

Fit for a Queen: Fitzwilliam first UK Museum to acquire a portrait by Spanish court painter Vicente López with support from the Art Fund

Fitzwilliam Museum acquisition:
Vicente López y Portaña (1772 - 1850)
Maria Isabel de Borbón, Queen of the Two Sicilies,
1829-30
Oil on canvas, 110cm x 78cm

The Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge has acquired a Royal portrait from 1829-30 of *Maria Isabel de Borbón, Queen of the Two Sicilies* by Spanish court painter Vicente López y Portaña (1772 -1850) – this is the first painting by the artist to enter a public collection in the UK. The painting has been acquired with support of the Art Fund, the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum and other generous private donors.

López is not well known outside Spain, but deserves to be – he is one of the most technically accomplished of all portrait painters of the period.

Already a highly respected artist and teacher, López

was appointed official court painter of Ferdinand VII of Spain 1814, and remained so to his death in 1850. He enjoyed great success, painting religious, mythological and historical subjects, but specialised in detailed, showy, yet psychologically insightful, portraits of the Royal Family and high society. From politicians to prelates, almost every notable person in Spain of the day sat to López.

This portrait depicts the matronly Queen of the Two Sicilies, also known as the Kingdom of Naples. She is awash with blue velvet and fine lace, wearing an impressive set of diamonds and sapphires – the painting is a superb example of López's skills. The portrait of the fifty-seven year old Queen is touchingly honest, the asymmetry of her face, discolorations of skin, tired eyes, reddened hands, double chin and hint of a smile, all rendered with the same meticulous care as her lace, diamonds, and virtuoso crumpled kid glove.

López painted two other versions of this portrait, one in the Academia Real de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, another in the Royal Palace at Madrid, but this version is believed to have belonged to Maria Cristina, Queen of Spain and the sitter's daughter. It is thought to be the finest of the three.



Vicente López y Portaña (1772 - 1850)
Maria Isabel de Borbón, Queen of the Two Sicilies, 1829-30
© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The sitter, Maria Isabel de Borbón (1789-1848) was herself a Spanish princess, the daughter of Charles IV of Spain and Maria Luisa of Parma. She was the second wife of Francis, Duke of Calabria, later Francis I of the Two Sicilies (1777-1830) - they married in Barcelona in 1802 and had thirteen children. Generous, good natured, pliable and increasingly overweight, she was said to be 'null in every respect, knowledge, ideas, curiosity', but stoically, even cheerfully, weathered the turbulent events of the time - including the French invasion of the Kingdom of Naples in 1806 and their exile to Palermo under British protection until 1820.

After her family's reinstatement in Naples and Caserta, Maria Isabel took little part in politics, but diligently married off her many children to the Royal and aristocratic houses of Europe - her daughters became respectively the Queen of Spain, the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, an Infanta of Portugal and the Empress of Brazil. Maria Isabel was particularly close to her second daughter, Maria Cristina, and arranged for her to marry her own brother, King Ferdinand VII of Spain, in 1829. Maria Isabel and Francis I accompanied their daughter to Madrid for the wedding and all three sat for their portraits by López on arrival.

Tim Knox, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum commented: "There are no works by López in British public collections, most remain in Spain, where he is highly esteemed - however, his work is virtually unknown here. We are keen to develop our collection of Spanish art, in time we hope to be able to assemble a more rounded representation of the Spanish portrait genre. We already have good group of portraits by Lopez's late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European contemporaries, as well as later portraits, by Millais, Sargent, Philpot, Sir William Nicholson, Sickert, John and Stanley Spencer, as well as by Cezanne, Matisse, Modigliani and Picasso, which make this an interesting area of the collection for comparison and research."

Stephen Deuchar, director of the Art Fund, said: "We are so pleased to support the acquisition of this remarkable portrait by a rare artist. It is a striking addition to the Fitzwilliam's collection of European paintings, and will enrich their Spanish and early nineteenth century holdings. We wish the Fitzwilliam all the best for their bicentenary in 2016 and are delighted to be part of the celebration through making this grant. "

The painting is now on display alongside some of the Museum's finest British and European portraits of the 16th to the 18th centuries in its Gallery 3. Admission to the Fitzwilliam is free.

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Press Office:
01223 332941 | press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Notes to editors:

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
FREE ADMISSION

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January and Good Friday.

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner Museum programme, funded by The Arts Council. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

The Fitzwilliam is celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2016.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years the Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. The Art Fund also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including ARTIST ROOMS and the 2013-18 Aspire tour of Tate's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* by John Constable, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators.

The Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 117,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 230 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibition. In addition to grant-giving, the Art Fund's support for museums includes the annual Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year, a publications programme and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org
For further information please contact Madeline Adeane, Press Relations Manager,
madeane@artfund.org / 0207 225 4804