

# A Brush With Fashion

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500 Years of  
Male Portraiture

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# Introduction

Throughout British history, clothing has been used to communicate notions of masculinity. Men's fashion has been historically interwoven with symbols and signifiers of certain social, economic, moral, and even romantic statuses of individuals within society.

The shifting status of artists in the sixteenth century also saw the representation of costume and clothing develop as a vehicle for painterly expression. The workmanship required to recreate elaborate and intricate clothing offered artists opportunities to demonstrate their artistic capabilities.

Inspired by the V&A's exhibition *Fashioning Masculinities: The Art of Menswear*, our curated selection of portraits explores the shifting representations of masculinity through British art over a duration of nearly 500 years.

From ruffs and wigs to suits and bowties, this display traces the changing preferences of fashion-conscious male sitters and the artists they sat for.

*We are grateful to Jacqui Ansell, Senior Lecturer Christie's Education, for her commentary on men's fashion which has been incorporated into this online catalogue.*

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Please click the 'Further Details' link on each artwork's page for full cataloguing.

All paintings are available to view online and in the gallery.

An<sup>o</sup> dñi 1573.  
ætatis suæ 26



## GEORGE GOWER (c.1538-1596)

Sir Francis Willoughby (1546-1596)

*1573*

This portrait by George Gower is the earliest work in our selection. Although this sitter's style of dress might appear sombre to a contemporary audience, black and white were in fact the favourite colours of Queen Elizabeth I. As such, this colour palette was sported by fashionable courtiers eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the crown. As well as a form of flattery, black was also the most expensive dye, and clothing of this colour was therefore an indicator of wealth and social status. The fashionable masculine silhouette of the 1570s placed an emphasis on hauteur, demonstrated through artificially broad shoulders and the illusion of a long neck. To attain this desirable silhouette, the sitter in the present portrait wears a sleeveless jerkin, or perhaps a cloak, with a strikingly high collar and pronounced shoulder wings, the lines of which are emphasised by gold buttons which appear to be decorative rather than functional.



Anglo-Irish School  
c. 1650-1660  
Sir John Moore





## ENGLISH SCHOOL

**Sir John Norris (or Norreys) (c.1547-1597)**

*Late 1580s*

Armour was as much a fashion statement as it was a form of protection in the Elizabeth age. In an era of exploration and rapid expansion abroad, men of the royal court were eager to demonstrate their bravery and willingness to fight whilst also showing a level of refinement, separating them from the lower classes. In this portrait, the sitter wears a breastplate with 'pauldrons' (shoulder armour) decorated with intricate motifs with depictions of trophies of arms, reminiscent of Roman triumphs, signaling the wearer's ambitions to be seen as a true renaissance man. Due to the looseness of detail in areas, it seems unlikely that the armour was painted from life and was instead perhaps based on a print or pattern made available to the artist.





## ENGLISH SCHOOL

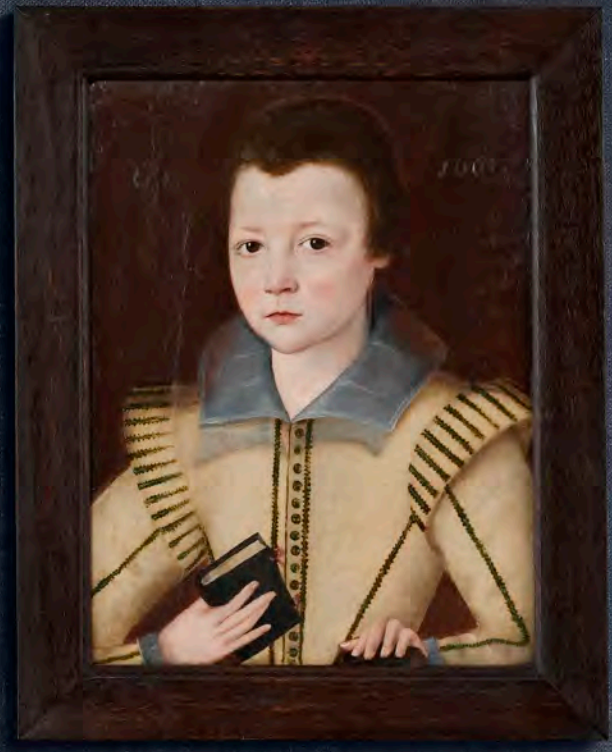
**An Explorer, possibly Sir Robert Dudley**

