

John Michael Wright (1617 – 1694)

Lord Henry Howard, later 6th Duke of Norfolk (1628 – 1684)

Oil on canvas: 52 ¾ × 41 ½ in. (133.9 × 105.4 cm.)

Painted c.1660

Provenance

By descent to Reginald J. Richard Arundel (1931 – 2016), 10th Baron Talbot of Malahide, Wardour Castle;

by whom sold, Christie's London, 8 June 1995, lot 2;

with The Weiss Gallery, 1995;

Private collection, USA, until 2019.

Literature

E. Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530 – 1790*, London 1953, p.72, plate 66b.

G. Wilson, 'Greenwich Armour in the Portraits of John Michael Wright', *The Connoisseur*, Feb. 1975, pp.111–114 (illus.).

D. Howarth, 'Questing and Flexible. John Michael Wright: The King's Painter.' *Country Life*, 9 September 1982, p.773 (illus.4).

The Weiss Gallery, *Tudor and Stuart Portraits 1530 – 1660*, 1995, no.25.

Exhibited

Edinburgh, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, *John Michael Wright – The King's Painter*, 16 July – 19 September 1982, exh. cat. pp.42 & 70, no.15 (illus.).

This portrait by Wright is such a compelling amalgam of forceful assurance and sympathetic sensitivity, that is easy to see why that doyen of British art historians, Sir Ellis Waterhouse, described it in these terms: '*The pattern is original and the whole conception of the portrait has a quality of nobility to which Lely never attained.*'¹ Painted around 1660, it is the prime original of which several other studio replicas are recorded,² and it is one of a number of portraits of sitters in similar ceremonial

¹ Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530 to 1790*, 4th integrated edition, 1978, p.108.

² Other versions include: Deene Park, East Northamptonshire (ancient seat of the Brudenell family), misidentified as *The Hon. Edmund Brudenell*; Ex-Abbotsford, misidentified as *Sir Philip Stapleton*, offered to

armour, painted by Wright in this decade.³

That Wright painted the nobility in what was by then anachronistic Elizabethan tilting armour, may be understood in the context of the recent Civil War and the climate of the post-restoration court.⁴ The pierced helmet appears again in Wright's portraits of Inchiquin and Rothes, and it is likely that Wright, who had strong antiquarian interests, actually owned these vestiges of an earlier age.⁵ The degree of realism which the artist attains in these areas of the painting must owe a great deal to daily familiarity with their gleaming presence, lit by an adjacent window in his studio in London's Great Queen Street. This realism was always a remarkable feature of the artist's work, as a painter of unmannered observation, far more so than his contemporaries. This same quality is evident here in the implication of weightlessness that he finds in the lace at Howard's throat and in the vagaries of the intertwining sword straps and their shadows on the tomb-slab. There are two features of the portrait that suggest a more idealising vision. In the middle distance on the right is a landscape perhaps more Italian than English, with an emotive sunrise, the compacted bars of grey cloud and pink sky something that appears in many of the artist's works. Also, on the left, in a dark wood a huntsman passes, grasping a lance, by the side of a prancing horse. This motif is similarly found in Wright's full-length portrait of the 1670s of an unidentified lady as *Diana the huntress*,⁶ and in two famous chieftain full-lengths from the 1680s – that of *Sir Neil O'Neill* and of *Lord Mungo Murray*.⁷

NPG in 1945, bt. by Cannon Hall Museum, Park and Gardens in 1958; Oval format after JMW at Ingatestone Hall (1954).

³ These include the portraits of *Murrough O'Brien, 1st Earl of Inchiquin*, (Manchester City Art Gallery); *John Leslie, Duke of Rothes*, (Private collection); and *General George Monck, Duke of Albemarle* (The Marquess of Bath, Longleat).

⁴ D. Howarth has suggested that the model for this unusual composition may well have been inspired by Agnolo Bronzino's portrait of *Cosimo I de Medici* (Toledo Museum of Art), an image well known to both artist and sitter through the tradition of friendship between the Medici and the Howards. *Questing and Flexible. John Michael Wright: The King's Painter*. Country Life, September 9, 1982, p.773.

⁵ G. Wilson, 'Greenwich Armour in the Portraits of John Michael Wright', *The Connoisseur*, February 1975, pp.111-114.

⁶ Private collection. See S. Stevenson & D. Thomson, *John Michael Wright, The King's Painter*, exhibition catalogue, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh 1982, pp.83-4; illustrated in colour, p.37. This exhibition was the last major showing of Wright's work.

