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LOT 7

THE PROPERTY OF A LADY

WILLEM KEY

BREDA CIRCA 1515/6 - 1568 ANTWERP

**A PORTRAIT OF MARGRET HALSEBER OF BASEL, 'THE LADY WITH THE TWO BEARDS',
HEAD AND SHOULDERS, WEARING A WHITE HEADDRESS**

oil on panel

31.1 by 26.1 cm.

ESTIMATE 30,000-50,000 EUR

Lot Sold: 102,250 EUR

PROVENANCE

Possibly Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517-1586), Besançon;

Probably Chevalier Francois Xavier de Burtin, Brussels;

Probably his sale, Brussels, 21 July 1819, lot 73 (as by Holbein the Younger);

Probably Van Huerne, Ghent, by 1844;

Probably his sale, Ghent, Dullaert/ Vandervin, 21 October 1844, lot 22 (as by Holbein), for 210 francs;

Private collection, England (as by Hans Holbein the Younger);

With Colnaghi & Co, London (as by Antonio Moro, according to labels on the reverse);

Gustave Becker, London (according to a manuscript note by Friedländer on the back of the photograph at the R.K.D., The Hague);

Miss B. Campe-Becker,

By whom sold, London, Christie's, 13 July 1951, lot 39 (as by Antonio Moro);

Benjamin Sonnenberg, New York;

His sale, New York, Sotheby Parke Bernet, 5/9 June 1979, lot 75 (as by Willem Key);

Estate of Dr. Samuel Schaeffler, New York.

LITERATURE

Messenger des Sciences historiques et archives des arts de Belgique, vol. 4, 1836, pp. 263-4, lithograph, presumably of the present painting, as by Hans Holbein - Considering the handwritten label, written in French, Brussels 1808, this lithograph may well have been based on the present painting;

Messenger des Sciences historiques et archives des arts de Belgique, 1837, p. 526;

A. Castan, *Monographie du Palais Granvelle à Besançon*, Paris 1867, p. 332;

H. Hymans, *Antonio Moro: son oeuvre et son temps*, Brussels 1910, p. 163 ("Oeuvre incertaine, autre fois attribué à Holbein" [gravure au trait dans le *Messenger des Sciences historiques*, 1837, page 526], referring to the version in Aachen, although the engraving cited is probably the present version);

A. Koopstra, *Schattengalerie - die verlorenen Werke der Gemäldesammlung*, forthcoming exhibition catalogue at the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen 2008.

CATALOGUE NOTE

The sitter's identity as Margret Halseber of Basel, also known as 'The Lady with the two beards', is confirmed by an old label on the reverse dated 1808. Although little is known of the sitter, her portrait is already listed in an 1819 sales catalogue,¹ and later in 1844.² Both catalogues record the existence of a contemporary copy of this portrait in the Royal Gallery, now the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (see fig. 3) and the 1844 catalogue also lists a version of equal merit. The existence of copies and a different version suggest that this sitter was recorded on more than one occasion because of her unusual appearance.

Although we cannot be entirely sure of the provenance of this painting before 1844, it is highly likely that the sales catalogues of 1819 and 1844 refer to our portrait and not to the version mentioned above, which is most likely the one in the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, since 1883³ but stolen in 1972 (see fig. 2). The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, both early catalogues fail to mention the inscription upper left of the Aachen version giving the sitter's

name without mentioning her origin of Basel,⁴ whereas this origin is mentioned on the label on the reverse of the present picture, and in both early sales catalogue entries. Secondly, on both occasions the work is attributed to Hans Holbein the Younger, as is the attribution given on the label on the reverse of our panel.

