



128 Sir Peter Lely

1618 – 1680 British

His Royal Highness Prince Rupert

oil on canvas, on verso titled on the Hudson's Bay Company Collection label, circa 1665
49 ¾ x 38 in, 126.4 x 96.5 cm

PROVENANCE

Said to have been presented to Hudson's Bay Company upon its foundation by Prince Rupert, 1670
Collection of Hudson's Bay Company, Canada

LITERATURE

The Beaver, June 1945, reproduced page 21

EXHIBITED

22 Grosvenor Place, London, UK, *Charles II: Loan Exhibition*, January 28 – March, 1932, no. 623

THIS PORTRAIT OF Prince Rupert has long been attributed to the Studio of Sir Anthony van Dyck. The Van Dyck attribution is initially understandable because the artist produced portraits of the prince as a youth. Stylistic analysis aside, however, the persistent Van Dyck attribution can be ruled out since the painter died in 1641, and the sitter in this portrait, born in 1619, must be considerably older than 22.

Appointed the first governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, serving until his death in 1682, Prince Rupert is portrayed as a military leader, three-quarter-length in a heavy buff coat and armoured breastplate with a baton in his right fist, his left hand on a sword, and an abbreviated scene of violent battle behind. The land battle depicted presumably commemorates the prince as a commander during the First English Civil War from 1642 to 1646, and this also endorses a later dating.

Guessing age in images is always difficult but here the prince appears slightly younger, certainly not older, than in the *Portrait of Prince Rupert* by the English Baroque artist Sir Peter Lely in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle (figure 1), from the so-called flag officer series of 13 canvases, and so dated to 1665–1668. It seems plausible to propose a date in the 1660s for the Hudson's Bay Company portrait based on the likeness alone and now to argue for Lely's authorship.

The earliest documentary reference to the painting is an archival record of the Company secretary Willam Smith, writing to a Mr. Winstanley, who valued the entire collection in 1821: "Since you were here yesterday, I have seen my predecessor Mr. Lean, who has kindly informed me that... the Portrait [of Prince Rupert] in the hall of No. 3 is by Van Dyke and was presented to the Company by the Prince on its Foundation."¹ No. 3 refers to the address at Fenchurch Street in the City of London, the then premises of the Company.

The portrait attributed to Van Dyck was lent for an exhibition devoted to Charles II in London in 1932.² This was the first time it appeared in public. To complicate its attributional history further, it was newly ascribed there to Jacob Huysmans—a still not well studied contemporary of Lely, born in Antwerp and later favoured by Catholic circles in England. C.H. Collins Baker is thanked in the catalogue preface for assistance with the cataloguing, and as a leading authority on this period of English painting he was probably responsible for reattributing the "Van Dyck" to Huysmans.³

More confusingly, but rather extraordinarily, in the review of this exhibition by Louise Gordon-Stables, this "Huysmans" *Portrait of Prince Rupert* is described as "finely sensitive" and admirably superior in quality for its subtle lighting and depth of characterization to anything by Lely.⁴ So the portrait was definitely regarded by that reviewer as a major work.

Credit goes to C.R. Cammell in a 1937 general survey article of the portraits of Prince Rupert for discrediting the School of Van Dyck label on the HBC painting and praising it as "in Lely's undoubted manner."⁵ It seems the Company did not notice or credit this published reference, and the Van Dyck label was maintained until the present day.

Assigning Lely's name to the portrait of Prince Rupert with baton should never have been in doubt, because a related documented version of the image survives in the Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti) in Florence (figure 2). Published in 1958, the canvas is firmly documented from its commission in 1674 to when it was shipped and received in Florence in 1677.⁶ Oliver Millar praised the quality of the Lely in Florence as fully autograph but, tellingly, mentioned that the composition was a retrograde one for the painter at that date. Millar did cite the HBC version in a footnote as a copy, so the first and only time linking the two works

in print, but curiously again, mentioned that the features seemed closer to the earlier portrait of Prince Rupert at Windsor Castle of approximately a decade earlier.

It is not clear Millar knew the Company painting in person, but his suggestions that both the design and face in the Florence version seemed earlier are relevant, if the HBC portrait was indeed painted earlier. And it is possible to defend the priority of the Company version from a reference in its archives stating that this portrait had been presented to the Company by Prince Rupert himself when it was founded in 1670, according to the document of 1821 already cited. Assuming the 1670 reference is accurate, the Florence painting must be either dependent directly on the HBC canvas in existence by 1670 at the latest, or another close version of it.

As Lely had such a large workshop and prolific practice, one must argue for the autograph status of the Company painting solely on basis of style. But the brisk liquidity of touch suggests the hand of the master. The roughly applied bituminous patch behind the head to define the hair and face compares to the oil sketch of King James II in the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 5211), which is one of the finest of all Lely's efforts. A copyist would not have left that visible in the final image.

From this detail alone it is arguable that this version was the primary one from which other copies were made. Similarly, the planar treatment of the face also suggests the master working with efficiency to establish form. Most significantly, the Uffizi portrait lacks the electric flash of red on the upturned cuff on the left sleeve, one of the bolder details of paint handling. Conversely, the red sash added to the Florence canvas gives the portrait a glamour appropriate for the new ducal patron but clearly thought too ostentatious in the earlier version. It is now possible to confirm the attribution of



FIGURE 1: SIR PETER LE LY
Portrait of Prince Rupert
oil on canvas, circa 1665 – 1668
48 ¾ x 39 ¾ in, 123 x 100.8 cm
Royal Collection Trust, 405883

Not for sale with this lot



FIGURE 2: SIR PETER LE LY
Portrait of Prince Rupert
oil on canvas, 1674 – 1677
49 ¼ x 40 ½ in, 125 x 103 cm
Galleria Palatina, Florence
Photographic Department of the Uffizi Galleries

Not for sale with this lot

this Company portrait of Prince Rupert to Sir Peter Lely and propose a date in the 1660s.

We thank David Franklin, art historian, curator and expert in Renaissance and Baroque art, for his extensive research on this work and for contributing the above essay. A longer version of this essay will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *British Art Journal*.

We are very grateful to Diana Dethloff, Catharine MacLeod and David Taylor for their advice about this work, as well as a number of other portraits.

1. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, A.5/6 fol.165. I owe this reference to the kindness of Kathleen Epp in Winnipeg.
2. *A Loan Exhibition Depicting the Reign of Charles II*, 22 & 23 Grosvenor Place, London, SW1, January 28 – March 1932, cat. #623.
3. According to Oliver Millar, *Sir Peter Lely, 1618–80* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 1978), exhibition catalogue, 54.
4. Louise Gordon-Stables, "The Charles II Exhibition," *The Burlington Magazine* 60, 1932, 151.
5. C.R. Cammell, "Rupert, Prince Palatine: Portraits of a Royal Artist," *The Connoisseur*, August 1937, 63. The other HBC portrait of Prince Rupert is illustrated on p. 63, fig. 7, with a list of the other versions.
6. Anna Maria Crinò and Oliver Millar, "Sir Peter Lely and the Grand Duke of Tuscany," *The Burlington Magazine* 100, 1958, 129n35.

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