(1574-1649)

*c.1595-1605*

Exploration during the Elizabethan age was pursued only by the most daring men at court. It required bravery, intelligence, and the ability to lead and command – a set of skills perceived by contemporary courtiers as profoundly masculine. This portrait, likely commissioned to commemorate a foreign expedition, boasts of these masculine stereotypes through the sitter's attire. His style of dress broadly corresponds with court fashion from the 1590s which emphasised a broad, linear silhouette achieved here through a long body, tight sleeves, shoulder wings and a tall hat. Other aspects of the outfit, however, are less easy to pin-down and it may be the case that the artist modified the outfit to prioritise opulence over accuracy. The gold embroidered doublet, for example, is of an unusual construction and has a profusion of pockets not seen in daily dress. This portrait reminds us that portraiture at this date was sometimes a careful balance between fact and fiction.





## ENGLISH SCHOOL

### The Ffolliott Boys

The young sons of Sir John and Barbara Ffolliott: Master Aylmer Ffolliott, Master John Ffolliott, Master Francis Ffolliott, Master Henry Ffolliott

1603

In Tudor and Jacobean portraiture, boys were often dressed in similar clothing to adults, and these young brothers are no exception. The four sitters shown here are dressed immaculately in matching doublets made of cream coloured silk, or chamois leather, embellished on the seams and shoulder wings with contrasting braid. Instead of ruffs, they wear more practical 'falling bands' of fine linen; although ruffs remained in fashion at this date, collars such as this were popular alternatives. The artist emphasised the burgeoning masculinity of the two eldest brothers during the painting process by broadening their shoulders, thus giving them a greater physical presence, and more clearly distinguishing them from their younger siblings. These amended areas, called *pentimenti*, are now visible due to the upper paint layers becoming more transparent over time.





Attributed to SIR JAMES PALMER (1584-1657)

**A Gentleman, said to be a member of the 'Dorset'  
family, wearing white falling ruff**

*c. 1615*

This young man wears a falling ruff trimmed with exquisite lace. The exact type of lace, known as *reticella*, was a form of cutwork where some warp threads of the fine linen were removed to create a net-like edge that was then filled in with a snowflake-shape formed of individual buttonhole stitches. The immense amount of workmanship required to create such patterns made this fine cloth very costly and subsequently painstaking to paint in portraits such as the present miniature.

Throughout the seventeenth century, men's hair was grown longer. Here, however, an element of height was required and the front of the hair – the foretop – was often curled up with the Jacobean equivalent of curling tongs. Moralists of the day commented that such 'gulls', as dandies of the day were called, looked like they had seen a ghost.



Factum infectum  
nisi cor affectum:

Anno 1621  
Aetatis 30:



## CIRCLE OF WILLIAM LARKIN (1585-1619)

### Portrait of a Gentleman

*1621*

In seventeenth century Europe, the black doublet signified a certain level of high social and moral status. Consequently, this desirable attire dominated elite portraiture, particularly in Britain and the Netherlands. Choice of cloth and the mode of its decoration offered further indications of the economic status of the wearer. This gentleman's fine silk doublet has been enhanced through a repeated pattern which has either been woven into it, or possibly pinked. Popularised throughout the late Elizabethan period, pinking was a fashionable method of stamping into fabric to achieve small holes or serrated edges that added detailed patterns to fabric. The exceptional condition of this work allows us to appreciate the sitter's dress in a way that is sadly not always possible in portraits of this period.





Attributed to CORNELIUS JOHNSON  
(1593-1661)

King Charles I (1600-1649)

*1630s*

Charles I was an immensely important patron of the arts and during his reign, art and fashion in Britain flourished. Throughout the Stuart period, ceremonial dress became increasingly popular in male portraiture as it projected a level of status and power that even the wealthiest men in the country could not always attain. In this portrait, King Charles I is shown wearing the robes of the Order of the Garter, one of Europe's most illustrious chivalric orders which was founded in 1348 by King Edward III. Membership was traditionally awarded to those who demonstrated bravery and valour, most often on the battlefield, and the robes therefore embodied contemporary stereotypes of strength and masculinity.





## FRENCH SCHOOL

The artist Claude Lefebvre (1632 - 1675) wearing  
black robes and white lace jabot

*c. 1664*

This sitter exemplifies the fashion for long natural hair, combined with neatly trimmed facial hair during the mid-seventeenth century. The row of close-set rounded buttons that adorn the front of the doublet are also a distinctive feature of the fashion of the period. An astute viewer might catch a glimpse of another parallel row of buttons, visible through the sitter's intricate lace collar.





