LOT 18
SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A.
BRISTOL 1769 - 1830 LONDON
PORTRAIT OF FREDERICK HOWARD, 5TH EARL OF CARLISLE (1748–1825)
oil on canvas, unlined
76.2 by 63.5 cm.; 30 by 25 in.

ESTIMATE 300,000-500,000 GBP

PROVENANCE
Commissioned by Frederick Howard, 5th Earl of Carlisle;
By descent to his fourth son, the Very Reverend, Hon. Henry Edward Howard (1795–1868), Dean of Lichfield;
By descent to his second son, Captain John Henry Howard (1827–1925);
By descent to his second son, Commander Robert John Howard (1878–1975);
By descent to his son, Lieutenant-Colonel John Thurstan Collins Howard (1919–98);
Thence by family descent until acquired by the present owner.
CATALOGUE NOTE

This exceptional, sensitively painted portrait is an early masterpiece by one of the greatest portraitists in European art and future President of the Royal Academy. Painted circa 1793, in the first flush of Lawrence’s precocious maturity, the lively handling and fresh brushwork are comparable with other works from the early 1790s, such as the Portrait of Emily, Lady Berkeley (Christie’s, 2 July 2013, lot 43), Elizabeth Farren (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and the Portrait of Lady Caroline Harbord (Private Collection, see, Garlick no. 380) of 1793. It depicts the sitter wearing the robes and collar of the Order of the Garter, with which he was invested in 1793, and may well have been commissioned specifically to celebrate this honour.

A diplomat and patron of the arts, the sitter was the youngest and only surviving son of Henry Howard, 4th Earl of Carlisle (1694–1758) and his second wife, Isabella Byron, daughter of the 4th Baron Byron. Educated at Eton and King’s College Cambridge, at the age of just ten he inherited Castle Howard, the great baroque palace in North Yorkshire designed by Sir John Vanbrugh, which had been started by his grandfather, the 3rd Earl, in 1699. The 5th Earl was perhaps the first member of the family to properly enjoy the ownership of the house to its full. The building work was all but finished by the time of his father’s death, and all that was left for him to do during his tenure was to complete the West Wing and commission a new stable block from John Carr of York. Nevertheless, the 5th Earl’s taste was to have a significant impact on the appearance of Castle Howard, particularly in the decoration of the interiors, and he would become one of the most important collectors and patrons of art of his generation. It was his acquisitions that transformed the collection at Castle Howard into one of the most significant in Britain.

Carlisle’s introduction to the arts began at a young age. In 1758, at just nine years old, he sat to Sir Joshua Reynolds for a portrait commissioned by his father. In 1765, on leaving Cambridge, Carlisle, by this stage in his late teens, came to live in London, partly in the acrimonious atmosphere of Carlisle House in Soho with his embattled mother and step-father, and partly with his old school friend, the future Prime Minister, Charles James Fox and his father, Henry, 1st Lord Holland, at Holland House in Kensington. It was in the metropolitan milieu of the Fox family that Carlisle encountered Reynolds once more, and in the summer of 1767 he again sat to the future President of the Royal Academy for his portrait (Private Collection). In the same year he was elected a member of the Society of Dilettanti, and shortly afterwards left England for a Continental tour which took in Paris, where he sat to Greuze, as well as Italy. As was the vogue among travelling young aristocrats Carlisle acquired a number of paintings in Italy, including works by Bassano, Titian and Tintoretto, and sat for his bust in marble by Nollekens in Rome. His one serious disappointment, however, was that he was unable to sit to Batoni, as he had intended, for a full length portrait with his dog, Rover (the great Roman portraitist having cleared his books in 1768 so that he could concentrate on his splendid double portrait of the future Emperor Joseph and his brother Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, which had been commissioned by the Empress Maria Theresa). Instead, on his return to London, he commissioned Reynolds to paint the magnificent full length portrait in the robes of the Order of the Thistle which adorns the State Rooms at Castle Howard to this day.

Carlisle’s renewed acquaintance with Reynolds clearly afforded the artist and his young patron the opportunity to discuss the latter’s new found enthusiasm for paintings. As well as his own portrait Reynolds sold the budding connoisseur a number of pictures from his own collection, including a Rubens of Salome with the head of John the Baptist; a picture of the great actor David Garrick in the role of Abel Drurger in The Alchemist by Reynolds’ friend and contemporary Johann Zoffany (Private Collection, fig. 1); and a Head of an Old Man by Ferdinand Bol which was then thought to be by Rembrandt; as well as a Portrait of Phillip II of Spain attributed to Titian and a scene of The Nativity by Annibale Carracci. In addition to his burgeoning interest in collecting Dutch and Italian Old Masters in the early 1770s Carlisle would become a significant supporter of contemporary British artists.

