



ROBERT SIMON FINE ART

Gaspar Antoine de Bois-Clair
(St. Bonnet le Chateau, Lyon, ca. 1654- Copenhagen1704)

Double Portrait of King Frederik IV and Queen Louise of Mecklenburg-Güstow of Denmark

Oil on wood strips, laid on panel, 15 ½ x 12 ¾ inches (39.4 x 32.4 cm)



Double Portrait (as directly viewed)

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Provenance: Gustav Froehlich, emigrated from Germany to Baltimore, 1868; thence by descent to his son:

Irvin L. Froelich, Baltimore, until 1939, when gifted to:

Charles F. and Edith G. Krastell, Baltimore, until 1991, by bequest in the family to:

Private Collection, USA, 1991 – 2009

Gaspard Bois-Clair styled himself “Pastor Pictor Poeta,” reflecting his careers as clergyman, artist, and author.¹ He was born a Catholic in Lyon and became first a Jesuit and then a Reformist priest while pursuing avocations as both writer and painter. He came to Copenhagen in 1690, having converted to Lutheranism and was appointed “French Chaplain” to the Court of King Christian V. Among his publications while at the Danish court were a tri-lingual Catechism, religious poems, and royal panegyrics. Bois-Clair appears to have stayed in Denmark for the remainder of his life, appearing on court rolls until his death early in 1704.²

Despite his active career in religious circles, Bois-Clair is best known today as a painter. Among his traditional works are the gouache Vase with a portrait of Christian V, dated 1693, and an oil painting, *The Suffering Christ* of 1694, both in the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen. Miniatures by him are at Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen and his *Allegory of the Reformation in Denmark* is at Frederiksborg. But Bois-Clair is most celebrated today for a single, quite unusual work, his *Double portrait of Frederik IV as Prince and his sister Sophie Hedeveg* at Rosenborg Castle. In this painting, which presents a confused amalgam when seen from the front, two distinct images –one of the prince and one of the princess-- can be rationally discerned when viewed from different angles. To achieve such effect the artist painted on a series of triangularly cut strips of wood. One facet remains against the backing of the painting, while each of the other two equilateral sides are oriented at 60° to it. When the viewer passes in front of the painting he sees successively one image from the right side and then the other from the left. Signed and dated 1692, the *Double Portrait* was recorded in the Royal Danish Kunstkammer the following year and remained there until its transfer to Rosenborg Castle in 1859.³



Gaspar Antoine de Bois-Clair: Double portrait of Frederik IV as Prince and his sister Sophie Hedevig
Rosenborg Castle, Denmark

A similar double portrait portraying Frederik IV's parents, Christian V and Charlotte Amalie, also painted in 1692, is in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Kassel, but until now, no other work by Bois-Clair in this format has come to light. The present painting, which was traditionally held to be a portrait of the British monarchs William and Mary, would appear to be the third known painting by Bois-Clair of this unusual type. When viewed directly from the front a chaotic arrangement of facial parts and wood slats appears, but when viewed alternatively from the right and left, two portraits --one of a bewigged gentleman, the other of an elegant lady— become visible.



Double Portrait (as viewed from the left)



Double Portrait (as viewed from the right)

The Double Portrait utilizes the same panel construction and is executed in the same pictorial style as the Rosenberg Castle portrait of Frederik IV and his sister. It shares with it a slight naiveté in representation and a sophistication in optical technique that is quite distinct to Bois-Clair.⁴

The internal evidence of the paintings points to the identity of the subjects depicted. The male wears a blue sash, from which depends a white emblem of an elephant with a cross on his back. This is the badge and characteristic blue sash of the Elefantordenen, the Order of the Elephant, Denmark's oldest and most distinguished chivalric order. The head of the Order is the Danish monarch and membership is restricted, or had been until modern times, to male members of the royal family.



Detail from the Double Portrait



1671 Badge of the Order of the Elephant⁵

Another detail of dress points to his identity -- the crimson cape with ermine lining that rests across his shoulder on the right. This is dress normally reserved for the monarch and worn on celebratory occasions. It is consistent with the Coronation Robes worn by the Danish kings, as can be seen in the extant robes of King Christian V from his coronation in 1671.⁶



Detail of robe from Double Portrait



Detail of Coronation Robe of Christian V (1671)

These details, together with the physiognomy of the sitter, indicate that the male subject of our portrait is Frederik IV, who became king upon Christian V's death in 1699. He is in fact the same subject portrayed as prince by Bois-Clair in the Rosenberg Castle Double Portrait, here depicted at least seven years later as king (and wearing a powdered wig). Comparison with known portraits of Frederik confirm this identification.



Two portraits of Frederik IV⁷



Detail of Double Portrait (reversed)

In the earlier portrait, Frederik's female companion was his sister; here it is his consort, Queen Louise of Mecklenburg-Güstrow, whom he married in 1695. Although the resemblance of the female sitter in our portrait to documented images of Louise seems less specific, there are many salient features in common to establish her identity.



Two portraits of Louise of Mecklenburg⁸

Detail of Double Portrait

While Bois-Clair has been held to be the inventor of two-way paintings such as the present work,⁹ he appears to have been following an older tradition. "Turning Pictures," or corrugated perspectives, are known from the seventeenth century and are referred to by Shakespeare.¹⁰ Later examples are known in Germany, where they are called Riefelbilder or Riffelbilder. Related works were produced using prints --stepped, folded, or cut and pasted; these were manufactured as novelties well into the nineteenth century.¹¹ But Bois-Clair's paintings, at least the present example, is a somewhat more complicated image than a simple two-way picture. The proper "rational" image of either male or female figure does not appear when the viewer is looking at the painting from the right or left hand side at the level of the painting. For the images to be perceived properly, the

viewer must look at the painting from a position below the level of the picture. From the two ideal vantage points --below and to the right for the Queen and below and to the left for the King-- the portraits “work.” As such, the two images are anamorphic, painted with a slightly distorted perspective so that they only appear “normal” when viewed from an oblique angle.



