

Portrait of Alessandro Farnese
Anthonis Mor, Flemish, c.1512-c.1576
1561, Oil on canvas, 71 1/8 x 38 7/8 inches
The Algor Meadows Collection, Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University,
Dallas, Texas

About the Artist

Anthonis Mor's *Portrait of Alessandro Farnese* is one of the few non-Spanish paintings in the Meadows Museum. Antonio Moro is the artist's Spanish name. His Flemish name is Anthonis Mor van Dashorst, and his English name is Sir Anthony More. He was born in the Netherlands in 1519 and became a master member of the Antwerp guild at the age of 28. In 1549, he became court painter in Brussels.

During the next 20 years Mor traveled to many of the courts of Europe--Lisbon, London, Madrid, and Rome--and became the leading portrait painter of his day. He did paintings for many rulers, but his most important patron was Philip II of Spain. His style of painting, which is dignified and formal with much attention to detail, was very well suited to the rigid etiquette and ceremony of the Spanish court.

About the Art

The details of Alessandro Farnese's clothing, his stance, and his expression give the viewer not only a picture of an actual person, but also tell us much about what was important to people at this time and in this place. The viewer sees a future soldier wearing his sword and half-armor. The elaborate detail and rich fabrics of his costume indicate that he is an important member of the court. The viewer sees in the expression on his face a confident, calm young man, who, despite his youth, is very much in control.

History tells us that Alessandro Farnese later became a famous military hero and served as the governor of the Spanish Netherlands (now Belgium) for twenty-one years. His mother, the half-sister of Philip II, King of Spain, had served in that position before him.

With other royal heirs, Allessandro was educated as a prince and trained to be an important military leader. Alessandro was sent to the University of Alcalá de Henares, now the University of Madrid, along with the king's son.

Additional Information

As we look at art history, we learn about questions and procedures with which historians are concerned. One of the questions that must often be considered is that of attribution. Attribution refers to the where, when, why and by whom a work is made.

Questions concerning who painted the Portrait of Alessandro Farnese have arisen, and three artists at different times have been credited with being the author of the work. One

of the artists, whom historians believed for a time had done the portrait, was Willem Key, an artist known to have been employed by Alessandro Farnese's mother.

Another person thought to have been the artist is Alonso Sanchez-Coello, a portrait painter for Philip II and a student of Anthonis Mor. In September, 1991, Dr. William B. Jordan, a former director of the Meadows Museum, conferred with other experts who agreed that the *Portrait of Alessandro Farnese* should be attributed to Anthonis Mor. Their decision was made after carefully comparing this painting to other paintings known to have been done by both Sanchez-Coello and Mor. Side by side comparisons of actual works of art reveal unique aspects of artists' styles that cannot always be seen in reproductions. For this reason, large retrospective exhibitions of an artist's work can sometimes result in re-attributions.

Attribution is just one of many determinations that museum directors and curators must make about the art works in their collections.

About the Time and Place

Ferdinand and Isabella sent Christopher Columbus on the voyage that would bring him to the Americas in 1492. During the next 50 years, Spanish conquistadors searched for gold in the New World and claimed land for Spain. By 1550, Spain controlled Mexico, Central America, most of the West Indies, much of western South America and part of what is now the southwestern United States. Gold, silver, and other riches found in the new colonies brought great wealth to Spain. Territories were also being seized in Europe and North Africa, and Spain became the most powerful nation in Europe during this period of expansion and exploration.

The Spanish Empire reached its height during the reign of Philip II, the king of Spain at the time the *Portrait of Alessandro Farnese* was painted. During Philip's rule, Spain enjoyed a golden age of cultural accomplishment. Writers, philosophers and artists created works of great importance. Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*, and El Greco and Diego Velazquez painted many of their important works.