



Dyck, Anthony van

Antwerp (Belgium), 1599 - London, 1641



Man with a Lute

Ca. 1627. Oil on canvas.

Room 016B

A young man holds a musical instrument that has been identified as a long-necked lute or *guitarrón*. His black clothing and the dark background leave his flesh tones and the white touches of his collar and cuffs as the only highlights, thus drawing the eye to his face and hands. This was a customary formula in **Baroque** portraits.

The sitter's expert grasp of his instrument indicates his familiarity with it, but his identity remains unknown. It seems to be a portrait of a professional musician and was long thought to be a likeness of Jacob Gaultier, a famous French musician who worked as first lutenist at the court of English king Charles I between 1617 and 1647. However, known images of that musician show a more corpulent figure with abundant curly hair, unlike Van Dyck's model here. Moreover, the presence of the instrument does not necessarily imply that he was a professional musician. Allusions to music were customary in many **Baroque** portraits as signs of distinction and intellectual refinement, making the instrument a quintessential courtly symbol. Here, the sitter may be a young bourgeois or aristocrat who

projects his distinguished social position through his mastery of the lute, an object associated with a refined and cultured lifestyle. Note the presence of a sword hanging from his belt, which would indicate a status somewhat above than that of a simple musician.

Van Dyck was a skilled and successful portrait painter. His placement of the figure in profile, walking to the left with his instrument in hand, reflects the casual appearance the painter sought in all his portraits. The result is a harmonious pose in a dynamic composition marked by a play of diagonals formed by the inclined instrument and the musician's extended arm.

There is no certainty about when this painting was made. But its confident execution and pictorial and compositional qualities reflect a creative maturity that could as easily correspond with his Italian period (1621-1627) or his second stay in **Antwerp** (1627-1632). On one hand, the figure's mobility, the singular characteristics of the lute and the straightforward composition suggest an Italian portrait. On the other, the austere palette and aristocratic ideal are consistent with his portraits from the **Netherlands**. There is no conclusive information about this painting's provenance, either. It is first documented in 1734, in a list of paintings saved from the fire that severely damaged Madrid's old royal palace and destroyed many of the paintings that had entered Spain's Royal Collection in the 17th century (Text drawn from Pérez Preciado, J. J.: *El Prado en el Ermitage, Museo Nacional del Prado*, 2011, pp. 118-119).

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TECHNICAL DATA

Inventory number

P001487

Author

Dyck, Anthony van

Title

Man with a Lute

Date

Ca. 1627

Technique

Oil

Support

Canvas

Dimension

Height: 128.70001 cm; Width: 101 cm

Provenance

Royal Collection (New Royal Palace , Madrid, "primera sala de la Furriera", 1747, n. 53; New Royal Palace, Madrid, "paso de tribuna y trascuartos", 1772, n. 53; New Royal Palace, Madrid, "antecámara", 1794, n. 53; Royal Palace, Madrid, "antecámara", 1814-1818, n. 53).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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OTHER INVENTORIES

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INSCRIPTIONS

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EXHIBITIONS

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LOCATION

+

DISPLAYED OBJECTS



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