









## Workshop of Michiel Wauters

(active around 1648 - 1679 Antwerp)

*King Charles II of England on Horseback, glorified by Ancient Gods, the Panorama of London in the Background (Design by Abraham van Diepenbeeck)*, c. 1660/1670

tapestry, approx. 290 x 500 cm, lower edge trimmed

### Provenance

art trade Wagner-Maurer, Vienna, 1974;  
collection Erna Weidinger (1923–2021)

### Exhibition

1974 Wiener Kunst- und Antiquitätenmesse, p. 94

### Literature

cf. David W. Steadman, Abraham van Diepenbeeck. Seventeenth-Century Flemish Painter, Michigan 1982, p. 48 (... "such as Charles II on Horseback, a portrait which indeed was one of those translated into a tapestry.")  
Wiener Kunst- und Antiquitätenmesse, Vienna 1974, p. 94 (with ill.)

**Estimate: 25.000–50.000 €**

The monumental tapestry comes from the workshop of Michiel Wauters, one of Antwerp's leading manufactories. The city ruled by the Habsburgs was the outstanding centre of art, textile, and luxury goods in the 17th century, both in terms of production as well as trade. The Forchondt family, which specialized in the sale of such works of art, maintained intensive international relationships with all major courts such as England and Spain. However, the sons of the Forchondt family who had settled in Vienna, the imperial capital, were not only appointed court jewelers as early as the 1660s, but also received an official trading license. They worked closely with Michiel Wauters, who had brought his father's tapestry workshop, which had been in existence since the first half of the 17th century, to blossom by implementing Rubenesque designs. One of his preferred artists for this was Abraham van Diepenbeeck (1596–1675), who himself worked closely with Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) from the 1620s. (cf. Guy Dermarcel, *Flemish Tapestry*, New York/London 1999, p. 255 ff.)

Michiel Wauters' inventory of October 16, 1679 describes a series of eight tapestries depicting horses by Abraham van Diepenbeeck. Several sets were woven, most of which are currently in English collections. All the scenes are inspired by designs that Van Diepenbeeck created for the Duke of Newcastle. They were published in 1657 as engravings in the book on the arts of horsemanship, „Methode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux“, also dedicated to King Charles II.

The book was conceived as a practical guide to horse training and so most of the rather prosaic depictions were only raised to a further representative level by classical-antique adaptations when they were translated into wall hangings. One example is plate 24 of the book „Courbettes de coté à gauche“ which depicts the horse trainer as an “elegant Mars” only in the tapestry (cf. David W. Steadman, *Abraham van Diepenbeeck. Seventeenth-Century Flemish Painter*, Michigan 1982, p. 48). A border design comparable to the present piece is documented on a photograph of a tapestry of these riding school depictions in the archive of the RKD, The Hague (cf. RKD, photo no. 235188).



fig. 1 Claes Visscher (1587–1652), *Panorama of London*, 1616 (© Bodleian Libraries, MS. Douce Prints a. 53(2))



Lower border digitally added in the illustration. Addition from: Michiel Wauters (after Abraham van Diepenbeeck), „Riding School“, 2<sup>nd</sup> half 17<sup>th</sup> century, tapestry, 390 x 500 cm, private collection, © RKD, The Hague (no. 235188)



The composition with Charles II, on the contrary, had been designed as a superordinate homage to the ruler through mythology from the very beginning. The sheet „Charles Le Second Roy de la Grande Bretagne“ (Fig. 2) engraved by Cornelis van Caukerken (1626 - 1680) already shows, among other things, a close proximity to Jacob Jordaens, who around 1650 created the designs for a „riding school“ in combination with ancient deities - Emperor Leopold I, too, acquired the woven series, so that it is now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (cf. KHM, inv. no. Kunstkam-mer, T XL 1). The banner attached to the lower edge of the engraving after Abraham van Diepenbeek also makes it clear that the composition already deals with the glorification of Charles II as king, general and horseman, comparable to an apotheosis:



fig. 2 After Abraham van Diepenbeek, copper engraving by Cornelis van Caukerken  
© National Portrait Gallery, London (inv. no. D32294)

“Que Pallas soit vôtre guide, Cupidon vôtre Page,  
Mars le Capitaine qui conduise vôtre courage;  
Que votre propre monture foit le Pegase aile,  
Et Mercure, comme laquaÿ, toûjours a vôtre côte  
Que la Fortune soit en votre seul pouvoir soûmise,  
Elle, qui sur nos testes ést jusques icÿ affise.”

“May Pallas be your guide, Cupid your page,  
Mars the captain, who directs your courage,  
May your own steed be Pegasus' wing,  
And Mercury as servant, always by your side,  
So that Fortuna is subordinate only to you,  
She, who always decides our fate.”

In the engraving the protagonist is crowned by a host of angels, while the tapestry at the top right shows Pallas Athena, the goddess of battle, wisdom, and art, with only one companion, who crowns King Charles II with a laurel wreath. On the lower right, Cupid follows his ruler with his helmet, while in the lower left Mars is shown fighting next to all kinds of warfare equipment. In the centre, directly underneath the proud steed, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, is shown with his wand - here, probably in relation to the banner, as a „bringer of luck“ or „bearer of good fortune“.

A view of London is shown in the left middle ground. Southwark Cathedral can be seen on the river front, while the old London Bridge, then with houses built upon, leads the viewer's eye to the panorama of the city. In addition to numerous other churches, St Paul's Cathedral can be seen to the left above Mars' sword. The perspective and view approximate a London panorama by Claes Visscher (1587-1652), which was first published in 1616 and is considered one of the best depictions of the metropolis before the ‚Great Fire‘ in 1666 (fig. 1). Charles II also chose a depiction on horseback in front of the London city panorama as the royal seal (fig. 3), because since ancient times, equestrian portraits have become the embodiment of leadership, power, and victory. Since the Renaissance at the latest, they have been elevated to one of the preferred forms of representation in Europe. The pose of the horse and its rider on the present tapestry, apart from small details, correspond to another composition by Abraham van Diepenbeek, depicting the Spanish-Habsburg “Cardinal Infante Ferdinand (1609-1641) on horseback”, designed in the 1630s and engraved by Antony van der Does (1609-1680). This work by Diepenbeek is also very close to Rubens and his style-defining equestrian portraits of a ruler on a horse in the classic ‚levade‘.



fig. 3 Copper engraving of the Royal Great Seal of Charles II, James Basire after the design by Thomas Simon, Seal from 1663-1672  
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