

## *Charles I: King and Collector*, Exhibition Catalogue; exhibition curated by Per Rumberg and Desmond Shawe-Taylor

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***CHARLES I: KING AND COLLECTOR*, EXHIBITION CATALOGUE;  
EXHIBITION CURATED BY PER RUMBERG AND DESMOND SHAWE-  
TAYLOR, ASSISTED BY LUCY CHISWELL AND NIKO MUNZ. (ROYAL  
ACADEMY OF ARTS: LONDON, 2018). 256 PP. \$65.00.**

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*Charles I: King and Collector* beautifully reproduces paintings and other objects shown in an exhibition by the same name at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. From 27 January to 15 April 2018, visitors could see works of art that had long since been separated: after King Charles I was executed outside the Banqueting House at Whitehall in January of 1649, his magnificent collection was put up for sale. With its more than 200 richly printed images, this volume offers a stunning view of the works collected and commissioned by the king, beginning in the early seventeenth century. The accompanying expert essays, all written in an accessible yet learned style, alternate gracefully between close readings of particular pieces and humanizing accounts of those responsible for making, moving, and maintaining those pieces.

The introductory essay by Per Rumberg and Desmond Shawe-Taylor takes its title, ““The Greatest Amateur of Paintings Among the Princes of the World,”” from a letter written in January of 1625 by the painter-diplomat Peter Paul Rubens, impressed by the artistic tastes that had developed in the young Charles, who only a few months later would inherit the throne from his father, James I. As Rumberg and Shawe-Taylor note, these tastes were cultivated early, both within the royal family and as a result of Charles’s infamous attempt to court the Spanish Infanta in 1623: “the marriage negotiations failed, but the Habsburg collection made a lasting impression on the future king, who returned to London with works by Titian and Paolo Veronese” (17). Acknowledging important new work by Erin Griffey and others, Rumberg and Shawe-Taylor also emphasize the significant influence of Charles’s French queen, Henrietta Maria, on the “shaping” of the royal collection (17). Although English monarchs had long appreciated the power of visual and material cultures, Charles kept Europe closely in view, modeling his collection after French and Spanish tastes in art and architecture. Drawing in part upon the inventory created by Abraham van der Doort, Surveyor of the King’s Pictures, Rumberg and Shawe-Taylor offer an informative introduction to several especially significant aspects of the collection, including *The Great Peece*, Anthony Van Dyck’s formidable portrait of the royal family.

They also include a brief but informative account of prevailing conceptions of art in the period, which were grounded in an appreciation for “a classical or Italianate ideal” (24). Moments like this signal the appropriateness of this book for both general and scholarly audiences; frequent notes accommodate the needs of specialists, but this and other gracefully informative sections indicate the kind of inclusive attitude required now more than ever for maintaining broad interest in the humanities.

A useful chronology, assembled by Lucy Chiswell and Niko Munz, follows the introductory essay. Chapter 1, “Artists and Agents,” includes a lively essay by Jeremy Wood, “Connoisseurship at the Caroline Court,” in which many of the people who “fed the royal taste for art” come into view (30). These include the queen; Inigo Jones, Ben Jonson, and Van Dyck; Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel and Aletheia Talbot, his wife; Nicholas Lanier, Master of the King’s Music; Endymion Porter; George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and his agent, Balthasar Gerbier, and many others. Although the title of the exhibition emphasizes the king as the primary collector, Wood makes clear the extent to which his magnificent assemblage depended on the expertise and activity of “a remarkable network of artists, agents, and collectors” (30).

Chapter 2, “Madrid and Mantua,” includes two essays: “Charles I’s Visit to Madrid” by Guido Rebecchini, and “‘Rare and Unique in This World’: Mantegna’s ‘Triumph’ and the Gonzaga Collection,” by Barbara Furlotti and Rebecchini. Together, these essays trace the European origins of the king’s collection: his politically disastrous yet artistically fortuitous visit to Spain in 1623, from which he emerged without a wife but with several paintings, both purchased and granted as gifts; and his acquisition of the stunning collection of “paintings, ancient sculptures, cameos, engraved crystals and tapestries” that had belonged to the Gonzaga court in Mantua. This acquisition ultimately included the nine canvases of Andrea Mantegna’s highly coveted *Triumph of Caesar*.

