



 CATALOGUE ENTRY

Portrait of a Woman

about 1560–1565

Corneille de Lyon

Netherlandish, active in France, 1500/1510–1575

oil on wood panel
6-3/4 × 5-13/16 in.
(17.1 × 14.7 cm)

The Clowes Collection
2014.84

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

None

Entry

1 The woman in this portrait wears a black bodice over a white chemise with a high, frilled collar. A pearl necklace tightly encircles her neck on top of the semi-transparent underdress, while another longer necklace, presumably carrying a pendant, is tucked into her dress. Her black dress is decorated with precious stones that form two garlands around the neckline and run vertically down the bodice, and her sleeves are also white. At the lower left of the painting, a glimpse of a golden belt is visible around the sitter's narrow waist. Covering her red hair is a simple black headdress with a train, which suggests she is a widow. Her elegant attire indicates that she is of noble origin, and its style can be linked to French court fashion during the later reigns of Henry II (1519–1559) and Charles IX (1550–1574), that is, from about 1540 to 1570.¹

2 When the painting appeared at auction in London in 1949, it was identified as a portrait of the *duchesse de Châtillon* (duchess of Châtillon) without further clarification.² Since *Châtillon* or *Châstillon* are old spellings of *Châtillon*, a noble family with its ancestral home in north-eastern France, the latter writing was quickly adapted for the title of the portrait. However, the identification of the sitter is problematic. While the House of Coligny-Châtillon possessed several fiefdoms during the late Middle Ages, it was not elevated to the rank of dukes and duchesses until 1643.³ In 1968, the art historian Mark Roskill speculated that the sitter might be Louise de Montmorency (1496–1547), the wife of Gaspard de Coligny (1465–1522), *seigneur de Châtillon* and *maréchal de France* (lord of Châtillon and marshal of France), whom she married in 1516.⁴ Appointed lady-in-waiting to Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), second wife of the French king Francis I (1494–1547), Louise de Montmorency had been widowed by 1522, and she herself died in 1547. The sitter's attire, however, points to the prevalent fashion of the mid-sixteenth century, and she looks quite young in the portrait; thus, the disparity between the style of dress and Louise de Montmorency's relative age when a widow—between 26 and 50 years of age—also casts doubt on her identification as the subject of the painting.

3 In 1962, Dana Bentley-Cranch, a scholar of Renaissance portraiture in England and France, noted the possible resemblance of this sitter to one in a painting depicting a widow in the collection at Versailles (fig. 1).⁵ In fact, the facial features do appear comparable, although the dress, which would have been a key element in the copying of painted portraits based on a common model, differs. A later inscription on the back of that painting in Versailles identifies the sitter as Philippe de Montespedon (about 1505–1578), alongside a date of 1548, raised its own issues, as the identification remained conjectural.⁶ A portrait drawing from the workshop of François Clouet (before 1522–1572) of Philippe de Montespedon, who became *princesse de La Roche-sur-Yon* (princess of La Roche-sur-Yon) upon her marriage to Charles de Bourbon-Montpensier (1515–1565), and who from 1564 onward served as a lady-in-waiting to Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589), is preserved at Chantilly. It bears a contemporary inscription, thus supporting it being a likeness of Philippe de Montespedon, but bears little resemblance with either the Versailles or the Indianapolis painting (fig. 2).⁷ The same is the case for the sixteenth-century drawing preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris that identifies the sitter as "Madame de Chastillon," which was the main point for comparison for Anne Dubois de Groër.⁸ Again, the facial features recorded in that drawing correspond neither with the features of the sitter in Versailles nor with the likeness of the sitter in the Clowes painting. The identity of the woman, thus, remains unknown, as there is no secured sixteenth-century portrait of a "Madame de Châtillon."



