

**Jan van Beers, *Portrait of Jean-Philippe Worth seated by a Window***  
Lier, Belgium 1852 – 1927 Fay-aux-Loges, France

oil on panel

12 by 14 inches (30.5 by 35.5 cm)

signed, inscribed and dated lower center: '*JAN VAN BEERS / SOUVENIR AFFECTUEUX A MA PETITE AMIE ANDREE WORTH / SURESNES 13 ET 14 JUILLET 1884*'

provenance: Andrée-Caroline Worth, Paris;  
Stefanie Maison, London;  
Private collection, London until 2021

note: Arriving in Paris in 1846, at the age of twenty, Charles Frederick Worth (Fig. 1) would build the most prominent and successful fashion house of the century. The House of Worth defined 19<sup>th</sup> Century style and Worth himself was soon recognized as “the father of haute couture.” With his talent for design and promotion, Charles Frederick Worth built his design house (Fig. 2) into a huge business during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, His garments were immensely popular among wealthy American patrons, as well as European royalty and aristocrats. Many clients traveled to Paris to purchase entire wardrobes from the House of Worth.

Charles Worth died in 1895 and his two sons, Gaston-Lucien (1853-1924) and Jean-Philippe (1856-1926), took over their father’s business and succeeded in maintaining his high standards. Jean-Philippe’s designs in particular followed his father’s aesthetic, with his use of dramatic fabrics and lavish trimmings. The house flourished during the sons’ tenure and into the 1920s. The great fashion dynasty finally came to an end in 1952 when Charles Frederick Worth’s great-grandson, Jean-Charles (1881-1962), retired from the family business.

The present portrait depicts Jean-Philippe Worth (Fig. 3). Painted at Suresnes on July 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 1884, it was completed eleven days before the sitter’s 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, and dedicated by the artist to Andrée-Caroline Worth, Jean-Philippe’s two-and-a-half-year-old daughter (Fig. 4). The sweet dedication, *Souvenir affectueux a ma petite amie Andrée Worth* is enough to indicate that Jan de Beers was a close friend of the Worth family. He also was their neighbor, having a house in Suresnes, a fashionable suburb of Paris near the Bois de Boulogne. By this time Charles Frederick Worth had built a monumental chateau at Suresnes, where it seems that both sons also made their home. This enormous and to all accounts unusually bizarre structure was raised by Jean-Philippe after the death of his mother Marie Worth in 1898, to be replaced by a large, but less ostentatious home for Jean-Philippe’s own family.

Born on July 25th 1856, Jean-Philippe started to draw dresses when he was very young, probably at the age of about 10. The milieu of fashion design came as naturally to him as learning how to walk and talk. Jean-Philippe wrote in his memoir, “I should undoubtedly have studied to be a painter, had I not loved my father so. But the thought that I might do other than follow in his footsteps never occurred to me.” At the age of 14, Jean-Philippe met the artist Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, who was sometimes a guest at the Worth dinner table. During the Franco-Prussian War, the teenager Jean-Philippe would go to the great painter’s studio every Sunday, at his mother’s insistence, to learn from him. Corot taught the youth to be honest in his art: “My dear friend, be conscientious. You should paint with your heart, with your soul. Your emotions and your artistic conscience should take precedence over your brain and your eyes.” Charles Frederick was not displeased with his son’s drawings, but neither was he sufficiently impressed to encourage

him to study fine art. Jean-Philippe completed part of his studies at the École Monge, later to become the highly reputed Lycée Carnot. After leaving school John-Philippe did his military service, returning home in October 1875. He immediately took up his post at the couture house thus embarking on a life-long career with the House of Worth.

Jean-Philippe's daughter, Andrée-Caroline, was born on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1881. Her mother, Alice Paulet, was a house model at Worth who became estranged from the family and the child was raised in Suresnes by her father and her grandparents. François Cartier was a close friend and business associate of the Worth family and his grandson, Louis Cartier, married Andrée-Caroline in 1898 (Fig. 5). They were later divorced. Andrée-Caroline died in Paris in 1939.

