LOT 41
PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE EARLS OF WARWICK
JAN SANDERS VAN HEMESSEN
HEMESSEN CIRCA 1504 - 1556 ANTWERP
PORTRAIT OF A BEARDED GENTLEMAN, AGED 34, BEFORE AN EXTENSIVE LANDSCAPE
inscribed on the card: AETATIS SVAE 34/ FORTVNE/ LE VEVT
stamped on versowith the royal insignia of William, Prince of Orange (1792–1849)
inventory number 178 etched into the reverse
oil on panel
92 by 73.5 cm.; 36 1/4 by 29 in.

ESTIMATE £800,000-1,200,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 1,762,500 GBP

PROVENANCE
William, Prince of Orange, later King William II of the Netherlands (1792–1849);
Probably Henry Richard Greville, 3rd Earl of Warwick (1779–1853);
Francis Richard Charles Greville, 5th Earl of Warwick (1853–1924);
Thence by descent.

EXHIBITED
Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Le Siècle de Bruegel. La peinture en Belgique au XVIe siècle
, 27 September – 24 November 1963, no. 134, reproduced ill. 132;
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on long term loan.

LITERATURE
the inscription Aetatis suae 24 fortunae, by Porbus [sic’], in the Red Sitting Room;
35, reproduced fig. 120.

CATALOGUE NOTE
Hemessen is considered the greatest and most imaginative artistic force in the northern city of Antwerp between the
death of Quinten Massys in 1530 and the coming of age of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Certainly his profound influence
on Flemish painting as a whole through the 1530s and 1540s is undeniable, but this has to-date been principally
described in terms of his religious and genre paintings. Analysis of his role as a portraitist is scant but the re-
emergence of this powerful Renaissance depiction of a well-dressed young man establishes him as one of the finest
exponents of the genre in the Netherlands in the second quarter of the sixteenth century and, what is more, one
whose style and success would anticipate and serve as a catalyst for the extraordinary flowering of portraiture in
northern Europe from circa 1540 onwards.
Hemessen’s portraiture is perhaps so alluring because of the lessons he learned on an extended trip to Italy in the late
1520s. There he studied both models from classical antiquity, such as the Laocoön (discovered in 1506), as well as
Michelangelo and Raphael, basing many of his early compositions on the work of these two great masters. His work
following the return to Antwerp is a lucid illustration of the impact of Italian painting on the pictorial idioms of northern
artists and the portrait presented here describes as well as any other the synthesis that Hemessen would achieve
between the classicizing tendencies of Italian portraiture of the sixteenth century and the fundamental strain of realism
and frigid pathos of the great northern exponents of the genre, such as Jan Gossaert, Joos van Cleve and others.
Hemessen may have first encountered Gossaert early in his career at the royal court at Mechelen where he is
believed to have worked briefly with the Master of the Magdalen Legend and where Gossaert and Jan Cornelisz.
Vermeyen were court painters.

Hemessen had been elected to the Guild of St. Luke in Antwerp in 1524, having completed his pupilage under
Hendrik van Cleve I, and, as with Jan Gossaert before him, his journey to Italy brought him into contact with the
classicising style and idiom of the great painters of the Italian High Renaissance. While Michelangelo and Raphael
remain the obvious influences in his religious work, his later portraiture owes more to the great master of the 1530s
and ’40s, Agnolo Bronzino. It has been said of the present portrait that it owes much to Bronzino and in many respects
this is true: it demonstrates most markedly the influence of his portraits of the mid to late 1530s, examples or
reproductions of which it is inconceivable that Hemessen did not somehow see or study. While there is no evidence of a second trip to Italy in the 1530s, he would have seen and learned more of the stylistic developments of his Italian counterparts on his trip to Fontainebleau in the mid-1530s, and from other northern artists returning to the Netherlands from Italy throughout the decade, such as Michel Coxcie.

Bronzino’s influence is marked in this portrait both by its pictorial intensity, which is achieved through its highly polished finish and the placement of the dark figure before a palpit backdpord; and its observational intensity, which we see in the extraordinary level of detail throughout the figure, particularly in the physiognomy, the beard and the intricately modelled fabric of the vestment. In these respects it closely resembles Bronzino’s Portrait of a Young Man with a Lute in the Uffizi, Florence, of circa 1535 (fig. 1):1 in both works, the mottled surface of the highly textured and similarly pleated cape is painstakingly rendered and, atop the shoulder pad, the uneven surface is silhouetted against a lighter backdrop. Both portraits follow the half- to three-quarter length mise-en-page popularised by Bronzino, but begun by Titian in Venice (whose La Schiavona is probably the first three-quarter length portrait in Western art); they both show a similar arrangement of the hands: the proper right hand grasping an item meaningful to the sitter’s interests or identity, the other resting lower down the plane. Such an arrangement would become standard practice in High Renaissance and Mannerist portraiture, one holding an item that may identify the sitter, the other resting on the hilt of a sword, column or chair. In all these respects Hemessen’s portrait can be compared with a myriad of works by Bronzino, but particularly those of the 1530s such as the Portrait of a Man with a Book in the Metropolitan Museum and also the famous Portrait of Bartolomeo Panticichi, also in the Uffizi.2