Figure 1: Corneille de Lyon (Netherlandish, active in France, 1500/1510–1575), *Portrait of a Woman* [old title: *Philippine de Montespedon, princesse de la Roche-sur-Yon (?–1578)*], about 16th century, oil on board, 16 × 13.2 cm. Chateaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France, MV3189. Photo: Christophe Fouin. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2: Workshop of François Clouet (French, before 1522–1572), *Philippine de Montespedon, princesse de La Roche-Sur-Yon (1505–1578)*, 1555, red and black chalk on paper, 13-13/16 × 9-1/16 in. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France, MN59; B253. Photo: René-Gabriel Ojéda. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

4 Attributed to Corneille de Lyon by the art historians Max J. Friedländer, in 1949, and Dubois de Groër, who included it in her 1996 catalogue raisonné of the artist's works, the portrait corresponds in its small scale, pale green background, and head to torso proportions with the tradition established by Corneille, who hailed from The Hague but who had settled in Lyons in southeastern France by about 1533.⁹ There he painted portraits of the French nobility before joining the court of the *dauphin* Henry (later to become Henry II). In 1547, Henry succeeded to the throne, at which time Corneille was made the royal court painter, a position he held until his death in 1575.¹⁰

5 The oldest portrait firmly attributable to the artist is the likeness of Pierre Aymeric, now in the Louvre, Paris. An annotation on the back of the panel, written by Aymeric himself, identifies the artist as Corneille de La Haye, painter to Eleanor, queen of France, and records the date of its completion as 11 April 1534.¹¹ The 1962 discovery of this painting with its indelible attribution has allowed for a reassessment of the entire production of the artist in subsequent decades. Purchased at auction by the Louvre in 1976, the portrait captures the quintessence of Corneille de Lyon's style: its warm green background revealing indications of a shadow, cast as if by the frame; its modeling of the sitter's features with thin, short brushstrokes; facial contours painted in dark color onto the light undertone of the skin; and the sitter's hair painted with individual strokes and blended into the color of the face. The loose brushwork has led scholars to speculate that Corneille

de Lyon painted directly on the prepared panel without the assistance of preparatory drawings.¹² Loose and dynamic brushwork and handling of the paint strongly shape the earliest known works that can be attributed to Corneille, although Dubois de Groër, the author of the only monograph on the painter, suggests that his later portrait production is characterized by a reduction of these features.¹³ Toward the end of his career, in the 1560s and 1570s, his portraits evidence softer modeling with smoother brushwork and blending of colors to create a more even surface without losing the decisive contours that are sketched with a darker color. The relationship between the size of the head and the reduced size of the half-length torso occurs frequently in Corneille de Lyon's later work, of which the *Portrait of a Man with a Glove* in the IMA's collection is a good example (fig. 3).¹⁴



Figure 3: Corneille de Lyon (Netherlandish, active in France, 1500/1510–1575), *Portrait of a Man with a Glove*, about 1540, oil on panel, 8 × 6-1/2 in. (panel), 17-1/8 × 18 in. (framed). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Art Association of Indianapolis in memory of Daniel W. and Elizabeth C. Marmon, 43.109.

6 In this portrait of an unknown woman, infrared reflectography has revealed a very summary underdrawing, most likely applied on a dry surface (fig. 4). The thin, sketchy lines are continuous and were made with a carbon-containing dry material such as charcoal or black chalk. The underdrawing for the preparation of this portrait is noticeably detailed, and although summarily executed, it is characterized by long, fluid, and continuous lines, reinforced along the facial contours of the averted cheek and the tip of the nose, for example, as well as along the length of the frilled collar. The artist also corrected the position of the sitter's right shoulder, which strongly indicates that the underdrawing was executed freehand without the help of mechanical methods of transfer, such as tracing. These lines served as a guide to determine outer contours and the sitter's most important facial features, but some details, such as the pattern on the white sleeves, were executed entirely in paint.



Figure 4: Infrared reflectogram. Corneille de Lyon, *Portrait of a Woman*, about 1560–1565, oil on wood panel, 6-3/4 × 5-13/16 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, The Clowes Collection, 2014.84.

