

NICOLAES MAES

(Dordrecht 1623 - Amsterdam 1693)

Portrait of a Gentleman, Three-Quarter Length, in a Brown Tunic with a Red Cloak in a Wooded Landscape, at Sunset

signed and dated 'MAES. 1676' (lower left)

oil on canvas

54.9 x 46 cm (21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ in)

Provenance: With Leggatt, London, 1929;
Sir William Ewert Berry, 1st Viscount Camrose (1879-1954), Hackwood Park, Basingstoke,
by whom bequeathed with Hackwood to his son
Sir John Seymour Berry, 2nd Viscount Camrose (1909-1995);
Christie's, London, 9 July 1999, lot 44,
anonymous sale [The Property of a Gentleman], Sotheby's, London, 10 July 2003, lot 135;
Private Collection.

Literature: L. Krempel, *Nicolaes Maes*, Berlin 2000, p. 318, cat. no. A 181, reproduced plate 249.

IN THIS ACCOMPLISHED PORTRAIT, NICOLAES MAES presents a confident young man with a disarmingly open gaze and jaunty demeanour. Although painted centuries ago, the portrait possesses a powerful immediacy and timeless appeal.

The sitter is posed nonchalantly with one arm akimbo and the other propped up against a mossy rock. His hair is worn long with luxurious curls falling below his shoulders which, matched by the brightness of his eyes, the smoothness of his skin and the hint of facial hair above his upper lip, indicate that he is a very young man. He wears a simple and elegant informal garment known as a vest in the seventeenth century. It fastens at the chest with decorative clasps, revealing his shirt underneath in a fashionably negligent manner. Dominating the composition is the gentleman's requisite cloak which wraps around his shoulders, falling in luminous folds and lending him a classical air. The sitter openly aspires towards a romantic look in his choice of dress and hairstyle and in the dramatic nature of his surroundings. The grotto under which he shelters is appropriately dark, craggy and overgrown, and the ivy tendril climbing up the rock at the left of the painting adds to the overall lyricism of the scene.

Maes' *Portrait of a Young Woman* in the Hermitage was painted two years after the present painting, and reveals similar choices in composition and palette (fig. 1). Maes' portraits of this period clearly favour red, gold, brown, ochre and russet tones, all of which were very much in vogue towards the end of the seventeenth century. The young woman in the Hermitage portrait is posed against a backdrop of sumptuous red drapery, emphasising a soft femininity, while the surroundings of the present portrait suggest masculine vigour and poetic sensibility. In both works, Maes reveals the clear influence of Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) who decades earlier had mastered the skill of portraying his subjects with casual elegance and timeless grace by generalising dress details and focusing heavily on the lustre and richness of the fabrics.

Born in Dordrecht, Maes spent his late twenties studying under Rembrandt (1606-1669) and emerging as one of the Dutch master's most talented pupils; Maes' employment of colour, *chiaroscuro* and brushwork, particularly in his early paintings of religious and genre subjects, is clearly inspired by Rembrandt. He settled permanently in Amsterdam in 1673, where he became a highly



Nicolaes Maes,
Portrait of a Young Woman,
1678, The Hermitage,
St. Petersburg;
Museum of the Academy of
Arts, Petrograd, 1922
(Figure 1)

sought after artist. The contemporary biographer Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719) remarked, 'so much work came his way that it was deemed a favour if one person was granted the opportunity to sit for his portrait before another, and so it remained for the rest of his life.'

A note on provenance: William Berry (1879-1954), created 1st Viscount Camrose in 1941, controlled the largest media empire of his day, owning the *Sunday Times*, *Financial Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, as well as other newspapers and magazines. In 1935 he bought Hackwood Park, built for the 1st Duke of Bolton (c.1625-1699) at the end of the seventeenth-century and altered by Samuel (1737-1699) and Lewis Wyatt (1777-1853) in the early nineteenth-century. The heirs of the Duke of Bolton had let Hackwood between 1850 and 1935, so Camrose also acquired much of the original furniture and contents. This he complemented, continued by his son, John Berry, 2nd Viscount Camrose (1909-1995), with a fine collection of Old Master and later paintings, including most notably Van Dyck's *Portrait of the Abbé Scaglia* (National Gallery, London; inv. no. 6575).



(Also illustrated p. 8)