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Arts

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## Antoon van Dyck: A Major Exhibition at Genoa's Palazzo Ducale

A landmark show traces Van Dyck's artistic journey across Europe through more than 50 masterpieces



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



Anton van Dyck, *The Four Ages of Man*, inv. A-288 © Vicenza, Museo Civico di Palazzo Chiericati.

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Gestisci consenso

From 20 March to 19 July 2026, the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa will host, in the Doge's Apartment, *Van Dyck, the European. The Journey of a Genius from Antwerp to Genoa and London*. This is the most extensive monographic exhibition of the past 25 years dedicated to this Flemish painter (1599–1641), best known for his portraits.

Thanks to his peripatetic life, Van Dyck was a European painter in the literal sense of the term. Born in Antwerp to a family of wealthy silk merchants with artistic talents, Antoon painted from an early age. During his late teens he studied with Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), the leading northern European painter of the day, who became his mentor.

### The Italian Years and the Rise of a Portraitist

In 1620 or 1621 he followed in Rubens' footsteps to Italy and for some six years settled in Genoa, hence the exhibition's location. Genoa was at a peak of power, and its art-loving merchant aristocracy customarily commissioned elegant, full-length portraits to display their wealth and power.



van Dyck, *St. Rosalie crowned by two angels*, The Wellington Collection, Apsley House, Historic England Archive

The city also had a strong, established community of Flemish artists who assisted Van Dyck upon his arrival. A devout Catholic, he also visited Rome, Mantua, Florence, Turin, Venice to study Titian, his favorite painter, and Palermo, where he, quarantined during the 1624 plague, painted several canvases of Saint Rosalia.

In 1630 King Charles I, a passionate art collector, persuaded Rubens to move to England, and two years later Van Dyck followed his mentor's example. Until his death a decade later in London, Van Dyck painted almost exclusively numerous portraits of the nobility and the many members of the royal family.

### The Exhibition: Themes, Masterpieces, and Discoveries

Over 50 paintings will be on display in Genoa, on loan from 32 museums and foundations across 22 European cities. These include the Louvre, the Prado, the

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, London's National Gallery, the Uffizi, Milan's Brera Pinacoteca, Turin's Musei Reali, the Belgian Phoebus Foundation, and the Portuguese Gaudium Magnum Collection.

The works aren't displayed in chronological order, but arranged in ten thematic sections, which highlight Van Dyck's adaptability to his environment and his artistic evolution, while consistently gaining international admiration and success. These include "Power and Portraiture," which examines his work for aristocratic and royal clients; "Van Dyck's Three Homelands": Flanders, Italy (specifically Genoa), and England; "Youthful Self-Portraits": the early evidence of his artistic style; "Genoese Aristocracy": portraits reflecting his impact on the local elite, including his "portrait in red" style; "Mythology"; "Religion"; "International Portraiture": a comparison of his styles in his three homelands; and the "Van Dyck Style": how he defined the image of nobility.

Among the highlights of the exhibition is the earliest known self-portrait by the artist, painted when Van Dyck was approximately fifteen years old. On loan from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, this work opens the exhibition and immediately reveals the artist's extraordinary talent.

Other exceptional loans include the *Portrait of Charles V on Horseback* from the Uffizi; *Portrait of Alessandro, Vincenzo and Francesco Maria Giustiniani Longo* from London's National Gallery; *Samson and Delilah* from London's Dulwich Picture Gallery; and the *Portrait of the Palatine Princes* from the Louvre. Also of great impact are a strikingly modern study for the life-size figure of *Saint Jerome*, belonging to the Phoebus Foundation, and *The Four Ages of Man* from the Civic Museum of Palazzo Chiericati in Vicenza.



Anton van Dyck, *Portrait of a Lady*, private collection, Rome

### Van Dyck's Religious Vision

While Van Dyck the portraitist will be well represented with works from every phase of his career, visitors will also discover, perhaps for the first time, Van Dyck's religious works, almost all painted in Italy. This section includes celebrated masterpieces such as the monumental *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* from the

Prado and the intense *Saint Sebastian* from the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh, alongside remarkable and previously unseen works, including an *Ecce Homo* from a European private collection.

Exceptionally removed from the altar of the small church of San Michele di Pagana (Rapallo), Palazzo Ducale will also display the only altarpiece Van Dyck ever created for a public setting: a monumental and deeply moving *Crucifixion*.

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