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Anthony van Dyck

Sir Anthony Van Dyck , 1599-1641, Flemish portrait and religious painter and etcher, b. Antwerp. In 1618 he was received as a master in the artists' guild, but even before this he produced independent paintings in his studio. For a few years he was the skilled assistant and close collaborator of Rubens . In 1620 he was summoned to England by James I, whose portrait (now lost) he painted. The next year he went to Italy, where he studied the works of the great Venetians and painted a series of portraits of the Genoese nobility. These pictures, many of them still in the palaces of the Doria, Balbi, Durazzo, and Grimaldi families, show Van Dyck's extraordinary gift for aristocratic portraiture. Van Dyck conferred upon his sitters elegance, dignity, and refinement, qualities pleasing to royalty and aristocracy. An outstanding example is the portrait of Marchesa Elena Grimaldi (National Gall., Washington, D.C.). In 1627, Van Dyck returned to Antwerp, where he rivaled Rubens in popularity and painted a famous series of religious pictures.

In 1632, Van Dyck was invited to England by Charles I. His most successful portraits of the monarch are in the Louvre and in Buckingham Palace. He was made court painter, was knighted, and was overwhelmed with commissions. Assistants were employed to enlarge his small black-and-white sketches and to paint the drapery from clothes lent by the sitter. With this preparation he was able to complete pictures very rapidly. From 1634 to 1635 he spent some time in Antwerp, where he painted his masterly Lamentation, as well as some of his best portraits.

The work of Van Dyck differs radically from that of his great master, Rubens, although it is similar in technique. The color is much more restrained, the form more refined, although his best work has an essential vigor that the English painters strove in vain to surpass. In his delineations of English aristocrats, he created a patrician image that greatly influenced the development of English portraiture. Van Dyck is well represented in the major European museums. In the United States examples are in the Art Institute of Chicago; the Fine Arts and the Gardner museums, Boston; the Frick Collection, New York City; the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and many others. The Metropolitan Museum has several portraits, including those of James Stuart, the Marchesa Durazzo, and Lucas van Uffel. Van Dyck also produced a fine series of etched portraits known as the Iconography. The British Museum has an excellent collection of these prints.

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