7 With the exception of the sitter's face, which was prepared with a lead white ground visible in the X-ray, paint was applied in very thin layers and with a small brush, allowing the artist to create a surface of great variety. The light green background becomes darker toward the edges, suggesting a shadow. These dark areas along the left and upper edges indicate a shadow cast

by the painting's frame, as if the painter anticipated a light falling onto the sitter's face from the upper left.¹⁵ Dubois de Groër suggested that this particularity in Corneille's work may have been related with the source of light within the painter's workshop, thus suggesting that it was painted after the model.¹⁶ Since no extant drawings attributed to Corneille survive, it is difficult to argue whether the orientation and light source relate to the painting process itself or rather a particular taste and distinct feature in the representation of small-scale portraiture. The shimmering reflections on the sitter's belt contain actual gold particles mixed with a binding medium so that they could be applied with a small brush. Although the sleeves of the dress may have been altered during cleaning and [restoration](#) before the painting entered the Clowes Collection, a pattern running vertically along their length suggests that the chemise may have been embroidered silk or lace.¹⁷ Such details on the sleeves, painted in a [wet-in-wet](#) technique with lead white, effectively capture the delicacy of the fabric.

8 Corneille granted visitors and potential clients access to his workshop and gallery, and documentation exists demonstrating that dignitaries such as the Venetian ambassador and the queen mother Catherine de' Medici visited him there and admired his paintings.¹⁸ As he is known to have painted only portraits, it is probable that the models for the portraits of his sitters remained in his possession and continued to be used within his workshop, giving him the liberty to reproduce them on a client's demand or to sell them on the open market.¹⁹

9 The exquisite frame, made of wood and colored marble, is contemporary with the painting and may be original to the portrait (fig. 5). Embellished with precious stones, in colors ranging from dark yellow to pinkish red, the frame resembles a small tabernacle, a miniature architectural construction composed of a pedestal, an architrave carried on two columns, and a broken pediment, all decorated with colored marble intarsia. Gilt tendril patterns, also common in contemporary bookbinding, further decorate the square profile frame surrounding the portrait. This impressive tabernacle-style frame more than doubles the size of the object and threatens to overpower the intimate miniature portrait with its lively, almost sketchy brushwork. To the modern eye, this choice to combine a small-scale lightly colored portrait with a representative architectural framing may seem peculiar, but it likely added market value: the precious frame not only augmented the price of the portrait but also linked it to the courtly culture of the French nobility.²⁰ Moreover, it concurs with a taste for Renaissance forms that were quickly adopted in the humanist milieu of Lyon, a highly important commercial and cultural center during the Italian wars in the first half of the sixteenth century.



Figure 5: Frame for *Portrait of a Woman*, about 1560–1565, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, The Clowes Collection, 2014.84.

Author

[Christine Seidel](#)

Provenance

Possibly Lord Boston, Hedsor, Buckinghamshire, England.²¹

Probably (David M. Koetser, London), about 1945.²²

Mary Charlotte Hunter (1881–1971), near Reading, by 1949;²³

Possibly purchased by (John Mitchell, London).²⁴

(David M. Koetser, New York and London);²⁵

(Ivan Podgoursky (1901–1962), New York), by 1955.²⁶

(John H. Folman, Bronxville, NY);

G.H.A. Clowes, Indianapolis in 1957;²⁷

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1958–2009, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (C10026);

Given to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2014.

Exhibitions

The Museum Association of Midwestern University, Gallery of the Museum, Wichita Falls, TX, 1955, *Collection of Count Ivan N. Podgoursky, New York*, no. 9;

John Herron Art Museum, 1959, *Paintings from the Collection of George Henry Alexander Clowes: A Memorial Exhibition*, no. 18;

Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, 1963, *Northern European Painting: The Clowes Fund Collection*, no. 5.

Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, 2019, *Life and Legacy: Portraits from the Clowes Collection as Portrait of a Woman called "Madame de Châtillon"*;

Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou, China; Hunan Museum, Changsha, China; Chengdu Museum, 2020–2021, *Rembrandt to Monet: 500 Years of European Painting as Portrait of a Woman called "Madame de Châtillon."*

References

Paintings from the Collection of George Henry Alexander Clowes: A Memorial Exhibition, exh. cat. (Indianapolis: John Herron Art Museum, 1959), no. 18 (reproduced);

Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968);

A. Ian Fraser, *A Catalogue of the Clowes Collection* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973), 148–149 (reproduced);

Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de la Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 220, no. 135 (reproduced);

Kjell M. Wangensteen et al., *Rembrandt to Monet: 500 Years of European Painting* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing, 2020), 114–115 (reproduced).

Kjell M. Wangensteen, et al. *Floating Lights and Shadows: 500 Years of European Painting* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing, 2020), 112–113 (reproduced).

Technical Notes and Condition

The support is constructed from a single panel, with the wood grain running horizontally. The panel was thinned to about 0.5 cm and edge strips added to all four sides, most likely when the cradle was added. The edges, however, do not appear to have been trimmed. The paint is applied in small brushstrokes and touches over a thin ground. Infrared reflectography reveals slight underdrawing applied in a dry material. Despite the underdrawing, no pentimenti are discernible.

The painting is in stable condition and structurally sound, despite previous damage. Extensive wormhole channeling throughout the panel is present but concentrated in the upper part and visible with X-radiography. Additionally, radiant stress cracks have developed along the top edges, probably caused when the panel was thinned and a second, cradled panel added.

Notes

1. See André Blum, "Le costume en France au temps des Valois (1515–1590)," in James Laver, ed., *Le costume des Tudor à Louis XIII* (Paris: Horizons de France), 1950, 63–124, and, on sixteenth-century dress in general, Jane Ashelford, *A Visual History of Costume: The Sixteenth Century* (London: Batsford), 1983.
2. *Catalogue of Old Pictures: The Property of The Hon. Mrs. Leith-Hay, the Property of Miss Mary Charlotte Hunter of Beech Hill House, near Reading...*, sale cat., Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 29 April 1949, lot no. 25.
3. Emile-V. Telle, ed., *La Vie de Messire Gaspar de Coligny Admiral de France, Introduction, Fac-similé de l'édition Elzévier (1643): Notes—Commentaires—Appendices* (Geneva: Droz, 1987), 109–114.
4. See Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968).
5. Letter from Dana Bentley-Cranch to Wilbur Peat, 20 June 1962, File C10026, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.
6. Claire Constans, *Les peintures: Musée National du Château de Versailles* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995), 1:179, no. 999 (MV 3189).
7. Raoul de Broglie, "Les Clouet de Chantilly, catalogue illustré," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 77 (1971): 313, no. 253 (MN59); and, more recently, Alexandra Zvereva, *Les Clouet de Catherine de Médicis: Chefs-d'œuvre graphiques du musée Condé*, exh. cat. (Paris: Somogy éditions d'art/Chantilly: Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly, 2002), no. 83.
8. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Département des Estampes et photographie, Reserve NA-22 (6)-BTE, inscribed, in red, "Madame de Chastillon" by a later hand. It also carries the inscription: "Isabel Hauteville, marié au Cardinal de Bouillon, veuve en 1571"; see Jean Adhémar, "Les portraits dessinés du XVIe siècle au Cabinet des Estampes, première partie," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 82 (1973), 121–198, at 146–147, no. 158, and Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 220, no. 135.
9. On the life of Corneille de Lyon, see Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), especially 15–35.
10. Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996). See also Dana Bentley-Cranch, *The Renaissance Portrait in France and England: A Comparative Study* (Paris: Champion, 2004). On Corneille's clients and his period based in Lyons, see Philippe Bordes, "Les portraits de Corneille de Lyon: Art de cour ou projet démocratique?" in Frédéric Elsig, ed., *Peindre à Lyon au XVI^e siècle* (Milan: Silvana editorial, 2014), 157–169. See also Cécile Scaillièrez, "Des petits portraits au naturel, qu'on nomme cornilla," in Ludmila Virassamynäiken, ed., *Arts et Humanisme: Lyon Renaissance* (Lyon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, and Paris: Somogy, 2015), 144–153.
11. The inscription on the back of the Louvre panel reads "Pierre Aymeric natif de Saint Fleur demeurant à Lyon a laige de vingt et six ans ou environ a este pourtraict audit Lyon par Corneille de la Haye em Flandres, painctre de la Roynne Helienor Roynne de France et a este paracheve le Xle jour davril mil VcXXXVIII apres Pasques escript et signe de la main dudict Aymeric, lan et jour susdicts, P. Aymeric"; it is reproduced and transcribed in Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 105, no. 1.
12. Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 81.
13. See Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 49–52.
14. Although this author does not share Dubois de Groër's judgment in calling the arms "ridiculously short," the reduced size of the body in relation to the head is a common feature of portraits showing half-length or three-quarter-length figures; see Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 193–194, no. 99.
15. The same features can be seen in numerous paintings attributed to Corneille de Lyon, including figure 3.
16. See Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 50.
17. Mark Roskill noted that Dana Bentley-Cranch referred him to a Witt Library, London, photograph, taken prior to 1949, revealing more details in the sleeves; see Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968).

