



LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER AND WORKSHOP

(Kronach 1472 – 1553 Weimar)

Portrait of the Elector of Saxony Frederick the Wise. 1525.

Oil on beech panel.

Signed with serpent and dated upper left above the shoulder: 1528.

38.7 x 25.3 cm.

Provenance: - Private collection, Binningen bei Basel, 1974. - Via inheritance to the current owner, Swiss private collection. Exhibited: Lukas Cranach. Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik, Kunstmuseum Basel, 15.6.-8.9.1974, no. 189. Literature: Koepplin, Dieter / Falk, Tilman: Lukas Cranach. Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik, Basel 1974, cat. no. 189, p. 298. Lucas Cranach the Elder was appointed in 1505 as court

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painter to Wittenberg by Frederick the Wise (1463-1525), Elector of Saxony, and served three successive Electors for nearly half a century. In 1508, Elector Frederick awarded Cranach with the coat of arms with the winged serpent, which was to form the basis for his signature device, as can be seen in the present work. Frederick the Wise was a patron of considerable importance in his support of the arts and humanism. In 1502 he founded the University of Wittenberg, which promoted Renaissance humanism and later served as a centre of Reformation teaching. In 1512 Martin Luther became its Professor of Theology. The present portrait of Frederick the Wise from a Swiss private collection was last shown in the 1974 exhibition "Lucas Cranach" curated by Dr. med. Dieter Koeplin at the Kunstmuseum in Basel, where it was described as an autograph work of the master (see literature). Recent studies now support the opinion that the sole authorship of Lucas Cranach the Elder cannot be clearly proven in any work assigned to him, and that the participation of the workshop, including his son Lucas Cranach the Younger (1515-1586), is to be generally assumed. Dr. Dieter Koeplin concurs with this opinion in our case as well. With this approach Dr. Michael Hofbauer, who also examined our panel firsthand and for which we are grateful, associates our depiction (Corpus Cranach no. CC-POR-160-026) with a group of six still preserved portraits of Frederick the Wise (CC-POR-160-026, CC-POR-160-027, CC-POR-160-028, CC-POR-160-029, CC-POR-160-030, CC-POR-160-031), which, despite slight variations in motif and technique, were produced during a similar period. All six versions bear the serpent facing right at the left edge of the picture. The version in Schleswig at the Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Schloss Gottorf (on loan from the Stiftung Rolf Horn) is dated 1525. In this work, the curls to the right of the eye end with an outward sweep, as consistent with the present version, suggesting that both works are likely to have been created within close proximity to one another. The infrared reflectogram (IRR examination by Dr. Michael Hofbauer on 27 November 2018 with OSIRIS A1) reveals, and from the surface image of our painting it can be seen, that overpainting was performed in the area of the snake and that the number 8 in our painting was originally a 5. It must therefore be assumed that the present painting was created

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in 1525 as well. In this group of works, the inscription with laudatory verses of the sitter in the lower third of the panel is executed in calligraphic script, as here, unlike later versions, where the text panel is printed. Indeed, Frederick's successor, Johann the Constant (1468-1532), commissioned multiple portraits of his brother from Lucas Cranach the Elder after Frederick's death in 1525. The infrared reflectogram also shows underdrawings that may have been used in the workshop for the multiple application of motif templates. In the lower area of the picture, at the transition from the painting to the attached paper, it can be seen in areas with tears that the paper strip may have been applied after the painting was finished, as brush marks of the fur project below the pasted paper.

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