Hemessen’s portrait however differs in one key feature: the external setting. Where the sitter (and his dress) might just as easily belong in a Florentine portrait, it is the landscape that roots it firmly back in the north. We see beyond a ‘world landscape’ popularised in preceding decades by Joachim Patinir, Massys and others. It is however painted in the more developed style of the 1530s, reminiscent of the landscapes of Mathys Cock. It is a curious idiosyncrasy that such an Italianate portrait should sit before such a wholly Flemish landscape and it is indeed difficult to conjure another portrait that fuses these two elements so successfully. This, though, would not be the only time Hemessen would employ such a tactic: his version of Raphael’s Holy Family of Francis I (Musée du Louvre, Paris) that he saw in Fontainebleau is personalized by the animation we see through the window behind the protagonists: in Raphael’s original we see essentially a luminous blue sky, but in Hemessen’s version (now in the Groeningen Museum, Bruges) we see a far-reaching panorama, another ‘world landscape’ that, like here, wrenches the Italianate design back to Flanders (fig. 2).

In its graceful and refined appearance and pose the portrait is the very antithesis of the twisting figures and grotesque facial types of Hemessen’s genre scenes for which he is perhaps best-known. This and the few other portraits given to Hemessen, such as the signed double portrait from 1532 in the collection of the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, Fife, and the two in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, reveal an unusual classicizing elegance and restraint.3 The portrait was first recognised as the work of Hemessen by Paul Philipott and was one of the stars of the 1963 exhibition in Brussels, Le siècle de Bruegel.4 Its rediscovery at that show was the catalyst behind Burr Wallen’s dedicated article in Oud Holland in 1971 and thus for the re-evaluation of Hemessen as a painter of portraits. Wallen dated the portrait to the 1540s. Peter van den Brink, to whom we are grateful, has proposed Hemessen’s date of execution to be in the 1530s or early 1540s.

Provenance
The reverse is stamped with the insignia (in wax) of William, Prince of Orange (1792–1849), later William II of the Netherlands. The painting does not however match any of the entries in C. J. Nieuwenhuys’ Description de la Galerie des Tableaux de S.M. Le Roi des Pays-Bas of 1843, nor does it appear to feature in the sales following the King’s death, held in Amsterdam on 12 August 1850 and 9 September 1851. The form of the insignia denotes that the painting was in the collection prior to William’s accession in 1840, and must have been sold prior to the compilation of the 1843 inventory. It may have been acquired by Henry, 3rd Earl Warwick, at some point in the 1820s or 1830s. It is interesting to note another link between Warwick and the King: one of the greatest portraits formerly at Warwick Castle, Moroni’s Don Gabriel de la Cueva, later Duke of Alburquerque (Berlin, Gemäldegalerie) was also in the
collection of King William II; it is listed in 1843 inventory, and was sold in the 1850 sale of his collection; the RKD's copy of the sale catalogue marks the buyer as 'Nieuwenhuys' who was at the time operating out of London and thus presumably buying on behalf of the 3rd Earl at the sale.

The painting would thus appear to be one of the later additions to the Warwick collection. The first watertight mention of it in the literature is in the 1897 article on Warwick Castle where it is described as by Pourbus. More summary entries in earlier inventories, lists and descriptions of the castle and its contents refer in only general terms to male portraits which may be identifiable with this work but only conjecture can lead to a link with any of them. There is, for example, mention in several places of a 'Burgomaster'. Samuel Woodburne, for example, refers to a 'Burgomaster – in the bedroom – very fine', in his Notes on the Paintings at Warwick Castle, 1832, and at the back, the 3rd Earl notes of it: ‘Burgomaster. Is this not by Sir Anthony Moor? An original’.

The motto on the piece of paper held in the sitter's right hand has been assigned in the past to several families, including the Dubois family of Antwerp and the Sersanders of Ghent.5

3. See Wallen, under Literature, figs 2, 11 and 12.
4. See under Exhibited.
5. See J. Dielitz, Die Wahl- und Denksprüche, Frankfurt 1884, p. 114

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**Fig. 1**

Agnolo Bronzino, Portrait of a young man. c.1532-40, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy / The Bridgeman Art Library

**Fig. 2**

Jan van Hemessen, Virgin with Child, Groeningemuseum, Bruges, Belgium / © Lukas - Art in Flanders VZW / The Bridgeman Art Library