

Queen Henrietta Maria

**'Queen Henrietta Maria' (1609-1690)
by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641)**

oil on canvas

A zoomable image of this painting is available on our website to use in the classroom with an interactive whiteboard or projector.

www.ashmolean.org/education/resources



Background information

The painting

Queen Henrietta Maria of France married Charles I in 1625 and Van Dyck painted this portrait of her in 1632 when she was 23 years old. This rather informal portrait has a relaxed elegance not seen in royal portraiture that had preceded it.

The three-quarter length portrait is charmingly elegant rather than formal and is painted with a lightness of touch and tone. Henrietta Maria's crown is not the focus of the portrait but is relegated to the background, half obscured by the sleeve of her flamboyant dress. The emphasis is indeed more on her fashionable silvery-grey dress with its pale pinkish-scarlet bows which are recorded with great care. Her hair is adorned by another bow in a similar colour to those on her dress and the pink roses under her right hand echo the bows. The dress is shown off beautifully by the sumptuous dark green curtain draped behind her.

The artist

Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) was a famous Flemish portrait painter. He was appointed court painter by Charles I. As well as State portraits of Charles I he portrayed the English royal family more informally and revolutionized royal portraiture by introducing more dynamic compositions. He often incorporated the dramatic presence of a draped curtain pulled back to allow the viewer a glimpse out into a natural vista and open skies.



The historical context

Van Dyck was one of the greatest portrait painters of the 17th century. He often flatteringly elongated his subjects and portrayed them from slightly below to enhance their stature. With elaborate settings and luscious, sparkling depiction of the rich fabrics of the period as well as symbolic accessories, and suggestions of movement, Van Dyck made his sitters seem at once grand and alive. He inaugurated a new style of formal portraiture which influenced many future generations of British painters

There are a number of versions of this portrait of Queen Henrietta Maria - they differ in detail such as the position of the crown. The high quality of the Ashmolean version suggests that it is by van Dyck with some studio assistance. The elaborate frame may date from c.1630 but it was probably originally made for a religious painting as Christian symbols are included amongst the varieties of fruit in the frame.