

At The Queen's Gallery – Charles II Art & Power

At The Queen's Gallery there will be a new exhibition about the art gathered together by Charles II in his bid for recognition as monarch. Some of the pieces were recovered from previous sales under the commonwealth government, and some were commissioned by a monarch who realised the power of the arts.

The exhibition will run from 23 November 2018 to 2 June 2019.

On 29 May 1660, his 30th birthday, Charles II made his triumphant return to London, ending more than a decade of Republican rule following the execution of his father Charles I in 1649. He had been in exile for 14 years, returning only briefly between 1650 and 1651 in an unsuccessful attempt to retake the throne with support from Scottish royalists, who crowned him King of Scotland at Scone Abbey – the last in a long line of monarchs to be crowned in Scotland.

During the quarter century that he was king the arts played a vital role in reinforcing Charles's legitimacy and authority as a ruler. The exhibition *Charles II: Art & Power* at The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, will explore how Charles used the arts to create a royal court that could re-take its place on the European stage.

One of the first acts of Charles's reign was the recovery of his father's art collection, much of which had been sold off by the Commonwealth government. In May 1660, Parliament

commanded that all persons holding goods formerly belonging to Charles I were to return them with immediate effect. Among the works recovered were Orazio Gentileschi's *A Sibyl*, c.1635–7; *David with the Head of Goliath*, c.1620, by Domenico Fetti; *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1613, by Cristofano Allori; and *A Bearded Old Man with a Shell*, c.1606, by Michiel van Miereveld, which had been purchased by the portraitist Peter Lely at auction.

Charles also set out to build a new collection for himself. While still in exile in the Netherlands and just days before signing the Declaration of Breda in 1660 – which set out the new terms of the monarch's relationship with Parliament, the army and the Church – Charles had placed an order for a large group of paintings from the dealer William Frizell. Among these were George de la Tour's *Saint Jerome*, c.1621–23, and Marco d'Oggiono's *The Infant Christ and Saint John Embracing*, c. [1500–1530](#).

In the same year the King was presented with an extraordinary gift of paintings, sculpture and furniture by the States of Holland and West Friesland, designed to strengthen the alliance between the two countries and to discourage Charles II from entering into a treaty with his cousin Louis XIV, King of France and the Dutch Republic's bitter enemy. The 'Dutch Gift' included Paolo Veronese's *The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria*, c.1562–69 and Parmigianino's *Pallas Athena*, c.1531–8. But this generous act of diplomacy had little lasting effect, for within a few years England and Holland were at war.



The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine of Alexandria

Having grown up surrounded by his father's art collection, Charles II knew that paintings were not just for pleasure and decoration, but also served as expressions of power. Just three weeks after his return to England, he appointed Peter Lely as official 'Limner [painter] and Picture Drawer'. Lely was seen as the natural successor to Sir Anthony Van Dyck, the first holder of the post established by Charles I. The miniaturist Samuel Cooper, who created the profile of the King for the new coinage, was made 'Picture Maker' in 1672. Around 1674 the Italian artist Antonio Verrio presented the King with his large canvas, *The Sea Triumph of Charles II*, in an attempt to win favour with the king. This clearly worked, for Verrio was subsequently commissioned to decorate the newly built State Apartments at Windsor Castle, and in 1684 was appointed 'Chief and First Painter' to the King.

A major collection of Renaissance drawings also entered the

Royal Collection during Charles II's reign. Charles I had little interest in drawings, but his son's taste for such works may have developed during his years in exile, when he would have encountered a number of notable collections, particularly in France. The two great groups of drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger and Leonardo da Vinci that formed the core of the King's collection had previously been in the collection of Thomas Howard, 14th Earl of Arundel, the first significant collector of drawings in England. They were probably presented to Charles by Arundel's grandson in thanks for the restitution of the lands and titles of the Dukes of Norfolk after the Restoration.

The Palace of Holyroodhouse

The King's efforts to re-establish the trappings of monarchical power extended to the Palace of Holyroodhouse, which had been badly damaged by fire in 1650 when it was occupied by Oliver Cromwell's forces. Following the Restoration, the Palace once again became a royal residence and the regular meeting place of the Scottish Privy Council, who agreed in 1670 to fund a major renovation project. The newly restored Palace would glorify Scotland and emphasise Edinburgh's royal and governmental role, and although the King never stayed there, he took a keen interest in the works.

The Palace of Holyroodhouse as it exists today is largely the result of this rebuilding programme. The north-west tower was added to give symmetry to the front façade, the processional sequence of rooms was modelled on the French court of Charles's cousin, Louis XIV, and the Palace's renowned plasterwork ceilings were executed by John Houlbert and George Dunsterfield. For the largest room in the Palace, the Great Gallery, the King commissioned a sequence of 110 portraits by the Dutch artist Jacob de Wet depicting real and legendary kings of Scotland, all of which can still be seen on a visit to the Palace today. The message of the portraits was clear: by endorsement of an ancient and venerable line of Scottish

kings, the Stuarts were divinely appointed to rule Scotland.

Charles II: Art & Power – The Queen’s Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse **23 November 2018 – 2 June 2019** [More information on the Royal Collection website.](#)