

**Sir Anthony Van Dyck, *Charles I with Monsieur de St Antoine*, RCIN  
405322**

This portrait is a vast oil on canvas portrait – about 4 metres high and 3 metres wide. Very simply it shows King Charles I on horseback, riding through a stone archway with, on the right-hand side of the portrait, a companion standing by his side. It was painted by the King's Principal Painter Anthony van Dyck in 1633 – 8 years after Charles came to the throne in 1625. Anthony van Dyck was Flemish, and a pupil of the other great Flemish master, Peter Paul Rubens.

In the centre of the portrait, Charles, in silver armour, rides his dazzling white horse towards us through a stone arch. A companion at his side. The arch fills the sides of the canvas. As Charles rides through it, behind him we can see a dramatic sky and indistinct background. The stone arch is just wide enough for Charles to ride through – there is only a thin slither of space on either side of the horse. The two vertical shafts of the arch are formed by fluted columns which sit on tall rectangular plinths. You can see more of the shaft with column and plinth on the left-hand side – the right is hidden behind Charles's companion and a flowing green drape. At the top of the arch, or the bridge, there is some scrollwork which hints at decoration in the centre, but it is not fully shown as it's where the canvas ends. Also around the top of the arch, is the flowing green drape, billowing theatrically down each shaft.

At the bottom right of the scene, really in the corner of the composition, is the standing companion, a figure wearing red doublet and breeches, with long fawn boots, who carries the King's helmet and looks up at Charles. In the bottom left-hand corner, there is a large shield, leaning against the plinth of the column, the shield bares the Royal Coat of Arms and is topped with a golden decorative crown. The ground on which the horse walks is brown and rough.

Let's concentrate now on the figures – Charles and the horse. These figures dominate the centre of the composition. The horse walks towards the right, as if trotting on the diagonal, but its head is pulled back to centre. It is a big, muscly white horse – you can see where van Dyck has clearly painted the muscles in its chest, just above its front legs, to emphasise the strength in the creature.

It is as if van Dyck has captured a moment of the horse in motion as its front right and back left legs are in the air, in a walking position. A red/golden harness is around its head – and its head looks small in comparison with the size of its body, but this is probably just an illusion because of the way the head is facing across the body. We can see some of the horse's white wavy mane, it looks almost crimped, and it's slightly more sandy coloured tail. The detail on the horse is quite remarkable, you can see the long thick hair, the feathers, on the lower leg just above each hoof.

The horse has dark eyes and has something of a submissive look on its face. Its muzzle is smooth and you can see all the detail in the lines around its dark, wide nostrils.

The King sits upright and looks towards us. His face is pale, with a high forehead. Long wavy light brown hair, parted in the centre, flows either side of his head. The hair on his left-hand side hangs long over his left shoulder, whilst the right is shorter and sits at shoulder length. He has a neat pointed beard, like a goatee, and a wispy handlebar moustache that turns up at each edge.

He looks straight out at the viewer, his brown eyes open wide, his nose long and broad. His expression is hard to describe, it's expressionless really – he looks at us, but very neutrally, very matter of fact.

Charles is wearing a suit of armour, made of jointed plates of gleaming silver. It covers all of his arms, although only his right arm is fully visible. His left arm, which must be holding the reins of the horse, is hidden behind the horse's head. The armour covers his torso, has a skirt across his hips and covers his right leg to just below the knee. Because of the angle of the horse, we can only see Charles' right leg. He is wearing light calfskin boots – we can see all of the right boot but only the foot of the left. His feet sit in golden coloured stirrups.

A large, lace collar with a scalloped edge covers the armour at neck and shoulders, and a pale blue sash is draped over his left shoulder, the medallion of the order of the Garter hanging at his right hip. His right arm is raised, hand cupping the end of a wooden staff. The other end of the staff presses against a red and gold saddle cloth in front of his thigh.

At the far right of the composition is the figure wearing red doublet and breeches, with long fawn boots, carrying the King's helmet. This is Pierre

Antoine Bourdin, Seigneur de St Antoine. He was known to be a master in the art of horsemanship. Sent by Henry IV of France to James I in 1603, he remained in the service of the Prince and later of Charles I, as riding master and equerry. He has a bearded face, with a slightly fuller, more unkempt pointy beard than his master. He has shaggy red-brown hair and black skull cap. His eyes are open wide and his forehead is slightly creased as he looks up toward Charles.

He wears a wide black ribbon around his neck, with a medallion hanging at lower chest level. The ribbon hangs under a plain, large white collar – the same style as the one Charles wears but significantly plainer. Behind St Antoine is part of the billowing green silk which hangs down from the bridge of the arch, across the fluted column, down the right-hand side. This emerald green fabric is not visible at the top, but does hang down the left-hand side, a half shorter than the right.

Thanks to old inventories we know that Van Dyck designed the painting to be hung at the end of the Gallery at St James's Palace, where it would have given the theatrical impression that the King was riding into the room.

The prominent display of the crowned royal arms, on the shield in the bottom left-hand corner, and the triumphal arch framing the armed King reinforce his image as ruler of Great Britain. Whilst the King's refined features, loose hair and the sash of the Order of the Garter worn, over his armour, convey the impression of a chivalrous knight – indeed skilled horsemanship was regarded as the epitome of virtue.