

Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo

Lot No. 77 -



Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo

(Madrid 1619–1671)

An equestrian portrait of the young King Charles II of Spain, oil on canvas, 208 x 154.5 cm, framed

Portraits have always been powerful tools of dynastic propaganda, and especially when depicting royalty, as is demonstrated in this impressive recently rediscovered portrait.

According to extensive research carried out by art historians Cipriano García-Hidalgo Villena and Gloria Martínez Leiva, this painting was used by the Spanish court and its painters as a model for other variations of the composition. The Royal workshop was an institution founded specifically at the Royal Alcazar in Madrid to diffuse images of the Habsburg rulers by producing works after established portrait types and the present painting, executed by the court painter Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo, was used as a model to spread a positive representation of the young king.

used as a diplomatic gift and as a symbol of the presence of the ruler even in faraway regions of the empire. For Charles II, an image as powerful as this rediscovered one was vital in conveying a picture of an able and adept monarch who would ensure the continuation of Habsburg Rule in the Spanish empire. However, the reality would prove to be somewhat different.

The ascension to the throne of Spain of the young boy shown here in September 1665, heralded one of the great tragedies of the Habsburg Family which ultimately resulted in one of the bloodiest conflicts in European history; the war of the Spanish succession. Charles was to be the last Habsburg King of Spain.

Prince Felipe Próspero, the heir to the Spanish throne, died when he was four years old on 1st November 1661, however, Charles the new heir was born only five days later, on 6th November. Charles was Queen Mariana's sixth child, and the health of his father King Philip IV made the birth of another heir highly unlikely. Charles's birth, which ensured the continuation of the Habsburg dynasty, was extensively celebrated as he was the last legitimate male member of the Spanish branch of the Habsburg family. His health, ability to rule and to produce male offspring, would be vital to ensure the continuation of Habsburg power, and to prevent the war that would ensue if there was an extinction of the royal bloodline.

Shortly after his birth, rumours began to spread among the diplomats in Madrid that the heir was weak and in poor health. The Gazette de Madrid tried to deny this affirming that the Prince was: 'beautiful of features, big head, black hair and a bit bulky of meats'. A portrait attributed to Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo (1612-1667), now in the Stirling Maxwell Collection, shows the new-born prince with a healthy appearance. Foreign ambassadors in Madrid received orders to find out the real condition of the child and they were even asked to verify his sex, an issue that had also been called into doubt. Philip IV, facing ever-increasing pressure from foreign emissaries, agreed that they could visit the new-born child. The French envoy reported to Louis XIV after the visit: 'The Prince seems to be extremely weak... The head is entirely covered with scabs. For two or three weeks, a kind of drainage channel or drainage has formed under the right ear. We could not see this, but we have learned through other channels ...'. Modern-day research has confirmed what had already been previously assumed, that both Charles's mental and physical condition were largely due to the extensive history of inbreeding which his family had practiced for decades, before his birth. The Habsburg family was well known for cousins marrying one another.

~~The visit of the ambassadors did not manage to extinguish the rumours and a~~

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heir, and art was to be used as one of its main tools. Philip IV died in 1665, and Charles became the ruler of a vast empire at the age of four, which, even in decline, was still one of the great powers of Europe. His mother, Mariana of Austria acted as Regent, until he reached the legal age of fourteen. To support his position a powerful message had to be transmitted to Spain's vassals, rivals and allies. The alleged good health of the child had to be emphasized to assure the people that he was already a head of state capable of steadily directing the empire's fate. This is the reason why the most widespread image of the new sovereign in his first years of rule would be the type used throughout all of art history as the most powerful symbol of royal power- the portrait on horseback.

Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo (1611–1671) was appointed court painter in February of 1667, following the death of Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo. Herrera Barnuevo, was given the task of creating a royal portrait that would be powerful enough to quieten widespread rumours and he drew inspiration from two successful royal portrait types which had been employed by earlier court painters.

