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EST. 1817

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(**Charles WAUTIER** (Mons, 1609 - Brussels, 1703) and
Michaelina WAUTIER (Mons, 1617 - Brussels, 1689)

The Calling of Saint Matthew

Signed (upper right): 'C. Wautier fecit'

Oil on canvas

48 ³/₈ x 57 ⁵/₈ (123 x 146.5 cm)

Painted *circa* 1650-1660



Provenance

Probably Sir William Barker, 4th Bt (*d.* 1818), of Bocking Hall Essex and Kilcooley Abbey, Co. Tipperary, Ireland;

By inheritance to his nephew, Chambré Brabazon Ponsonby-Barker (1763–1834), Kilcooley Abbey;
His son, William Ponsonby-Barker (1795–1877);

By inheritance to his nephew, Captain Thomas Brabazon Ponsonby (1878–1946);

Thence by descent, at Kilcooley Abbey until before 2004.

Private collection, England, until 2018.

Literature

J. Sanzsalazar in K. van der Stighelen, *Michaelina Wautier 1604–1689. Glorifying a Forgotten Talent*, exh. cat., Kontich 2018, pp. 77 and 83, n. 59 (as 'Charles Wautier');

P.-Y. Kairis in K. van der Stighelen, *Michaelina Wautier 1604–1689. Glorifying a Forgotten Talent*, exh. cat., Kontich 2018, pp. 262 and 265, under no. 25, reproduced p. 265, fig. D (as 'Charles Wautier, 1650s').

Exhibited

Osterley Park and House, London, on loan until October 2018 (inv. NT 77123).

This painting, signed by Charles Wautier, is likely to be one of several works that he painted in collaboration with his sister Michaelina – until recently a 'forgotten talent' and the subject of a landmark exhibition in 2018.¹ The present work is discussed by Pierre-Yves Kairis in the catalogue of that exhibition in the context of another larger canvas depicting *Christ among the Doctors* (with Michel Ceuterick) (fig. 1) in which he suggests convincingly that Michaelina Wautier painted the head of the youthful Christ and Charles Wautier executed the rest.² What is equally apparent in *The Calling of Saint Matthew* is the

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different – and arguably more accomplished – handling of the figure of Christ's youthful attendant, which suggests that it too was painted in collaboration with his sister. Charles and Michaelina shared a house and presumably a studio in Brussels from 1638 or shortly afterwards until her death, and collaboration between them must have been common.



Fig. 1: Charles Wautier, *Christ among the Doctors*, private collection.

As Kairis discusses in his catalogue entry on *Christ among the Doctors* both it and the present painting are strongly lit from one side. In this respect, in their innate sense of drama, and in the placement of Christ off-centre, both compositions are Caravaggesque in the Antwerp tradition of artists such as Theodoor Rombouts, to whom the unsigned *Christ among the Doctors* was formerly attributed. The composition of *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, framed by the edge of the table, echoes that of *Christ among the Doctors* before it was altered and enlarged, as shown in X-radiography.³ There are similarities also in the choice of model for the figure of the boy Jesus among the Doctors and for the young assistant in the *Calling*: although the latter looks several years older, they share similar facial traits besides their long fair centre-parted hair pushed back from their face. Kairis' hypothesis that the same model posed for both pictures has

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implications for the chronology of Charles' as well as Michaelina's work. Kairis dates both works to the 1650s. Indeed the softly modelled sculptural handling of the central head in the present picture recalls what is perhaps Michaelina's best-known painting, the *Two Girls as Saints Agnes and Dorothy* exhibited in Antwerp, and most likely dating from the end of the 1650s (fig. 2).⁴



Fig. 2: Michaelina Wautier, *Two Girls as Saints Agnes and Dorothy*, Antwerp, Museum voor Schone Kunsten.

Charles Wautier painted another version of this composition in a work now in the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse.⁵ The handling is coarser and the application of paint thicker, but more importantly, it is clearly all the work of one hand. The Toulouse painting, as Jahel Sanzsalazar has observed, is almost certainly a replica of the present work, and is probably the *Calling of Saint Matthew* that belonged to Don Antonio Messia de Tovar, Count of Molina, and recorded in his inventory of 1675 as *Copia de botiers*

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('copy of Wautier').⁶ Its valuation – 550 *ducados* – is drastically lower than that of another work by Wautier (*Botiers*), a lost *Death of Abel*, assessed at 3,300 *ducados*, but as Sanzsalazar suggests, 'copy' could have referred to an autograph replica. The composition was evidently popular, since Sanzsalazar records four further copies, given variously to Theodoor Rombouts and Jacob van Oost.⁷