The portrait as viewed from its two ideal view-points

The Double Portrait was painted as an artistic curiosity, both as a portrait to celebrate its subjects and as an object to instill wonder and surprise among its viewers. Like its cousin at Rosenborg Castle, this painting was likely intended for a Kunst- und Wunderkammer, but its provenance prior to its arrival in America in the nineteenth century remains unknown.¹² Among Bois-Clair’s writings were poems dedicated to King Frederik IV and Queen Louise. The 1703 publication of the latter was, according to the title-page “Accompagné d’und tableau mystérieux.”¹³ Whether that mysterious picture, presumably a print, corresponds in some way to the present painting remains the subject of ongoing research.

¹ He is so indicated as author in the 1703 publication cited below. While usually called Gaspard, his name appears variously as Gaspar, Caspar, and Gasparin.

² See Torben Holck Colding, *Miniature- og Emailmaleri I Danmark 1606-1650* (Copenhagen 1991), and *idem.* in *Weilbachs Kunstnerleksikon*, 4th ed., 1994, on-line resource. Among Bois-Clair’s publications were

Dialogues chrétiens entre un luthérien et un reforme, touchant quelques différences de leurs religions. Copenhague 1693; Nouvelle defense en abrégé de Gaspard Antoine de Bois Clair : contre tous les bruits et contre toutes les lettres, ou véritables, ou supposées, ou alterées que l'on fait courir contre lui dans la ville de Copenhague et ailleurs..., Copenhague 1693; Jonas prophète, ou Le prédicateur fugitif, poëme sacré ou est d'écrite une partie de la vie de ce saint homme, tiré de la prophétie, par un pasteur Evangelique, ou Luthérien. Copenhague 1694; Cantiques ecclésiastiques Luthériens pour le mois de Septembre 1694, sur l'air danois Jesu søde Hukommelse, ou sur l'allemand Kom Gott Schöpffer heiliger Geist...; Les consolations de l'âme fidelle par le chant religieux des Pseaumes tirez du Vieux, et du Nouveau Testament, ou Pseaumes ecclésiastiques chantez dans l'Eglise royale de Copenhague. Copenhague 1696. Le catechisme abrégé du Docteur Martin Luther Copenhague 1697; Oraison funebre de Christian 5.-me, Roy de Danemarck et de Norwege ... / Par le pasteur François de feu sa Majesté; Copenhague 1700; Devise et poëme consacrés et publiés, à la gloire de S. Maj. Frédéric 4me roy de Dannemarck & de Norwege. Glückstadt 1701. Poëme héroïque sur la naissance heureuse de son Altesse le Prince Frederich Charles de Dannemarck, né à Copenhague, le Dimanche 23. jour du mois d'Octobre 1701, Copenhague 1701; Clair A Sa Maj. la Reine [Luise] de Danemarck Sounaits respectueux ... d'heureuse année 1703 ... / par un pasteur évang. françois. Accompagné d' und tableau mystérieux ... par le même pasteur françois D. B. C. - P. P. P. [that is, de Bois Clair - Pastor Pictor Poeta] Hamburg 1703.

³ Bente Gundestrup, Det kongelige danske Kunstkammer 1737; The Royal Danish Kunstkammer 1737. [Copenhagen] : Nationalmuseet 1991, II, pp. 262-263, no. 858/34 53 x 46.5 cm. The painting was transferred to De danske Kongers Kronologiske Samling at Rosenborg in 1859, where it is inv no. DKK 8.23. See as well, Jørgen Hein and Peter Kristiansen, Rosenborg Palace; A Guide to the Chronological collection of the Danish Kings (Copenhagen 1994), p. 35, no. 1053.

⁴ The Rosenborg painting is signed or inscribed by Bois-Clair on the reverse. Unfortunately, the back of the present panel is a later replacement.

⁵ The 1671 badge illustrated is at Rosenborg Castle and has been attributed to Paul Kurtz

⁶ The Coronation robe illustrated is at Rosenborg Castle and was used by Christian V at his coronation in 1671. It is made of red silk velvet, embroidered in golden thread with 1400 royal crowns. The edge of the upper side is made from ermine.

⁷ The portrait at left is in the Museum Sønderjylland, Åbenrå; that on the right, depicting Frederik in his Coronation Robes is at Rosenborg Castle and was probably painted by the Danish court artist Bénéoit le Coffre.

⁸ The portrait at left is in the Museum Sønderjylland, Åbenrå; that on the right is by J. D. Du Wahl and is at Rosenborg.

⁹ As by Gerald Oster, "Optical Art," Applied Optics, IV, 11 (1965), pp. 359-69. Bois-Clair is frequently cited as a kind of god-father of lenticular printing.

¹⁰ Allan Shickman, "'Turning Pictures' in Shakespeare's England," Art Bulletin, LIX, no. 1 (March 1977), pp. 67-70.

¹¹ Sometimes called a Tabula scalata or a tableau changeant. See Barbara Maria Stafford, Devices of wonder: from the world in a box to images on a screen, Los Angeles 2001, pp. 28-29, 226, 376. Twentieth-century variants include the works of Yaakov Agam, and, in particular his "Agamographs," which rely on lenticular printing techniques.

¹² As indicated above, the painting came from the collection of a German family, who emigrated to the United States in 1868. Traditionally considered by its owners to portray William and Mary, the painting has passed by gift and bequest to its most recent owner.

¹³ Cited in note 2 above. A copy of this publication is catalogued as being in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin; however a recent request has found the book missing and presumably lost during the war.