## RICHARD GIBSON (1615-1690)

**A Gentleman wearing a brown silk doublet with slashed sleeves and blue cloak**

*c. 1670*

The luscious locks of this young sitter may, or may not, be his own. Painted at a time during the popularisation of the wig – thanks to the King of France, Louis XIV – this miniature exemplifies the trend for long hair. Charles II, after his time exiled in France, returned home in 1660 with several foreign fashions, including the wig, and it soon became a costly status symbol. Although wigs were enormously expensive, they could be easier to care for than the wearer's own hair, which was shaved to accommodate wig wearing.







## JOHN CLOSTERMAN (1665-1711)

### A Boy with a Fowling Piece

*c. 1705-10*

An insight into the origins and development of the modern-day three-piece suit – jacket, waistcoat and breeches – is discernible in the present portrait. The sitter's gleaming pale blue jacket is fitted to the waist and falls out into full folds. The large, loose sleeves reveal the shirt's full sleeves beneath, which billow from the tight cuffs. The left sleeve of the sitter's gold brocaded waistcoat peeks through the large cuffs of his jacket – an example of a waistcoat *with* sleeves, before they were later jettisoned in the middle of the eighteenth century. The full linen cravat emulates the 'Steinkirk' style; a style of cravat favoured by both men and women of the early eighteenth century. The loose folds of material that comprise the cravat are echoed in the excess of fabric throughout the costume, particularly in the cuffs of the shirt and jacket.





## JOHANN ANTON DE PETERS (1725-1795)

### Two boys building a house of cards

*c. 1750*

These two boys wear the finest of formal dress offered at the period – identical to the clothing that would have been worn by their fathers. The three-piece suit is fully developed here, with the brocaded cuffs of the lilac silk jacket matching the golden silk fabric of the waistcoat. Whilst the boy in blue wears a cravat tied into a bow at the neck, the young gentleman in violet wears falls of fine lace. The fashionable lace of the period is much finer in pattern and texture than the late seventeenth century equivalent, in line with the move to Rococo sensibilities from the heavier forms of the Baroque. Although the boys are dressed as young men, they are engaged in the childhood pursuit of building a house of cards. Often depicted in genre paintings as a means of conveying an allegorical message, inevitably the card castle will collapse over time, reminding the viewer that childhood is brief and that development into adulthood is unavoidable.

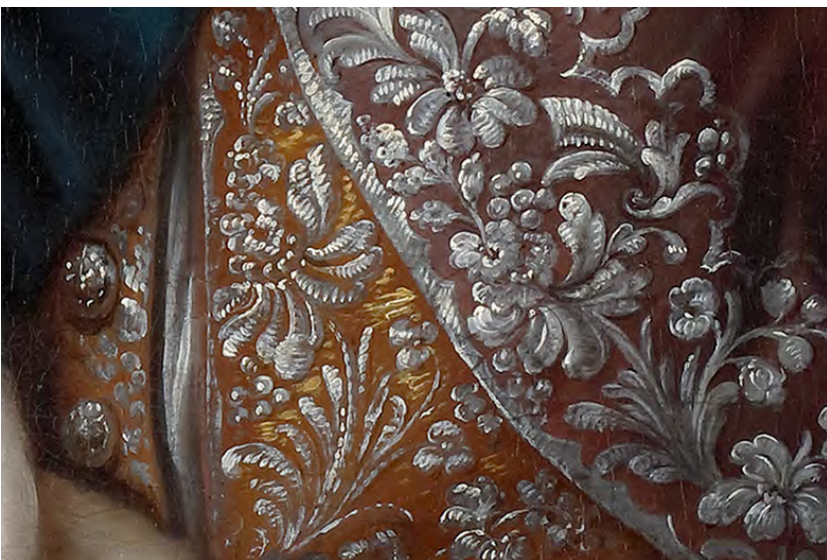




## DAVID LÜDERS (1710-1759)

### King George III (1738-1820) when Prince of Wales *c. 1751*

This self-assured portrait shows the young King George III when Prince of Wales. George would have been around thirteen when this portrait was painted, although he appears much older due to his elegant attire and confident pose. Many aspects of George's dress signify his royal status, including his red velvet fur-lined robes, which were worn only by peers of the realm. The white ermine fur lining seen here was both rare and expensive. It was said that an ermine would rather die than have its pure-white fur soiled, which led to its association with moral purity and royalty. George also wears the star of the Order of the Garter on his chest and the blue garter sash worn over his left shoulder – the most distinguished chivalric orders in Europe.