The work of Michaelina Wautier is, in the words of Christopher Brown, 'a remarkable rediscovery'. As Ben van Beneden writes in the prologue to the exhibition catalogue, 'There can be no doubt that Michaelina Wautier (1604–1689) was among the great female artists of the seventeenth century, along with Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652/3) and Judith Leyster (1609–1660)'. As well as a manifesto for Michaelina's claim to genius – a claim that it amply demonstrated – the exhibition showcases her hitherto better-known brother Charles, and the catalogue yields a wealth of information about their lives, as well as their work. Neither sibling married, and along with their brothers maintained close contacts with the courts in Brussels and Madrid, and their paintings permeated collections in Northern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula in their own time. Michaelina's talent was particularly appreciated by the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm. Both artists' paintings are proof, if any were needed, that the towering figure of Rubens did not exert an overarching influence on all of Flemish history painting or portraiture in Flanders, and that artists such as the Wautiers were receptive to the styles of other painters, both local and far afield.⁸

In 1630 Kilcooley Abbey, originally a Cistercian foundation dating from the late twelfth century, was granted with its lands to Sir Jerome Alexander, and passed by marriage to the Barker family of Bocking, Essex. Though partly ruined, parts of the Abbey remained habitable, and were turned into a house around 1700. Sir William Barker, 4th and last Baronet, reorganized and improved the Kilcooley estate, reclaiming undeveloped lands, and although he stayed out of politics, he mustered two companies of volunteers to defend Ireland against the French during the American Revolution. Having landscaped the estate with imported English elms for the forests, and a five acre lake stocked with fish and wildfowl from Canada and Greenland, he built a substantial Palladian house in the Kilcooley demesne in the 1790s. The architect is unknown, and the original form of the house unclear, since it was remodelled extensively following a fire in the 1840s, but it included a picture gallery. He commissioned portraits of himself and his wife from Gilbert Stuart, who painted him seated half-length holding plans of his house, with the semi-ruined Abbey in the background, and his wife, Catherine Lane Barker in the bow-fronted dining room facing the lake (the room to which her husband points on the plan), before the Gothic boathouse he had erected at

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the far side of his lake.⁹ Stuart also painted other members of the family. It is likely that Sir William acquired the present painting for Kilcooley: at any rate none of his ancestors or descendants are known to have been collectors. The reverse of the frame bears the label of William Wright, Carver and Gilder of 22 Wardour Street.

This is most likely William Thrale Wright ([P]1801–1862) who occupied the premises at 22 Wardour St, Soho, from 1827 or possibly before until 1850.¹⁰ The label claims that Wright was employed by Princess Sophia Matilda of Gloucester (1777–1848), great-granddaughter of King George II and niece of King George III. The frame may have been supplied following the 1840 fire at Kilcooley.

1 *Michaelina Wautier 1604–1689. Glorifying a Forgotten Talent*, exhibition organised by the Rubenshuis and held at the Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp, 1 June – 2 September 2018.

2 Oil on canvas, 166.5 x 249.5 cm.; see Kairis in Van der Stighelen 2018, pp. 262–65, no. 25, reproduced.

3 Van der Stighelen 2018, reproduced p. 263, fig. A.

4 Antwerp, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, inv. 599; see Van der Stighelen 2018, pp. 194–99, no. 9, reproduced.

5 Inv. D.1952.4; oil on canvas, 122 x 152 cm.; see Sanzsalazar in Van der Stighelen 2018, pp. 77 and 83, n. 58, reproduced p. 79, fig. 20.

6 Sanzsalazar in Van der Stighelen 2018, pp. 77 and 83, n. 57.

7 Sanzsalazar in Van der Stighelen 2018, p. 83, n. 60. 8 In Van der Stighelen 2018, p. 9.

8 Christopher Brown remarks how little of Michaelina Wautier's work reflects the influence of Rubens in his review of the exhibition: C. Brown, 'Michaelina Wautier: Baroque's Leading Lady', *The Burlington Magazine*, 160, August 2018, p. 672.

9 C. Rebora Barratt, in C. Rebora Barratt and E.G. Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, exh. cat., New Haven and London 2004, pp. 93–96, nos 24 and 25, both reproduced.

10 See British picture framemakers, 1650–1900 on the National Portrait Gallery website:
www.npg.org.uk/research/conservation/directory-of-british-framemakers