

Caylus



LOUIS-MICHEL VAN LOO

(Tolón, 1707– Paris, 1771)

Portrait of the Infanta María Antonia Fernanda de Borbón

Circa 1743

Oil on canvas

39.5 x 39 cm

PROVENANCE:

Conde Villagonzalo, mediados del s. XX. Formaba pareja en esta colección con el retrato del Infante Felipe de Borbón que reproducimos a continuación [Fig. 4] a partir del cliché 02077_B_P de la fototeca del IPCE.

Louis-Michel Van Loo was the third of the great French painters summoned to Spain by the new Bourbon dynasty. A pupil of his father, Jean-Baptiste, he was contracted by Philip V to succeed Jean Ranc as Court Painter. Van Loo arrived at court in 1737 and painted for the King and for his successor, Ferdinand VI.

In Madrid the artist divided his time between commissions for the royal palace and teaching at the Academia de San Fernando, playing an active role in its foundation and assuming the position of director in 1752. Van Loo's role at the Spanish court, as it had been in France and in a manner comparable to his predecessor Jean Ranc, was primarily to produce numerous portraits, a task in which he was assisted by various copyists working under his instructions and entrusted with reproducing portraits intended as royal gifts. Among these collaborators was Van Loo's pupil Benoit Verdot, appointed honorary court painter in December 1739.

Van Loo has always been considered to have been almost exclusively a portraitist to the royal family but his output was in fact more diverse and he produced mythological compositions and cartoons for tapestries in the style of Teniers. He also painted portraits of members of the nobility and individuals from the worlds of politics and the intelligentsia.

On the death of Philip V, Van Loo became First Painter to his successor Ferdinand VI, painting various portraits of the new monarch and his wife Bárbara de Braganza. On his return to France in 1752 Van Loo was one of the painters most appreciated by the French royal family. He painted Louis XV and almost all the major figures of his day, from aristocrats to intellectuals. He succeeded his uncle Carie in the role of director of the *École royale des élèves protégés*. He also regularly exhibited his work at the Salon between 1753 and 1769.

Van Loo's work is wide-ranging and reveals the influence of Italian art on the French school. His portraits skilfully envelop the sitter in the splendour and pomp appropriate to their social status, locating them in grand and monumental architectural settings that include impressive sweeps of curtains and elaborate furnishings, in addition to a range of accessories that are always intended to create a rich and luxurious environment. The artist's virtuoso skills in depicting the textures of fabrics, jewels and insignias do not detract from his acute study of the character of his models, and while this psychological investigation is slightly adapted to the nature of these images as royal portraits, he nonetheless offers an acute reflection that reveals the personality of the model.

The artist's most important work painted during his time in Spain is probably his great portrait (measuring 408 x 520 cm) entitled *The Family of Philip V*, executed in 1743 (fig. 1: Museo Nacional del Prado, P-002283). The monarch is shown with his second wife, Isabella Farnese, who provides the central focus of the composition, surrounded by their children, the future Ferdinand VI (Philip's son from his first marriage) and Charles III, both with their wives, in addition to all the other members of the royal family alive at that time. In this family-dynastic group Van Loo included interesting and contrasting poses and attitudes: the weariness of the King, which contrasts with the authoritative and dominating vigour of his second wife; the would-be elegant but in fact rather awkward appearance of the Prince of Asturias, the future Ferdinand VI; the slightly remote self-confidence of Charles III, at that date King of Naples, and the gentle sweetness of his wife; the grace of the young girls in the foreground; and the frieze of faces of Spanish princes, all destined to play an important role in the turbulent years to come. Overall this is a group of different characters and personalities expressed in a refined, courtly manner but one not devoid of psychological insight despite the weighty compositional scheme with its monumental, solemn atmosphere intended to achieve the approved theatricality of the period in order to convey the concept of royal majesty through the appropriate attributes of that status, the sense of glorious dynastic continuity and the pomp that surrounds power, all expressed through costly and sumptuous splendour.

Van Loo devised a large room in a Roman Baroque style of a type suggestive of a space in a royal palace and opening onto a garden. The Queen is located at the centre and the composition is structured around her, with all of her and her husband's direct descendants clustered around her apart from the Princess of Brazil who appears next to Bárbara of

Braganza, possibly due to her remoteness from the court and her adoption of a new homeland.