⁷ Respectively at Tate Britain, London, and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

Whether these figures are simply attendants, references to the sitter's predilection for hunting, or have a deeper symbolic meaning is open to interpretation. The metaphorical narrative could signify a spiritual gallop through a '*selva oscura*', brought to successful conclusion on the edge of an unfolding Arcadian landscape.⁸ In turn, the rising sun breaking through the clouds may suggest a new dawn following the restoration of the monarchy – and indeed a new beginning for the Howard family. The combination of these unique resonances with Wright's fresh and unblinking realism, again sets him apart in an entirely original way from his contemporaries in seventeenth-century British art.

Henry Howard was the second son of Henry Frederick Howard, Lord Maltravers and 15th Earl of Arundel (1608 – 1652) and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart (*d.* 1674), daughter of the 3rd Duke of Lennox. Henry's paternal grandfather, Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel (1585 – 1646), was a notable figure in the court of both James I and Charles I, appointed Earl Marshal in 1621 and Constable of England in 1623. Indeed, in 1636 Thomas Howard commissioned a double portrait by Sir Anthony van Dyck with his eldest grandson Thomas (1627 – 1677), in a clear statement of dynastic intent (The Duke of Norfolk, Arundel Castle). It was in this context that Henry joined his elder brother with their grandfather in Padua in 1644, in exile from the English Civil War. Poignantly, it was there that his brother contracted a fever rendering him a lunatic for the rest of his life, unable to fulfil his hereditary destiny. Our sitter, Henry Howard, therefore became *de facto* head of the family when his father died on 17 April 1652.

Following the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the family fortunes improved. There was near unanimity in the House of Lords that year to persuade King Charles II to revive the Dukedom of Norfolk, and since Thomas the heir apparent was consigned to an asylum in Padua, Henry was summoned to the Lords in his own right. By 1665, the year of the Great Plague in London, Henry had settled at his villa in Albury, Surrey, where the famous diarist John Evelyn visited him and admired his collection of paintings and curiosities, with '*cartoons and drawings of Raphael and the Great Masters*'. Like his grandfather, he was a keen connoisseur,

⁸ J. Moffitt, 'Le Roi à la chasse: Kings, Christian Knights, and Van Dyck's Equestrian Portrait of Charles I', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 4 (7) 1983, 79-99, p.85.

and was elected as a fellow of the Royal Society, to whom he presented the greater part of his library in 1666, after the Great Fire of London. In 1677, following the death of his elder brother, he finally became 6th Duke of Norfolk.

That Henry Howard chose the most fashionable painters of the day to paint his portrait in a dazzling array of costumes is no surprise. Among his chosen artists were Flemish-born Gilbert Soest, Adriaen Hanneman and of course, John Michael Wright, who painted him again in c.1669 (Powis Castle & Garden, Powys, National Trust). Henry's preoccupation with his own image, and desire to promote himself through portraiture, was no doubt prompted by his elder brother's mental infirmity, and an awareness that he would ultimately succeed to the Dukedom. As such, our portrait can be regarded as a vehicle for historical continuity. It is not known for what occasion this portrait was commissioned, but Henry's apparent youth and the symbolism within the painting would suggest the Restoration of 1660, and the revival of the Dukedom of Norfolk.

In 1662, on the death of his first wife Lady Anne Somerset, Howard is said by Evelyn to have fallen into a deep melancholy and to have sought relief in a course of dissipation, which impaired both his fortune and his reputation. He married secondly his mistress, Jane Bickerton, whose father was Gentleman of the Wine Cellar to Charles II.⁹ He died in 1684 at Arundel House and was buried at Arundel Castle, except for his heart which was deposited at the convent of St Elizabeth in Bruges.¹⁰

John Michael Wright was the most distinguished and original native-born portrait painter during the Restoration period. He spent his apprenticeship working for George Jamesone in Edinburgh which provided a grounding in the fundamentals of painting, however it was his entry into the Academy of St. Luke in Rome in 1648 that introduced the young artist to a new and more sophisticated approach to painting. This exposure to continental artists shaped the direction of Wright's technique and style, a unique fusion of Dutch realism, Italian Baroque and French classicism. He returned to England in 1655 and by 1660 established a successful portrait-practice in London. At the time, he was described by John Evelyn, as *'the*

⁹ Evelyn, who clearly did not approve of the union, commented in his diary the Duke had: *'now newly declared his marriage to his concubine, whom he promised me he would never marry.'*

¹⁰ Howard said of himself that: *'the character of a papist ... (was) ... ever indelible in me.'*

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famous painter Mr Write'.¹¹ He worked for both Royalist and Parliamentary clients, and must have been an affable as well as mercurial character.

We are grateful to Dr. Duncan Thomson for his assistance with this catalogue entry.

¹¹ E.S. de Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 5 April 1659, (Oxford Press 1955), p.228.