Following his return from Italy Carlisle had made strenuous efforts to reconcile his mother and step-father, Sir William Musgrave. His sympathies lay with the latter who had failed to steady ‘the youngest, handsomest, and Wittiest widow in England’, however his mother continued to flutter with a variety of admirers between London and the Continent, finally departing for Paris and thence to Italy in early 1769. With her departure Carlisle decided it was time to move forward as his own man. Abandoning the old family residence in Soho he moved into a brand new house in
fashionable St James’s, close to Spencer House. In 1770 he married Lady Margaret Leveson Gower (1753–1824), the sixteen year old daughter of the 2nd Earl Gower, later 1st Marquess of Stafford, and his wife Louisa Egerton. The union brought with it not only a good introduction to London society and strong political connections, but Caroline also bore him four sons and three daughters, thus securing the Howard dynasty. As a young man Carlisle had developed something of a reputation as a rake, maintaining a number of mistresses, including Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey, and steadily losing large amounts of money at the gaming tables – both on his own account and standing as guarantor for his friend Fox’s debts. However a growing determination to take a more active role in politics soon overtook him and in 1777, at the age of just 29, he was appointed a Privy Counsellor and made Treasurer of the Household.

The following year he was sent to North America, together with his friend William Eden, Lord Auckland, as part of the delegation sent to negotiate a peace treaty with the colonists, where he criticised the French for meddling in the situation and thus enraged the Marquess of Lafayette who challenged him to a duel. Carlisle refused, however, declaring that he was responsible only to his King and his Country, and not to any individual. In 1779 he became President of the Board of Trade, and the following year he was sent to Dublin as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, where he showed remarkable political deftness and acumen – not only laying the foundation for the Bank of Ireland but also considerably furthering the cause of Irish home rule. Convinced that the Irish loved a colourful court Carlisle brought a lavish entourage with him to Dublin and the press, who admired his ‘pomp and show’, dubbed him ‘Lord Red-heels’. Something of the state in which he maintained himself whilst in Ireland is captured in Francis Wheatley’s masterpiece The Earl of Carlisle and his entourage in the grounds of Phoenix Park (fig. 2), which hangs in the State Rooms at Castle Howard, and his further patronage of contemporary Irish artists at the time can be seen in the two fine landscapes by Jonathan Fisher, also at Castle Howard.

In 1783, back in England, he was appointed Lord Privy Seal in the Fox–North coalition, and later played a prominent role alongside Fox in opposition to Pitt’s ministry. The horrors of the French Revolution, however, disturbed Carlisle, and he gradually broke with Fox and increasingly spoke in favour of Pitt’s administration in the Lords. It was during this period that Carlisle also published his first of several literary works; a five-act tragedy in verse, titled The Father’s Revenge, which won praise from Samuel Johnson and even the normally critical Horace Walpole. Despite these enthusiastic forays into print, however, Carlisle only achieved lasting literary fame through the works of his cousin and ward, Lord Byron, whose guardian he became with some reluctance in 1799.

In 1786 the Howard estates came out of Trusteeship and Lord Carlisle gained the financial independence necessary both to complete his ancestor’s architectural achievements and really start collecting in earnest. In 1796, together with the Marquess of Stafford and the Earl of Bridgewater, he became one of three shareholders in the acquisition of the famous Orléans collection; arguably the greatest private collection of Western art ever assembled. The collection was particularly famous for its Italian pictures, and in all Carlisle acquired fifteen paintings for Castle Howard, including Annibale Carracci’s The Dead Christ Mourned (also known as The Three Marias, now in The National Gallery, London, NG2923), for which he paid 4,000 guineas, as well as four other works attributed to the artist; Giorgione’s Portrait of Gaston de Foix, Duke of Nemours and Tintoretto’s Portrait of the Duke of Ferrara; The Finding of Moses by Orazio Gentileschi (then given to Velazquez and now in a private collection, on loan to the National Gallery, London); and a Portrait of Frans Snyders by Sir Anthony van Dyck (Frick Collection, New York, no. 1909.1.39). Also in the group were works by, or attributed to Bassano, Bellini, Domenichino, Parmigianino, Carlo Saraceni and Titian. Many of these pictures he displayed in the Green Drawing Room at Castle Howard, which later became known as the Orleans Room. Further purchases followed, including works by Rubens, Jan Gossaert’s Adoration of the Kings (National Gallery, London) and Ferdinand Bol’s Portrait of a Boy, which he purchased in 1801 from the Fagel collection (see lot 11). He also bought contemporary British pictures, including two further theatrical works by Zoffany, Mr Foote and Mr Weston in ‘The Devil upon two Sticks’, and Mr Foote in ‘The Mayor of Garrat’, both purchased at the Woolmer sale in 1796; Gainsborough’s celebrated Girl with Pigs, which he bought at auction in 1795; and Reynolds’ famous Portrait of Omai (Private Collection, fig. 3), which he bought at the artist’s studio sale in 1796. In 1805 Carlisle became one of the founding directors of the British Institution, a role which further stimulated his interest in
contemporary British painters, and during his later years he became the principal patron of John Jackson, who supplied a splendid range of family portraits; including a hauntingly beautiful view of the interior of Carlisle’s new Long Gallery, with portraits of the artist and his patron.

Lawrence would have been in his mid-twenties at the time this portrait was painted, and yet he was already well established as the leading portrait painter in England. A child prodigy, he had already painted the Queen by the age of twenty, in 1789 (National Gallery, London), and had established himself, following the death of Gainsborough and Reynolds, as the pre-eminent society portraitist in the country. It is perhaps telling of his overt talents that Carlisle, one of the leading connoisseurs of his generation and previously such a fervent patron of Reynolds, should turn to Lawrence for such an important commission just one year after the elder master’s death. Previously unrecorded this portrait has, until recently, remained in the hands of the sitter’s descendants since it was painted.

1 Horace Walpole, Correspondence, 37:561.