Jan van beers (Fig. 6) was predestined for an artistic career. He grew up in a particularly cultured an artistic milieu - his father being a famous poet, befriended Belgian celebrities such as the famous composer Peter Benoit (1834-1901) and the internationally celebrated painter Barron Henri Leys (1815-1869). Jan had an exceptional talent for drawing and painting which showed itself at an early age. Studying later at the renowned Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Van Beers quickly became the leader of a group of ambitious young artists known as the "Van Beers *clique*", including, besides Van Beers, talented and promising young artists such as Piet Verhaert (1852-1908), Alexander Struys (1852-1941) and Jeff Lambeaux (1852-1908). Following what with hindsight almost seems a proto-Dada strategy, their gang would, however, not build its reputation so much on the artistic potential of its members as on their mischief and eccentricities. One contemporary recounted how the group of friends would ramble through town dressed in historic costumes, Van Beers, up front as Sir Anthony van Dyck (Fig. 7) - Van Beers later would claim to be an actual descendant of Van Dyck. The young Van Beers often also strolled through Antwerp in a low-cut woman's dress. It seems that these young artists did not take the art world too seriously and often mocked its self-important inhabitants. This can be illustrated by the anecdote from Van Beers' early Paris period. When receiving a possible client in the studio that Van Beers shared with some other artists, the entire group dressed up as women and welcomed the poor guest with an incomprehensible jabber. When Van Beers and his friends kept babbling madly there was nothing their visitor could do but leave and return later. Apparently, even before Van Beers found himself in the center of a storm that would sweep through the Belgian art scene, his relationship with the other actors on that scene was at best eccentric and unstable.

Notwithstanding this inclination to mockery and a questionable sense of humor, Van Beers moved to Paris in pursuit of fame and success. While still living and working in Antwerp, the painter often had been portrayed as one of Antwerp's most gifted and promising talents. Yet the actual reception of his work was mixed: critics recognized Van Beers superior technical skills, but they rejected the often eccentric and mannered nature of his compositions. Van Beers, more ambitious than any other artist of his generation, tried everything to turn the tide. He attempted every genre and every subject, change styles as he changed clothes, painted huge historical pieces, landscapes and smallish genre pictures all in the same period. However, the critics complained that Van Beers had not yet found his proper artistic identity. Disappointed, Van Beers move to Paris. His historical pieces did not, however, received the critical acclaim that he felt they deserved in this city either. Thus, around 1879, the artist decided to play his final trick, one that would make him a rich and famous figure. Van Beers abandoned his historical compositions and started painting small sometimes even tiny pictures. These new works were delicately brushed, hyper realistic in detail, and extremely finished. Success was almost immediate. The painter, satisfied with the applause he was finally receiving, started producing and exhibiting more of these wonderful miniatures.

By 1880, it seemed that Van Beers finally had found the artistic and commercial niche he had been seeking and was on his way to the top of his profession. Then, at the Brussels Salon of 1881, the artist became the center of a scandal that rocked the Belgian art world and catapulted him into instant celebrity, or perhaps, notoriety. Van Beers exhibited two works at this Salon. Both were painted in his new hyper realistic miniature style, but one of these paintings ran afoul of the critics who suspected it of being a *photo-peinture* - a painting created over a photograph. The *Review de*

*l'Art Moderne* defended Van Beers, implying that the critics and other artists were jealous of his commercial success. Van Beers suggested that experts could scrape off the paint to determine the truth of the allegations. An investigation followed, and eventually Van Beers started legal proceedings. *L'affaire Van Beers*, as this scandal came to be known, brought the artist wide European attention. The final report found in his favor and held that he was “an honest man”. Previously a largely unknown artist, Van Beers was able to use his newfound fame to sell his works for extraordinary sums and the artist’s name was known all over the world. But *L'affaire Van Beers* marked the painter for the rest of his life.

Van Beers interest in costumes clearly found favor with Jean-Philippe who, himself, enjoyed dressing in exotic costumes (Figs. 8 & 9). The fashion designer was also known to work with painters designing costumes for their models. He once said, “I very much enjoy designing picture-costumes ... To mention but one of these (artists) – one who has been good enough to call me his collaborator – there is Jan van Beers.”. Clearly, as the intimate and playful inscription on this painting indicates, Jan van Beers and Jean-Philippe were close friends and sometimes even artistic collaborators.



Fig. 1

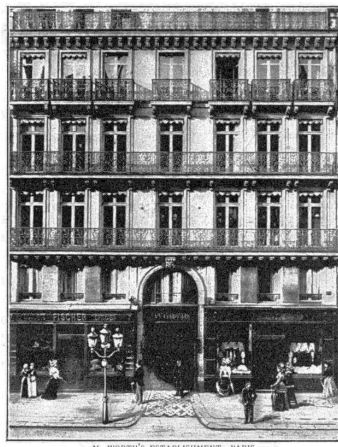


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8 & 9