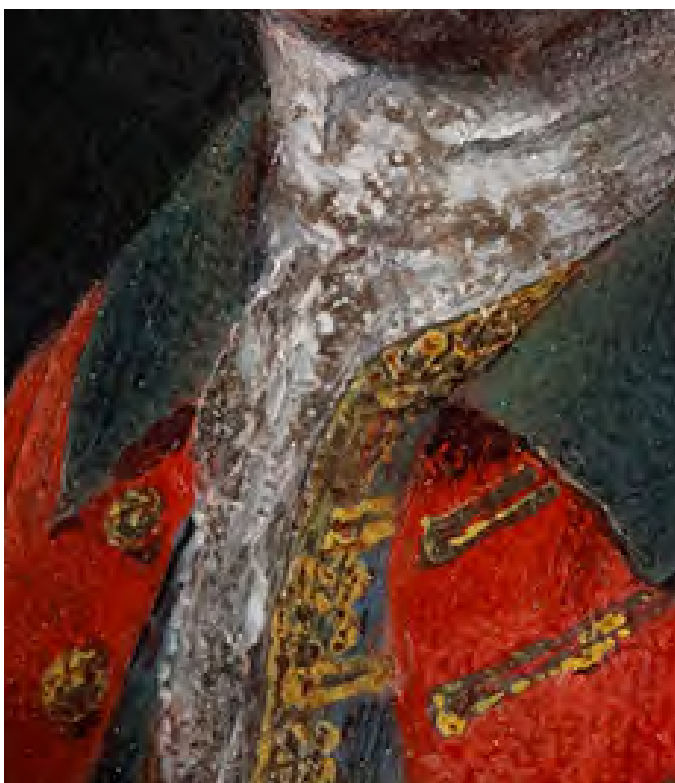




## THOMAS FRYE (c.1710-1762)

### A Gentleman, wearing a red coat with green collar *c. 1761*

As Rococo tastes began to give way to neoclassicism throughout Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, fashion became more subdued. Embellishments and decorations were simplified – for example, in the present portrait, the decoration to the sitter's coat is limited to gold embroidery down the centre front of the sitter's waistcoat, and around the buttonholes. Although the present sitter is unknown, from his clothing we can sense a man confident in his class and status. A stiffened stock or cravat holds his neck firm, and head erect. By this date, the traditional, formal jacket had been replaced by a stylish frock coat, which had evolved during the 1740s as a less formal jacket and was often made in woollen cloth. Scarlet was a particularly popular colour in the 1760s, as was the use of its complementary colour green.







## RICHARD COSWAY R. A. (1742-1821)

**A Gentleman, wearing a blue coat with brass buttons**  
*c. 1790*

The most important weapon in this dandy's armoury is clearly his fine linen. The swathes of linen adorning this gentleman's neck are tied into a neat cravat, the tones of which are echoed in his powdered hair. Powdered hair was beginning to be frowned upon for its cost and the wastefulness of using wheat flour for decoration rather than consumption. Those who persisted in feeding their pride through wearing hair powder were taxed on its use from the late 1780s. In 1795 – to help defray the costs of war with France – a licence had to be obtained and, as the licence cost a guinea, those who sported hair powder became scornfully known as 'guinea pigs'.