In Chapter 3, “The Northern Renaissance,” David Ekserdjian’s essay “Charles I and the Northern Renaissance” offers a clear account of the king’s “eye-wateringly illustrious array of Northern Renaissance paintings”—including the striking *Adam and Eve* (c. 1520) by Jan Gossaert—at the same time that it explores the question of “whether it is true that [Charles] was surprisingly indifferent to his Northern paintings” (82). Ekserdjian continues to fill in the picture of the king’s personal tastes in the next chapter, which begins with his essay on “Charles I and the Italian Renaissance.” These paintings, suggests Ekserdjian, “seem to have been the King’s true passion,” although he also notes that “as a rule [Charles’s] conception of the pecking order among Italian artists of the sixteenth century was entirely in conformity with the attitudes of his age” (100). This economical essay is rife with fascinating accounts of several works, but perhaps most captivating is the story of how the king came to acquire one of Michelangelo’s sculptures:

This was his early *Sleeping Cupid*, which belonged to the Cardinal Raffaele Riario in Rome as early as 1496, at which point[...] it was masquerading as an antiquity. That very year, letters between Isabella d'Este and an agent prove that she was interested in acquiring it, but in the end did not do so, perhaps because it had been outed as a modern counterfeit. Then, in 1502 it was given to her by Cesare Borgia, the son of the reigning pope, Alexander VI. Isabella was evidently enchanted with it, and commented that 'for a modern piece it has no equals.' Tragically, when it reached London from Mantua, its importance appears to have been forgotten, and its ultimate fate is unknown. (102)

From here, the volume moves on to royal portraiture, and the anchoring essay for Chapter 5, "The 'Act and Power of a Face': Van Dyck's Royal Portraits," by Desmond Shawe-Taylor, offers several informative readings of the paintings made for the royal family. This essay complements Per Rumberg's account of "Van Dyck, Titian, and Charles I" as well as Gregory Martin's essay on "Rubens, Painter and Diplomat," both in the following chapter. Both Van Dyck and Rubens occupied especially central roles at court, and the intensive treatment of them in these three essays results in a vivid account of the larger historical and political forces in play during the period.

The final three chapters in the volume, each featuring a single essay, take us from Queen Henrietta Maria's house in Greenwich, to the royal tapestry workshop at Mortlake, to the king's private Cabinet Room. The preceding essays also acknowledge the significance of space—as in Martin's account of the Rubens ceiling in the Banqueting House at Whitehall—but these concluding essays display in remarkable ways the fundamental connections between works of art and human life, labor, and leisure. In "Henrietta Maria, Charles I and the Italian Baroque," Karen Serres draws out the Catholic queen's involvement as a patron, as well as the social and political implications of her actions. In "Charles I and Raphael's 'Acts of the Apostles,'" Helen Wyld offers a fascinating account of tapestry making in England, which began under James I with "[t]he decision in 1619 to found a native tapestry workshop, the first of its kind in the British Isles," and which "coincided with a broadening of ambition in arts patronage at the Stuart Court" (191). Wyld notes—especially helpfully for non-specialists—that although "connoisseurship of paintings was a new phenomenon in early Stuart Britain, the use of tapestries and rich textiles was part of an established mode of display" (190). Wyld's readings of the Mortlake tapestries in relation to both Raphael's cartoons and other, earlier tapestries modeled on them are succinct and learned, and I often found myself flipping back and forth between her words, the cartoons, and both sets of tapestries, lingering over a particular shadow or other difference she had observed.

Finally, in “A ‘More Solitary Place’: Charles I and his Cabinet,” Vanessa Remington and Lucy Whitaker guide us through the Cabinet Room, “a locked, private enclave at the heart of the King’s private apartments in Whitehall Palace. It was here that he and his closest associates could retreat from the busy public rooms and thoroughfares of the rambling palace to enjoy his most treasured small-scale paintings and works of art” (206). The room held hundreds of objects, some of which he had received after his brother Henry’s premature death: “73 paintings [including Leonardo da Vinci’s *St. John the Baptist* and Raphael’s *St. George and the Dragon*], 36 statues, 35 bas-reliefs, 77 limnings and miniatures, 54 books, 4 pieces of gold, 4 agates, about 33 coins and medals, 28 ‘small objects,’ 4 ‘crystals’ (polished lenses used to study small objects), 4 framed engravings, 14 silver pieces of plate, about 4 ivories, 17 drawings, some wax sculptures, and a number of miscellaneous objects” (206). Following their colleagues, Remington and Whitaker capture the humanity and irony that attended various aspects of Charles’s reign and demise; their keen sense of both emerges most poignantly in their conclusion: “Certainly, by the time of Charles I’s death, the fashion for cabinet-room displays had become so entrenched that the regicide Colonel John Hutchinson, having purchased a number of the King’s paintings at the Commonwealth Sale, immediately created a ‘neat cabinet’ for their display at his country home in Nottinghamshire.”

The catalogue included at the end of the volume is itself a formidable piece of scholarship; as a whole, *Charles I: King and Collector* stands as an important complement to existing conceptions of visual and material culture in the first half of the seventeenth century, a period in which both the acquisition and creation of art were nearly always connected to urgent questions of diplomacy, religion, war, and political power.