

20 January 2009

Changing Faces

Anthony Van Dyck as an Etcher

17 February – 24 May 2009

Rarely-seen portrait etchings by the Flemish artist Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641) go on display at The Fitzwilliam Museum this spring.

Van Dyck's achievements as a painter are manifold: the pupil of Peter Paul Rubens, his skill and innovation as a portrait painter won him wide acclaim, noble patronage and a knighthood from King Charles I. In the shadow of this reputation, Van Dyck's contributions to the history of printmaking have often been unjustly overlooked; yet although few in number, his portrait etchings are among the most beautiful examples of the technique ever seen.

Changing Faces: Anthony Van Dyck as an Etcher throws light on Van Dyck's achievement as a printmaker with this choice selection from The Fitzwilliam Museum's collection. Van Dyck drew the image direct on the plate, but only in the very rare early examples on display can viewers see his subtle touch before professional engravers altered and added to the image. By showing early impressions of the artist's pure etchings next to later states, this exhibition offers visitors the chance to witness the fascinating development of the portraits.



Van Dyck's interest in printmaking was inherited from his teacher Rubens, in whose studio he worked in the 1610s. It was here that the artist first considered printmaking as a means to promote and disseminate his work, and around 1630 Van Dyck conceived the idea to produce a uniform series of portrait prints of distinguished contemporaries after his own designs, a series widely known as the *Iconography*.

With the exception of his portraits of Erasmus and the diplomat Philippe Le Roy, Van Dyck's subjects are all Flemish artists. Van Dyck even honoured two of his highly skilled printmaking collaborators, the engravers Lucas Vorsterman and Paulus Pontius, with the inclusion of their likenesses. His portrayal of his fellow artists takes its cue from the portraiture of the Renaissance in which, through their physical poses, expressions and attire, artists were represented not as ordinary craftsmen, but as distinguished, dignified and learned men.



Throughout *Changing Faces*, the subjects' poses range from the stately to the more intimate and distinctive. Van Dyck's portrait of Joos De Momper has the sitter gesturing towards a mountainous backdrop, in knowing recognition of De Momper's talent in painting mountain ranges; elsewhere, Frans Snyders forgoes the heroic stances of his fellow sitters and gazes at the viewer with an intensity that makes clear Van Dyck's interest in the distinct personalities and characters of his subjects.

A testament to Van Dyck's artistic variety and versatility, these portrait prints reveal not only a less well-known side of Van Dyck's career, but also the human faces of the seventeenth-century art world.

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Press Release | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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17 February – 24 May 2009

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OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: Mondays and Good Friday

ADMISSION FREE

Further information and images from:

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Notes for Editors The Fitzwilliam Museum

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints.

The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st century and include masterpieces by Titian, Canaletto, Stubbs, Constable, Monet, Renoir and Picasso, one of the world's foremost Rembrandt print collections, Handel music manuscripts and the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, one of the most significant collections of Korean ceramics outside South-East Asia, medieval illuminated manuscripts and outstanding collections of pottery, porcelain and medieval coins.

The Fitzwilliam Museum welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year, offers a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events, and has an award-winning Education Service. The Museum is open Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00, Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00. Free admission.
Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

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