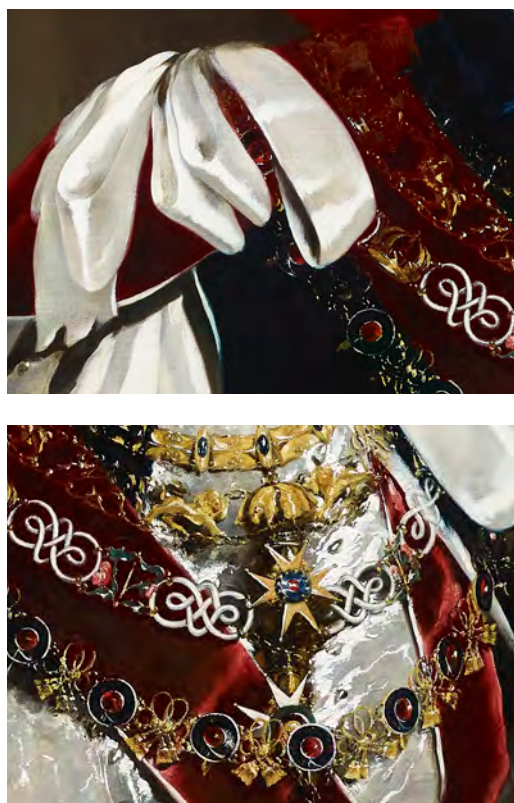


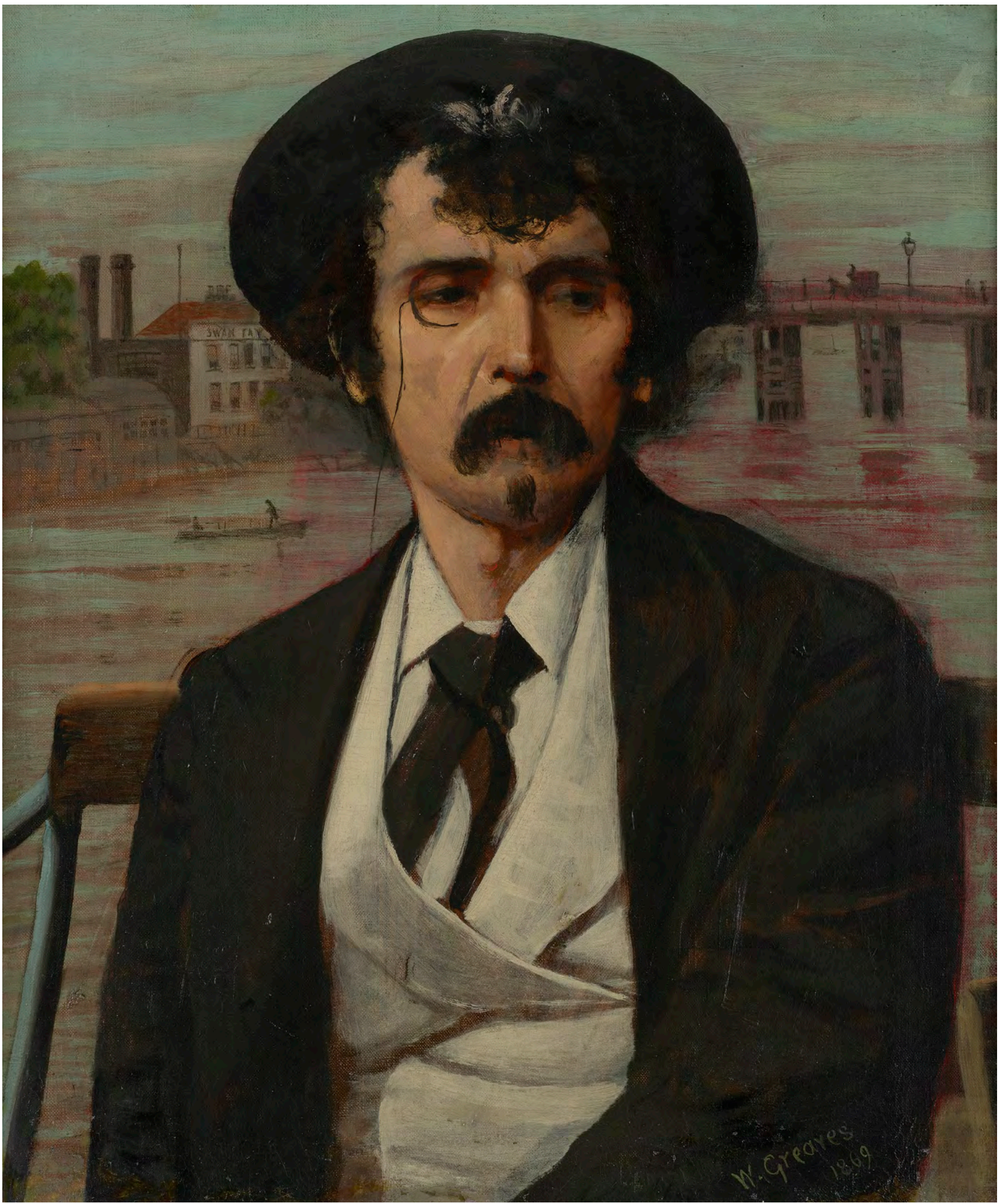


## SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE PRA, AND STUDIO (1769-1830)

King George IV (1762-1830) when Prince Regent  
*c. 1815*

King George IV's love of fine clothing is legendary, and few artists recorded this fondness for fine fashion as eloquently as Sir Thomas Lawrence. Royal portraiture was often intended to impress and intimidate in equal measure and one way to achieve this was through the clever combination of expressive postures and sumptuous dress. George's large physique