

ANNE, COUNTESS OF STRAFFORD (c. 1715-1785)
Joshua Reynolds, 1758-59
99.63



Gallery Label:

Lady Strafford (1715-1785) was the second of five daughters born to John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll. Following her marriage in 1741 to William Wentworth, 2nd Earl of Strafford, the couple became part of a social set that included luminaries such as Horace Walpole. Walpole particularly considered the countess to be a "vast beauty" whose charms he immortalized in a poem published in 1765. Entries in Reynolds' sitters book reveal that this painting was executed over several sittings between 1758 and 1759. That it was subsequently reproduced by at least four engravers indicates that painter, portrait, and sitter were all held in high regard.

Here, he uses subdued palette, making color secondary to formal definition.

Information

Anne, 2nd daughter to a duke, married to an earl, is at the epitome of English society in the 18th century. Here, at age 43, she is considered a great beauty. Her clothing and jewelry speak to her wealth, her smile and assured bearing speak to her position, yet, with downcast eyes, she also gives an impression of modesty. An ideal woman of the time.

Portraits glorify the present for the benefit of the future. The sitter becomes an important ancestor. The importance of the name and the lineage is assured. Plus, one shows wealth in the portrait and by the fact of having it done.

Reynolds would have had to have been very assured to win as many society commissions as he did. He was refined enough to be accepted and trusted by the wealthy to make these important images of them. He would need to converse with and entertain them, in addition to painting them. This painting took 13 sittings to complete. It was later reproduced by at least 4 engravers, attesting to the high regard of the sitter, the painter and the painting.

Historical Highlights

Age of enlightenment (rationalism, order) moving into neoclassicism.
Herculaneum (1709) and Pompeii (1748) create great interest in classical work, Greek and Roman forms, harmony, simplicity, proportion.

Reynolds, from Heilbrunn Timeline

Sir Joshua Reynolds was England's most important Georgian artist. His style was formed while he was apprenticed to the portraitist Thomas Hudson (1701–1779), and during a stay of several years' duration in Italy, where he studied antique sculpture and pictures by the old masters. Returning to London in 1753, he became the city's busiest fashionable painter. In 1768, he was appointed first president of the Royal Academy; in 1784, principal painter to George III. Reynolds overcame an inadequate grasp of anatomy and perspective with impetuous handling, sonorous color, and a profound understanding of the rhetorical possibilities of pose and gesture.

Source: [Sir Joshua Reynolds: The Honorable Henry Fane \(1739-1802\) with His Guardians, Inigo Jones and Charles Blair \(87.16\) | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

Reynolds, master of the perfectly calibrated pose and gesture, had a sure sense of what was appropriate to a sitter's age sex and social or political position.

Source: [Portrait Painting in England, 1600–1800 | Thematic Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

From abcgallery.com

In 1753, Reynolds settled in London. He became popular very quickly. The *Portrait of Captain Keppel* (1753-54, Greenwich, National Marine Museum), on whose ship he had left to Italy, brought him his first success. By 1760, he had become the most popular portrait painter in London. His works were valued twice as much as those of [Gainsborough](#).

Undoubtedly, Reynolds was artistically talented and a master of the brush, but he also possessed another gift -- a gift for selling -- and in the 1750s-60s he ran what we would today call a highly successful marketing campaign. Watching painters at work was a kind of entertainment at the time, and Reynolds made a performance out of his work. He had a large mirror in his studio, which he placed so that a sitter could observe the progress of the painting; he never sat when painting, but was in perpetual motion, and, being well-read and well-mannered, he engaged his sitters in polite and clever conversation. He forged prestigious social contacts, and had among his friends such literary celebrities as [Samuel Johnson](#) (1709-84), Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), the statesman, author, orator and political philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797), the actor and theatrical manager David Garrick (1717-1779) and others.

Thanks to his activities and success with the public, Reynolds managed to raise the social status of the painter in Britain and made the profession as prestigious as that of scientist and philosopher.

Among his models were aristocrats and the gentry, state and political figures, military men, poets and writers, actors and scientists, upper-class ladies and women of questionable reputation. Having a lot of commissions, Reynolds produced more than 100 paintings a year. Naturally, to keep up such an output, he had to hire several assistants. The employment of drapery and landscape painters for adding backgrounds to portraits was a normal practice in England at the time. Besides, Reynolds' studio assistants often produced copies of portraits for relatives and friends of the sitter. It was not uncommon for Reynolds to paint the face and hands, leaving the rest of the picture to be completed by his assistants. It usually took several sessions as long as one hour each to finish the face, while the rest of the picture was completed without "troubling" the client.

His annual speeches to the students of the Royal Academy between 1769 and 1790 were later published and became the accepted standard of classic art education. He felt that the moral purpose of art was the improvement of man. He approved of "high" themes vs. "low" (such as the art of Hogarth). Reynolds was a neoclassical, opposing the emotionalism of Romanticism. It is interesting to note, though, that he didn't always follow his own advice. He is noted for the feeling and psychological knowledge he displays in his portraits. He also was a great experimenter (note the "impetuous handling" and "sonorous color" mentioned in the Heilbrunn essay). These experiments continued with pigments, resins, waxes, oils, etc., leading to quick fading, cracking and sometimes destruction of his pictures.

He has a “pompous” classical style where he overtly tries to relate his subjects to Greek and Roman gods. These pictures are not admired. His “straight” portraits, intimate and “psychologically subtle,” are.

From Christies.com/Lotfinder

- Anne was the 2nd of daughter of John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll and 1st Duke of Greenwich, and his second Jane Warburton.
- The poem in which Walpole praised her is called “The Beauties”
- Her sister, Lady Mary Coke, wrote a celebrated series of letters to her, which are a key to social information of the time.
- She was also painted twice by the Scottish painter Allan Ramsay

Questions

1. Tell us about this woman and her position in society. What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Why do you think the sitter or her family wanted this portrait done?
3. This is a society portrait, done to record and glorify ancestry and beauty. What kind of artist do you think would be allowed to do these kinds of pictures?

Quote from “The Beauties: An Epistle to Mr. Eckardt the Painter”

http://books.google.com/books?id=oFAOAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA90&lpg=PA90&dq=Desponding+artist+talk+no+more&source=bl&ots=j0ZuKH26DB&sig=8vfUukQy1LKNMBaV4xVhhXCqVtU&hl=en&ei=fCs7To3bKPGMsAKDtoEu&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CEQQ6AEwBQ#

“...The crescent on her brow display’d,
In curls of loveliest brown inlaid,
With every charm to rule the night,
Like Dian, Strafford woos the sight;
The easy shape, the piercing eye,
The snowy bosom’s purity,
The unaffected gentle phrase
Of native wit in all she says;
Eckardt, for these thy art’s too faint:
You may admire but cannot paint...”