



Sir Peter Lely,
Isaak Beckett; after Sir Peter Lely, National Galleries of Scotland

SIR PETER LELY: ARTIST AND COLLECTOR

13 November 2009 – 14 February 2010

NATIONAL GALLERY COMPLEX, The Mound, Edinburgh, EH2 2EL

Telephone 0131 624 6200

www.nationalgalleries.org

Admission free

This winter the National Gallery of Scotland celebrates one of the most fashionable portraitists in 17th-century Britain, Sir Peter Lely (1618-80), in a display of 28 works on paper. Lely was one of the greatest artists working during one of the most turbulent periods of British history, the English Civil War. As Principal Painter to Charles II, he was the most celebrated artist at the glamorous Restoration court and was also famous for being one of the first great collectors of art in Britain, amassing an important collection judged by the artist himself as 'the best in Europe'. This exhibition of rarely seen art works will explore his life and career considering him as both artist and collector.

Lely was a painter of Dutch origin but spent most of his working life in England. He began his career producing history and landscape paintings but he became renowned as a portrait painter and was appointed Principal Painter to Charles II in 1660. In this privileged position he produced magnificent portraits of the Restoration courtiers including controversial subjects such as Charles II's infamous mistress Nell Gwyn and his favourite illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth.

Lely was one of the first artists in Britain to have his work copied in mezzotint, a printmaking technique used to reproduce paintings using half tones to achieve a particular richness in quality. Lely saw the potential in this method as a means to publicise his own work, and embraced the technique whilst actively encouraging a number of Dutch printmakers to come to England and practice it. Due to his interest and love of collecting, at his death in 1680 he left behind a large collection of art works including 10, 000 prints and drawings and nearly 600 paintings .

This exhibition includes drawings, engraved prints and mezzotints by and attributed to Lely, by Italian and Flemish Old Masters and by a variety of established print makers.

Sir Peter Lely: Artist and Collector comprises works on paper from both the Scottish National Gallery and Portrait Gallery. This exhibition demonstrates not only the influence of one of Britain's greatest 17th-century artists, but also highlights the wealth and importance of the National Galleries of Scotland's collection of works on paper.

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