has been exaggerated here by the robes of the Order of the Garter which broaden his silhouette and emphasise his masculinity. The draw of fashion was so strong, that even established and traditional ceremonial robes evolved to reflect contemporary trends. Here, George's garter robes have been adapted and embellished to incorporate current notions of exuberant masculinity and the beribboned white doublet and breeches exhibit the evolution of the seventeenth century doublet and breeches combination.

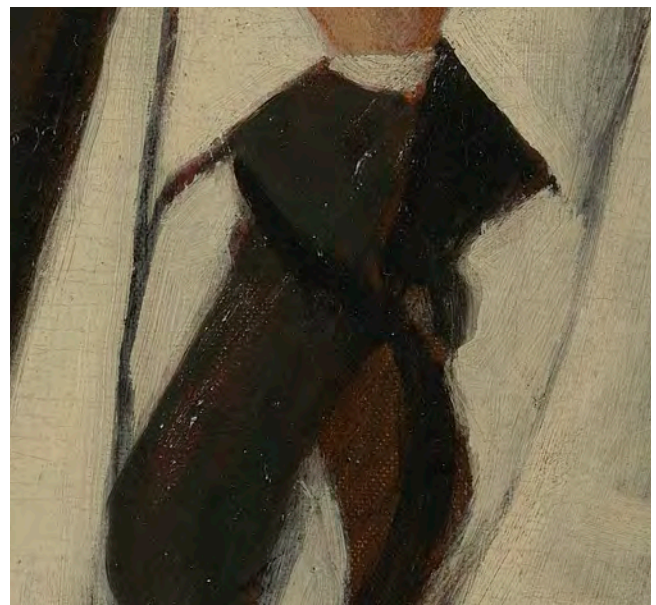
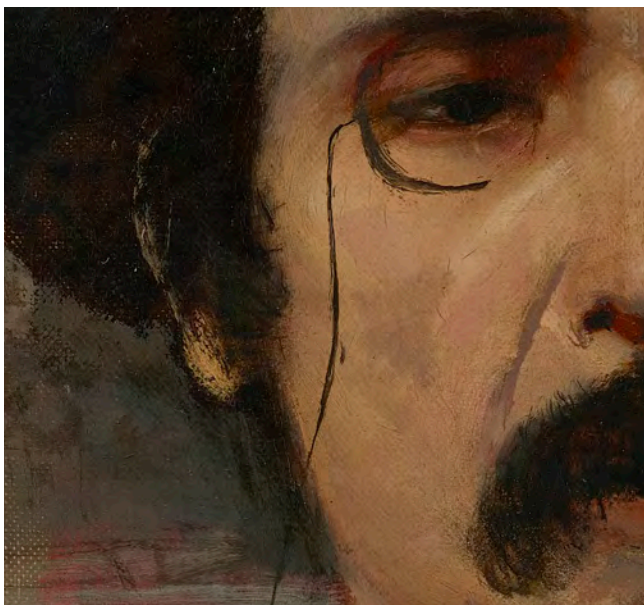