While nowadays there is a consensus that this attribution to Holbein - doubtless inspired by the Basel connection - cannot be sustained, suggested alternative attributions have gone back and forth over the last 100 years. When the painting was sold in 1979 (see Provenance) it was attributed to Willem Key, whereas it had previously been on the market as by Antonio Moro. The ex-Suermondt-Ludwig version was thought to be by Moro since entering the collection in 1883, however this attribution was called into question in the 1910 monograph on the artist by Hymans.⁵ It was subsequently attributed to Willem Key by Dimier in 1931,⁶ which presumably led to the present picture's 1979 attribution. Dimier based his attribution of the Aachen portrait to Key on the 1607 inventory list of the Palais Granvelle, Besançon, which recorded a painting of a lady with a beard by the artist Guillaume Chayez.⁷ According to Dimier this Chayez can be identified as Willem Key, who is recorded as receiving many commissions from the palace.⁸

However, Dimier fails to mention that Antonio Moro also had links to the Palais Granvelle. He painted Cardinal Granvelle's portrait⁹ and was, according to Van Mander, in close contact with the Cardinal.¹⁰ Although the connection with Granvelle goes for both artists, it is more likely that it was indeed Willem Key who painted the mentioned portrait of the lady with the beard, because of its attribution to Guillaume Chayez on the inventory list. The French name for Willem is Guillaume and Chayez could well be a corrupted version for Key. While Dimier's conclusions were based on his belief that the portrait listed was the Aachen portrait, this is unlikely. The inventory list does not give a name of the sitter and the Aachen portrait has an identifying inscription. It therefore is more probable that the list refers to the present portrait, which has no inscription, nor had a label on the reverse at this early stage. Apart from this documented evidence, when judging the portrait purely on stylistic grounds, it becomes clear that it is Key who painted this image. The vividness of the underdrawing (see fig. 1) and the thinly applied paint suggest a hand that is more reminiscent of Willem Key than of Antonio Moro. Moro's use of paint is often thicker and he would be more precise and detailed in his handling of, for instance, the white headdress and collar. These are in fact painted rather roughly. Dr. Koenraad Jonckheere, who studied the present painting at first hand, also confirms the attribution to Key on stylistic grounds. He dates the painting in the 1550s, before Key started to evolve more towards Moro's style. He recognises the artist also in the palette, and the underdrawing reminds him of Key's Last Supper in the Dordrecht museum,¹¹ which can be dated 1555/6. Furthermore, the reflections of light on the eyelids are typical for the artist.

We are grateful to Anna Koopstra, of the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, for her help in cataloguing this lot. The present painting has been requested for inclusion in the forthcoming exhibition Schattengalerie - die verlorenen Werke der Gemäldesammlung at the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen.

We are also grateful to Dr. Koenraad Jonckheere for endorsing the attribution on the basis of first-hand inspection. This painting will be published in his forthcoming publication on the artist.

1. See sale, Brussels, 21 July 1819 under Provenance.

2. See sale, Ghent, Dullaert/ Vandervin, 21 October 1844 under Provenance. The measurements are reversed 25 x 34 cm., instead of 34 x 25 cm.

3. This portrait belonged to the Aachen collector Johann Heinrich Beissel, who sold it in his sale, Brussels, 6/8 April 1875 to Barthold Suermondt, who donated it in 1883 to the Museum along with the rest of his collection, which therefore was renamed after its donator.

4. The inscription upper left reads: MARGRET /HALSEBER.

5. H. Heymans, Antonio Moro, Brussels/Paris 1910, p. 163.

6. L. Dimier, *Mélanges Hulin de Loo*, Brussels 1931, p. 140, with the Aachen picture reproduced in reverse.

7. See Castan under Literature, *Tête de femme portant barbe, de la main de Guillaume Chayez, haute un pied et une pousse, large de quatorze pousse. Sa moulture noire no. 110.*

8. L. Dimier, *Mélanges Hulin de Loo*, Brussels 1931, p. 141.

9. In the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (inv. no. 1035).

10. See K. van Mander, *Het Schilderboeck*, (reprint) Amsterdam 1946 , p. 92.

11. See K. Jonckheere, *Adriaen Thomasz. Key (c. 1545-c.1589), Portrait of a Calvinist painter*, Turnhout 2007, p. 339, fig. 4.

ENGRAVED:

By P. de Vlainck, see *Messenger des sciences et des arts de la Belgique ou nouvelles archives historiques, littéraires, scientifiques*, 4, Ghent 1836, pp. 263-4, reproduced.