

ATTRIBUTED TO  
ANGELICA KAUFFMANN

(Chur 1740 - Rome 1807)

*Portrait of a Lady, Three-Quarter-Length, Wearing a Gold Dress and Red Shawl,  
with a Pearl Headdress, Holding a Dove*

oil on canvas  
76 x 64 cm (30 x 25¼ in)

**Provenance:** Sale, New York, Christie's, 6 April, 2006, lot 319 (as Angelica Kauffmann).

**T**HE DOVE, WHICH RESTS WITH WINGS OUTSTRETCHED in the arms of the elegant lady pictured here, is a symbol of Venus, thus likening the sitter's beauty and grace to that of the goddess. The inclusion of the bird, depicted on such a large scale, was no doubt intended to give the portrait an allegorical dimension; the choice of the dove, in particular, is significant not only for its associations with Venus but alternatively with prudence, innocence, simplicity, peace and matrimonial harmony. The multiplicity of possible interpretations serve to exalt the sitter and make the portrait more enigmatic and engaging.

The lady is positioned in a dignified manner, with her hair fashionably upswept and decorated with a strand of pearls. Her garments are of rich gold and red fabrics that shimmer in the gentle light cascading over her. Her dress, ornamented at the neck with luminous beadwork and at the shoulder with a delicate clasp, is simple in cut and reveals her shift underneath, giving the costume a classical, timeless appeal.

*Portrait of a Lady, Three-Quarter Length, Wearing a Gold Dress and Red Shawl, with a Pearl Headdress, Holding a Dove* is attributed to Angelica Kauffmann, the distinguished Swiss neo-Classical painter. The portrait is very similar stylistically and in costume detail to Kauffmann's *Portrait of Mme. La Touche*, the pendant to her portrait of John La Touche, both formerly in the Schloss Kevenig bei Trier collection (fig.1). The informal sketchiness of the work, the soft lighting effects and the plain background resemble that of the present painting, as does the sitter's refined pose and simplicity of dress, with voluminous sleeves and elegant detailing around the neck, a red shawl wrapped artfully around her left shoulder, and her hair carefully arranged and bedecked with pearls. Mme La Touche is portrayed in a contemplative manner with one hand supporting her head and the other resting on a book, signifying her scholarly or poetic nature. In many of Kauffmann's portraits of women, she makes a point of depicting the sitter with a meaningful object, such as a book or as in the present work, a dove, suggesting that the woman's identity transcends the traditional role of faithful wife or mother. Likewise, Kauffmann's self-portraits often show her with a paintbrush and palette in hand, emphasising her position as an artist over that of a woman.

Kauffmann was initially tutored by her father, Joseph Johann Kauffmann (1707-1782), a painter of portraits and ecclesiastical murals, and grew up assisting him with commissions in Switzerland, Austria and Northern Italy. In

1762, they arrived in Florence, where Kauffmann was introduced to early neo-Classicians, such as the American artist Benjamin West (1738-1820) (see catalogue no. 138). In 1763, she travelled to Rome and then briefly to Naples before returning to Rome, where she painted portraits and studied Classical sculpture. At the same time, she ventured into history painting, a prestigious branch of art that had long been closed to women. Three years later, Kauffmann travelled to London, where she associated more closely with the neo-Classicians and rapidly became acknowledged as a leading artist of her day. In 1768, she and Mary Moser (1744-1819) were selected as the only two female founder-members of the Royal Academy of Art. Kauffmann enjoyed a glittering reputation as a portraitist in London, which proved the most lucrative aspect of her career, although she was also highly praised for her history and subject painting, which was noted for its innovative iconography. In 1781, Kauffmann married her second husband, Antonio Zucchi (1726-1796) (see catalogue no. 101), and returned to the Continent, settling eventually in Rome, where she painted some of her finest works and was a prominent figure in the city's artistic society.<sup>1</sup>



Angelica  
Kauffmann,  
*Portrait of Mme. La  
Touche*,  
Private Collection  
(Figure 1)

<sup>1</sup> David Piper, *A-Z of Art & Artists*, Guild Publishing, London, 1984.