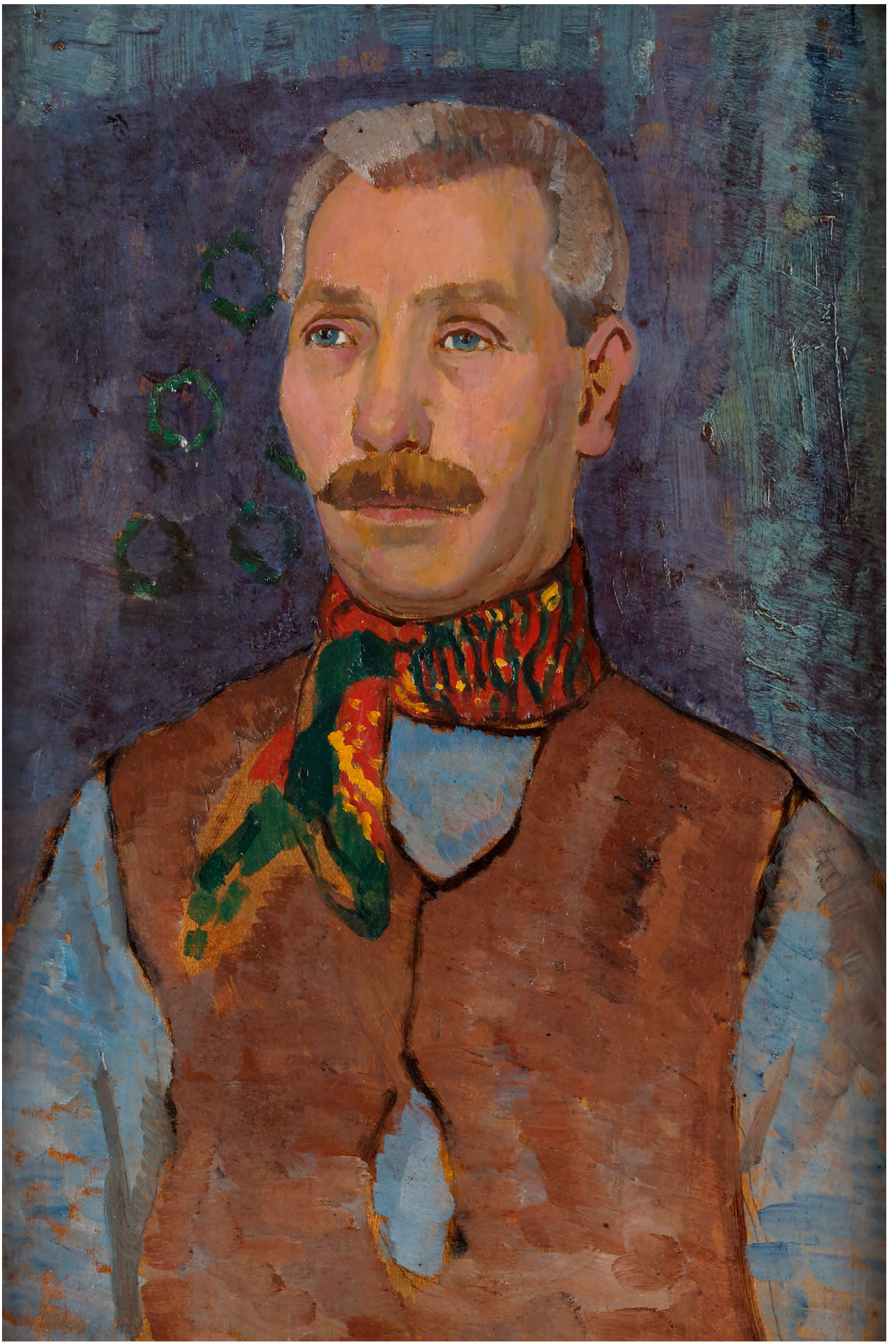


## WALTER GREAVES (1846-1930)

### Portrait of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, with the old Battersea Bridge and the Swan Tavern beyond *1869*

This strikingly modern portrait reflects the dramatic modernisation of men's fashion during the nineteenth century. Whistler's modern clothing reflects his role as a 'flaneur' – a term coined by his friend Baudelaire, who urged artists to celebrate 'the Heroism of Modern Life'. Baudelaire issued a rallying call to artists to reflect modern, rather than traditional, fashion trends. Greaves and Whistler heed this through Whistler's double-breasted white waistcoat and cloth jacket, which is far less structured than previous traditional styles and lacks the padding and restrictive tailoring of Georgian equivalents. The collar of the shirt is relatively soft, and the tie is loose, in contrast to the stiff collar and cravats worn in the era of George IV. The term 'flaneur' was synonymous with scrutinising and observing and this sense of observation is implicit in the stylish monocle which Whistler wears, and the gaze with which he surveys the scene.





