

Scottish beauty goes public

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Hamilton Portrait of 18th century beauty acquired by Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Image



Portrait of Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton by the Scottish painter Gavin Hamilton

An exceptional portrait of *Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton* (1733-1790) by the Scottish painter Gavin Hamilton (1723 - 1798) has been acquired by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The acquisition was made possible by a £200,000 grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and £75,000 from The Art Fund, the UK's leading independent art charity. The painting was commissioned by the 6th Duke of Hamilton and has remained in the family until now.

Gavin Hamilton's full-length portrait of Elizabeth Gunning captures one of the most celebrated beauties of the day. Painted in 1752/53 to celebrate the sitter's marriage to the 6th Duke, it was extremely well known at the time through engravings and was considered as the epitome of a particular idea of female perfection. With this work, Gavin Hamilton, asserted himself as one of Britain's most accomplished young portrait painters. Although he was subsequently to concentrate on his historical pieces and his activities as a dealer, this early demonstration of his skills as a portraitist is confirmed by his later depiction of Elizabeth's son on the Grand Tour, a work acquired by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 2001.

James Holloway, Director of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery commented: "This is an early portrait masterpiece by one of the most important and influential Scottish artists of the eighteenth century. We are tremendously grateful for the generous support given by the NHMF (HLF) and The Art Fund which will enable the nation to enjoy this iconic image in perpetuity."

Acknowledging the significance of this grant, Colin McLean, NHMF's representative in Scotland, said: "The Scottish National Portrait Gallery has the world's largest collection of Gavin Hamilton's paintings and this acquisition is a wonderful addition to it. We are extremely pleased that the National Heritage Memorial Fund has been able to step in and help save such an important painting for visitors to one of Scotland's best-loved galleries to enjoy for many years to come."

David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund said: "It's easy to understand how Gavin Hamilton's portrait of Elizabeth Gunning turned the young Duchess into an icon – it's a truly spectacular painting. After generations in a private collection The Art Fund is delighted to have helped the painting go to the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, where I'm sure the public will fall in love with the Duchess of Hamilton all over again."

Lanarkshire-born Gavin Hamilton (1723-1798), a distant kinsman of the Dukes of Hamilton, is regarded as one of the key figures in the emergence of European neoclassicism. Born into a landed family and educated at the University of Glasgow, Hamilton took the relatively unusual decision to become an artist. In 1744, Hamilton travelled to Rome and studied in the studio of Agostino Masucci. He returned to London in 1751 and established himself as a portrait painter.

The National Galleries of Scotland has the largest and most significant collection of works by Gavin Hamilton in the world. The Scottish National Portrait holds

perhaps one of the finest portraits of Gavin Hamilton, the pastel by Archibald Skirving and a pencil portrait by Ozias Humphry, dated 1777. The NGS also hold other significant portraits documenting Gunning's family connections including a portrait of the sitter's son, Douglas, 8th Duke of Hamilton and a magnificent full-length of Elizabeth Gunning's youngest daughter Lady Charlotte Campbell painted in 1789. The acquisition of this iconic portrait will enable the Scottish National Portrait Gallery too add to the visual documentation of the Hamilton dynasty, a major family in the history of Scotland.

Notes to editors

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections and campaigns widely on behalf of museums and their visitors. It has 80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, The Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire over 850,000 works of art, ranging from Bronze Age treasures to contemporary works of art. In 2005 The Art Fund offered over £4.1 million to museums and galleries and distributed 12 gifts and bequests. Independent of government, The Art Fund was at the forefront of the campaign for free admission in 2001 and the campaign to save the Macclesfield Psalter in 2005. In April The Art Fund unveiled one of the most significant projects in its history – a permanent 'Skyspace' at Yorkshire Sculpture Park by James Turrell. In May The Art Fund published key findings from its groundbreaking survey of UK museums and gallery acquisitions, which showed 70% of UK museums now acquire objects mainly or solely by gift. The key findings are available at <http://www.artfund.org/news/428>.

Further information

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