18. The Venetian ambassador, Giovanni Capello, noted in his diary in 1551 that he visited "an excellent painter who had shown him beautiful paintings of members of the entire court of France"; see Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon (1500/1510–1575)* (Paris: Arthena, 1996), 39, 98n1.
19. As suggested by Philippe Bordes, "Les portraits de Corneille de Lyon: Arts de cour ou projet démocratique?" in Frédéric Elsig, ed., *Peindre à Lyon au XVI^e siècle* (Milan: Silvana editoriale, 2014), 157.
20. For this assessment, see Philippe Bordes, "Les portraits de Corneille de Lyon: Arts de cour ou projet démocratique?" in Frédéric Elsig, ed., *Peindre à Lyon au XVI^e siècle* (Milan: Silvana editoriale, 2014), 159.
21. This information is recorded in the catalogue raisonné section in Anne Dubois de Groër, *Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon*, Paris, 1996, no. 135 (ill.) and repeated in earlier IMA publications, however it may be in error. Although Lord Boston (1860–1941) did own a female portrait by Corneille de Lyon, sold at Christie's, London, *Catalogue of Pictures by Old Masters, the Property of the Right Hon. The Late Lord Boston, formerly at Hedsor, Bucks....*, 6 March 1942, lot no. 57, based on the auction catalogue description it not this painting, but de Groër, no. 142 (ill.).
22. Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968), who states that Koetser sold it to an unknown buyer in 1945.
23. *Catalogue of Old Pictures...the property of Miss Mary Charlotte Hunter of Beech Hill House, near Reading....*, sale cat., Christie's, London, 29 April 1949, lot no. 25.
24. Handwritten annotation in Mark Roskill, "Clowes Collection Catalogue" (unpublished typed manuscript, IMA Clowes Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN, 1968).
25. Letter from Koetser to IMA, 15 June 1959, noting that he sold the painting to Podgoursky, in File 2014.84 (CI0026), Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields. Koetser also noted that he purchased the painting in London but could not recall the specific source. For information on Podgoursky, see his obituary in the *New York Times*, 23 April 1962.
26. The painting was included in an exhibition at The Museum Association of Midwestern University, Gallery of the Museum, Wichita Falls, TX, *Collection of Count Ivan N. Podgoursky, New York, 29 September–6 October, 1955*, no. 9.
27. Bill of sale, 25 September 1957, File 2014.84 (CI0026), Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.