## FRANK DOBSON (1888-1963)

### The Batman

*1916*

Practical and hardwearing, this man's garments befit his active role as a 'batman'. This peculiar military term fits many different roles of 'gentlemen's gentlemen' but generally refers to a soldier or airman assigned to a commissioned officer as a personal servant or trusted 'right-hand man'. Given the date of the portrait, it seems reasonable to infer that this man, with his military moustache and sleeveless leather jerkin, might have served an officer. However, this sitter has not abandoned his individuality amongst the uniformity of military life; the brightly coloured neckerchief is a focal point in this portrait, as it would have been in real life. Coloured cotton handkerchiefs had been worn around the neck by working men and women as far back as the eighteenth century and served a practical function – they could be used to mop the sweat of the brow, as well as to provide an easily washable extra layer of clothing. Through his sitter's fashion choices, Dobson captures a subtle hint of this military man's free will and idiosyncratic personality.



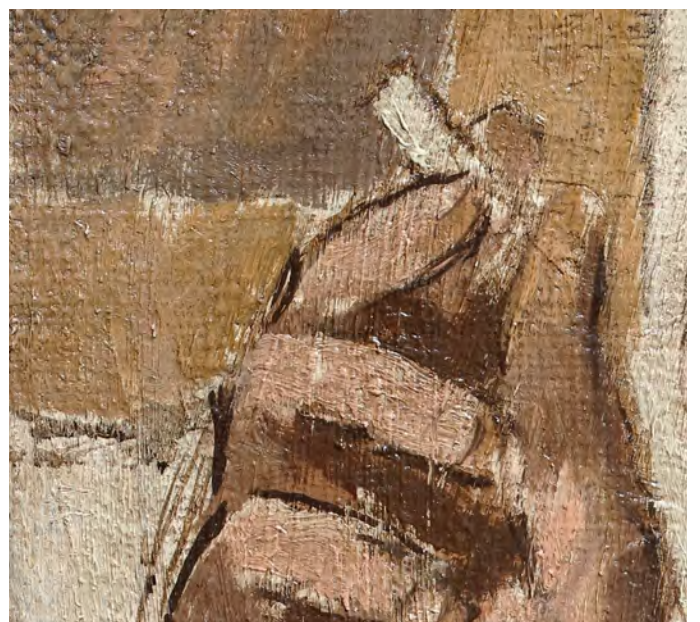
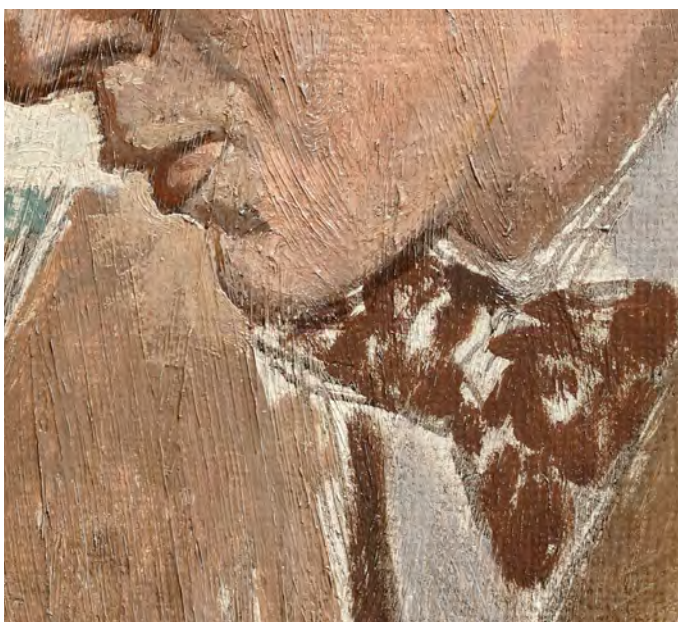


## MAURICE FIELD (1905-1988)

### Portrait of W. H. Auden

1937

Notions of conformity and equality within male fashion developed exponentially throughout the nineteenth century, in an era that saw men adopt sober and sombre suits and stovepipe hats. As evidenced in this portrait, the suit began to reflect the developing democratization of wealth and trend toward simplification. Although Auden's *full* attire in this portrait is not visible, we can ascertain with sartorial confidence that Auden would have been wearing trousers in a fabric type, colour and pattern that matched his jacket – in other words, he is wearing a suit. Hairstyles equally became more austere and in the twentieth century the 'short back and sides' was popularised. Auden sports this fashionably homogenous cut in the present portrait, although he expresses an element of individuality through his neckwear. Whilst a black or white bow tie had long been worn for formal occasions, as a descendent of the masculine cravat, the early twentieth century saw the expansion of decorative and patterned bow ties, worn by men and women.



PHILIP MOULD  

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& COMPANY