Close to the final version are the preparatory study in the Musée de Versailles and the drawing in the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid (fig. 2; 865 x 1,110 mm, D-2390). There are also various paintings which are individual studies for the different figures, some in the Museo del Prado (fig. 3; P-006148), others belonging to Patrimonio Nacional and the rest in private collections (fig. 4). These conform more or less closely to the position and pose of the figure in the final painting.

María Antonia Fernanda de Borbón (Seville, 1729 - Moncalieri, Italy, 1785), Infanta of Spain and Queen of Sardinia, was born in Seville, the city to which the court had moved following the act of union between the royal houses of Spain and Portugal, which took place on the Spanish frontier in Extremadura and was sealed with the marriages of María Ana Victoria to José, Prince of Brazil, and of Bárbara de Braganza to Fernando, Prince of Asturias. Her birth coincided with that of Louis of Bourbon, the Dauphin of France, for which reason the Marquis of Brancás, the French envoy present in Seville to negotiate the Treaty named after the city, organised elaborate celebrations in honour of both events.

María Antonia Fernanda's education was appropriate to a royal princess. In addition, she shared her mother's love of music and was able to enjoy the splendid musical scene at the Spanish court which included the presence of French and Italian composers as well as Spanish ones, notably Domenico Scarlatti and Farinelli. In addition to enhancing daily life at the palace with his performances of arias and sonatas, Farinelli organised the so-called "domestic theatre", one of the royal family's favourite entertainments which became an important element of court celebrations.

María Antonia Fernanda's life was determined by the political strategy orchestrated from the court in Madrid. Philip V died on 9 July 1746 and María Antonia Fernanda and her brother the Infante Cardinal Luis were obliged to accompany their mother into internal exile at the royal residence of La Granja after Isabella's political authority was reduced by the new monarchs. Following the Treaty of Aachen in 1748, Spain entered a period of political peace and neutrality which also permitted the recovery of territory lost with the Peace of Utrecht. This allowed two Infantes to become rulers of Italian territories: Charles

in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Philip in the duchies of Parma, Piacenza and Guastalla.

In the context of these European alliances, on 12 April 1750 the marriage took place between María Antonia Fernanda and the cousin of her brother Ferdinand VI, Victor Amadeus, heir to the house of Savoy in the Kingdom of Sardinia. This contributed to establishing peace in the region and demonstrated to the other powers Spain's political independence with regard to France, given that the House of Savoy had never been favourable to the interests of Paris. Furthermore, on 31 July that same year another Spanish Infanta, María Ana Victoria, became Queen of Portugal following the death of John V.

Sardinia was a relatively young monarchy. Following the signing of the Treaty in London in 1718, which came into effect from 1720, Victor Amadeus II of Savoy replaced Sicily with Sardinia, thus creating the Kingdom of Sardinia made up of the states of Savoy, Aosta, Monferrato, Genoa, the principality of Piedmont, the earldom of Nice and Sardinia itself.

The court of Savoy, which became the permanent home of María Antonia Fernanda, was based in the city of Turin and was characterised by its sobriety and religiosity, aspects that to some extent accorded with her own nature. Despite the geographical distance, she maintained her relationship with her mother through an extensive correspondence filled with family news and observations on music, one of her great passions.

It would be many years, however, before María Antonia Fernanda and her husband became the monarchs of Sardinia. Victor Amadeus III came to the throne in 1773 at the age of 48 with a repressed desire for power. Following his assumption of rule he imposed a still more rigorous religious discipline, with full observance of Lent and fervent public manifestations of piety and devotion.

María Antonia Fernanda's marriage to Victor Amadeus III brought them twelve children, of whom three would occupy the throne; Charles Emmanuel III, who succeeded his father between 1796 and 1802 and married Marie Adelaide Clothilde of France; Maria Elisabetta Carlotta; Marie Joséphine Luisa, who married Louis XIII of France; Amadeus Alexandre; Duke of Monferrato, who died aged only a few months; Marie Thérèse, who married

Charles X of France; Maria Ana, who married her uncle Benedict, Prince of Savoy and Duke of Chablais; Victor Emmanuel I, King of Sardinia from 1802 to 1821, who married Maria Theresa, Archduchess of Eastern Austria; Marie Christine Joséphine, who died young; Maurizio, Duke of Monferrato; Maria Carolina Antonietta, who married Anthony, the Elector of Saxony; Charles Felix, King of Sardinia from 1821 to 1831; and Giuseppe Benedetto, Count of Moriana and Asti.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4