The first is the equestrian portrait of Balthasar Carlos created by Velázquez (fig. 1) for the Salón de Reinos of the Buen Retiro Palace. Examples of the first type, based on the Velasquez model and an apparently lost prototype by Barnuevo, can be found in many Spanish collections, such as the portrait Charles II on horseback, Madrid, Patrimonio Nacional. Copies by the Royal workshop vary strongly in quality. When Charles II was ten years old, and he started to approach his legal age of fourteen, it was apparently decided to evolve the type of the equestrian portraits that were used to endorse the image of the king. Now Barnueovo turned to another portrait as a reference: Rubens' famous equestrian portrait of the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand (see fig. 2).

Leiva argues that Barnuevo did not choose the Cardinal Infante Ferdinand of Austria as an iconographical reference for purely aesthetic and artistic reasons. He also wanted to subliminally link the young king with the dynasty's glorious past. In Rubens' portrait, the brother of Philip IV was portrayed by the artist in commemoration of a decisive victory he won over the Protestant army in 1634. Rubens had devised a traditional equestrian image, where the serenity of the Cardinal contrasted with the agitation of the horse. The usual elements alluding to the power of the military and government capacity are united to the eagle, symbol of the Habsburgs, and to the allegory of Divine Revenge. The artist, portraying Charles II in this way, wanted to link the sovereign with a victorious moment in the dynasty's history and his decision to use a prestigious model served to strengthen this image. Barnuevo was responsible for identifying the Rubens model to the figure of Charles II.

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Cipriano García-Hidalgo Villena and Gloria Martínez Leiva have suggested that the portrait offered here is indeed the prime version of this successful adaptation, and was the model, after which the royal workshop produced countless copies. The number of equestrian portraits made of Charles II declined after the death of Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo in 1671, and after the king had reached the legal age. The most important portraits were those painted by Luca Giordano and Francisco Rizi, which differ from Herrera's two successful models.

The Portrait:

The present painting depicts a landscape with almost nocturnal lighting, under blue and leaden skies. The child king appears on a white horse in a corvette position. He has long wavy blonde hair, his slight body is covered with a rich armour including decorations in gold and silver, and he is dressed in brown leather riding trousers. The armour may be one of the Milanese pieces that Philip III wore during his childhood and it appears to be similar to one in the Royal Armoury in Madrid. He wears the order of the golden fleece around his neck and holds the commander's baton in his right hand. In the upper left corner of the painting, an eagle carries a laurel wreath in its beak which crowns the child. Meanwhile, a battle takes place in the background of the lower part of the painting. This battle could represent the Devolution War that took place in 1668 and was one of the few Spanish victories during the reign of Charles II. The pose of the king is identical to the artist's portrait in the Prado, Madrid (see fig. 3). The way in which the wavy hair and the face of the king are executed are similar in both paintings.

The battle represented in the background of the landscape is made with a loose brushstroke including touches of white, reminiscent of Venetian Renaissance painters and is similar to the technique which can be seen in other works by Barnuevo such as the painting of the Jesuit martyrs of Japan in the altarpiece of the Trinities, in the Church of San Isidro, Madrid. The same technique of loose brushwork can be seen in the handling of the decorations and the highlights in the armour. The eagle in the upper part of the painting is also characteristic of Herrera's portraits.

This present work is one of the most successful paintings by Sebastián Herrera Barnuevo and displays his painterly skill which made him the successor of Juan Baustista Martínez del Mazo and Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. It is one of his few known fully executed works.

We are grateful to Cipriano García-Hidalgo Villena and Gloria Martínez Leiva for their help in cataloguing this lot.

Specialist: **Mark McDonnell**

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EUR 60,000 to 80,000


USD 74,000 to 98,500

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AUCTION DETAILS

Old Master Paintings

Date: 24.04.2018, 16:00 

Location: Palais Dorotheum Vienna

Exhibition: 14.04. - 24.04.2018
