied the royal family to the safety of the French court when the English Civil War broke out. Although her husband was beheaded in 1649, Henrietta Maria lived to see her children resume the throne upon the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

Oil on canvas, 2.191 x 1.348 m (86 1/4 x 53 1/8 in.)
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.39

Henri II de Lorraine (about 1634) was painted in Brussels during Van Dyck's visit to the southern Netherlands in 1633–1634. Henri II had fled from the French duchy of Lorraine after the failure of his intrigue against Louis XIII's prime minister. With ostrich plumes in his hat, armor scattered at his feet, and a steel gorget or throat guard underneath his lace collar, the duke is among the most flamboyant sitters Van Dyck ever portrayed. The bachelor also has a lovelock—a curl grown longer than the rest of his hair—in which a gallant would sport ribbons that were favors from his lady friends.

Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney 1947.14.1

Catherine Howard, Lady d'Aubigny (about 1638) depicts Catherine Howard holding a rose garland, a traditional emblem of betrothal. She married George, Lord d'Aubigny, in 1638, and Van Dyck's portrait is stylistically consistent with the date of her wedding. Van Dyck imbued her image with the elegance that pervaded the court of Charles I, where beauty was equated with idealized love and spiritual fulfillment.

Widener Collection 1942.9.95

The paintings discussed in this sheet usually hang in these two rooms, but installations change frequently.

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15 October 2007 (2 ed.)