THE LIMNER COMPANY



DAVID DES GRANGES (c.1611 - c.1672)

King Charles II (1630-85), wearing a decorated doublet under an armour breastplate, the blue sash of the order of the garter, and a lawn collar; circa 1651

Circa: Circa 1651

Watercolour on vellum

Signed with initials and dated *DDG*

Original turned stained wood frame

Oval, 57mm (2 ¼ in) high

This portrait by David des Granges is one of a series commissioned by the young Charles while fleeing into exile. Here, his official title was 'King of Scots', as after his father Charles I's execution in January 1649, The Scottish Parliament proclaimed Charles II as king.

This title was not a comfortable fit, as Charles's relationship with the Scottish Parliament was fraught to say the least. The young king refused to bow to demands concerning religion, union, and the peace of Scotland, according to the covenants. After a final attempt to invade England, Charles's army was defeated at Worcester in 1651. That year had begun with Charles's coronation as 'King of Scots' in January but he now became a fugitive, hunted through England (hiding from the army's search in, among other places, the famous oak tree at Boscobel), protected by a handful of his loyal subjects until he escaped to Normandy, France in October 1651.

Based back in Perth, the artist des Granges was tasked with painting miniatures of Charles to distribute to those who were loyal to the monarchy and providing much needed funds to the royal family. [1] New research into the life of des Granges and his family has shown that the artist had relocated from London to Edinburgh by 1649, where they baptised a son named Samson, after his grandfather, in Canongate. Although it has been suggested that des Granges followed Charles II to Edinburgh, when the future king arrived in the city in June 1650, Des Granges had actually already been based there for at least a year.

The dire financial circumstances of the monarchy are well illustrated by des Granges's own plea to be paid for portrait miniatures, such as the present example, in the Treasury Papers of 1671. Called '*A Schedule of Work done by David de Grange Intertained Limner to His Majty during Y or Royal abode at St.Johnstons at Scotland*'. The artist had already waited two decades to be remunerated for his work. The only gain for des Granges, other than this expression of his loyalty to the crown, was the title of King's Limner.

One of barely a dozen portraits gifted to those closest to the royal family, the remaining extant miniatures have ended up in large and important collections across the country, including the Buccleuch collection, Ham House collection, and the National Portrait Gallery. Without the King to hand, des Granges took his visage from oil portraits. The lost oil by by Adriaen Hanneman is the likely source here.[2] Des Granges also seems to have gained inspiration from the portraits by Champaigne for his own composition, featuring similar tassels on Charles's lawn collar, and slightly flattening the King's hair too.

Two years after the death of Oliver Cromwell, in 1660, Charles returned to England to begin the process of restoring the crown. Portraits, particularly portrait miniatures, were a key feature in this transition – they had kept the image of the King and his claim to the throne alive during the Protectorate. Given that portrait miniatures were deemed to represent the absent sitter 'by proxy' (i.e. as if they were bodily present), they invoked the loyalty of the owner far more than other portrait formats. Their size also meant that they could be hidden and secretly gifted. The original stained wood case would originally have had a lid, which would have kept the portrait both protected and concealed.

The present work is both a rare survival and a key object in the story of the Restoration of the monarchy.

[1] Des Granges is known to have been based as St Johnston's, the 17th century name for Perth, the city closest to Scone Palace where Charles II had just been crowned King.

[2] O. Ter Kuile, Utrecht, Adriaen Hanneman, 1604-1671: A Portrait Painter in the Hague, 1976, p. 68.

Exhibitions

Compton Verney House, Warwickshire, 'The Reflected Self; Portrait miniatures 1540-1850', Sept. 2024-February 2025.