

**Angelica Kauffmann, Portrait of Alexander Gordon, 4th Duke of Gordon, c. 1770, oil on canvas, 54 x 45.2 cm, not signed, lined, some areas of retouching, with a beautiful frame of the 19th century (70.7 x 63.1 cm). Verso inscribed on the frame „449/53“, „R. Menas [?]“, „Ehrmann“ and on an old label „Nr 7 Engliches [sic] Porträt eines jungen Mannes“.**

Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807) is one of the few exceptions of female artists who do not need to be rediscovered. She was already a superstar during her lifetime and has remained highly significant to this day. She was an extremely successful painter throughout Europe, was one of the founding members of the Royal Academy in London and was admired by numerous men such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).

Beyond this, however, only a few women were able to achieve the status of their male colleagues as artists before the 20th century – for example Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1654) in the Baroque period and the Venetian Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757) in the first half of the 18th century. For a long time, women were denied access to the academies, sometimes having to trade under the name of their fathers, brothers or husbands, and were systematically consigned to oblivion.

Kauffmann's painting, which was only discovered a few years ago, shows Alexander Gordon, 4th Duke of Gordon (1743–1827) as a bust portrait with a vermilion cloak and Van Dyck lace collar. It is closely related to a portrait of Gordon from the Kauffmann family, which is now in a Swiss private collection (see Baumgärtel 2018/19), and the official portrait in the National Galleries of Scotland in Edinburgh. The family was one of the most influential in Scotland and Great Britain. Kauffmann had met the young duke on his Grand Tour in Italy and later painted him in London, probably in the early 1770s.

Gordon was not only considered as one of Britain's best matches financially at the time and admired by many – including the Scottish national poet Robert Burns (1759–1796) – but was also praised as one of the most goodlooking men of his time. With his regiment of Gordon Highlanders, he became an important military figure, he wrote some Scottish songs that are still sung today and he held prestigious titles such as *Keeper of the Great Seal Scotland* or *Cock of the North*. His later marriage to Jane Maxwell produced seven children, but was legendarily unhappy. He had countless scandalous affairs, which led to Jane's depression, a subsequent divorce and her rather early death. Her life story served as the basis for a whole series of pop-cultural adaptations.

The newly discovered portrait of Alexander Gordon impressively illustrates Angelika Kauffmann's working process. It is a *modello*, i.e. the first version of a portrait commission created in the artist's studio. More immediate, untamed and lifelike than the later, more official versions, we as viewers thus come very close to the Gordon portrayed. In the *modello*, the person to be portrayed is only given simple clothing, as Kauffmann is primarily concerned with the precise capture of facial features and character traits. The subsequently executed, more official, more mannered version of the Gordon portrait remained in Kauffmann's family for another century and is now in a Swiss private collection. Finally, the highly official, magnificent, signed and dated (1774) state portrait of Gordon, the last version, can be seen in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh.

I would like to thank Dr. Bettina Baumgärtel, editor of the catalog raisonné of Angelika Kauffmann and director of the Angelika Kauffmann Research Project (<https://www.angelika-kauffmann.de/>), for her help in identifying the sitter and confirming the attribution to Angelika Kauffmann based on personal examination of the painting in the original.

### **Provenance**

German Private Collection

Kunstauktion Scheublein, Auktion 54, Lot 523 (as "England (18. Jh.)"), 24.9.2021, Munich

Southern German Private Collection