

Painting “Portrait of King Augustus III in a Polish costume”



- Date of production ca. 1737
- Dimensions height: 246 cm, width: 164 cm
- ID no. MNK-I-327
- Museum [The National Museum in Kraków](#)
- Oddział The Bishop Erazm Ciołek Palace
- Gallery Art of Old Poland. The 12th – 18th century
- Subjects [authority](#), [clothing](#), [painted](#)
- Technique [oil painting](#)
- Material [canvas](#)
- Acquired date purchased in 1913
- Object copyright The National Museum in Kraków
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- Digitalisation NMK, iMNK project
- Tags [portret](#), [strój kontuszowy](#), [malarstwo](#), [barok](#), [sarmatyzm](#), [2D](#), [władza](#), [król](#), [domena publiczna](#)

The representative room of the Bishop Erazm Ciołek Palace, known as the Room of Virtues, houses the gallery of old Polish portrait paintings that were common in the old Poland. For the nobility, their own images and depictions of their relatives and ancestors formed a vital factor for building family and social ties and documenting genealogy and affiliations. These works were usually distinguished by their strong individualism expressed in very emphatic realism that stressed the characteristic physiognomic features of the persons portrayed. What is vital in the old-Polish portraits is the depiction of all attributes indicating the model's status. They primarily include the typical outfit of the nobility, known as the Polish costume, that is, a *żupan* and *kontusz* tied with a patterned, woven *kontusz* sash, a sabre, an officer's insignia (maces or batons) or symbols of the positions held (e.g., chancellor's seals), orders, and finally, the coats of arms and inscriptions that could usually be seen in the background.

The representative portrait of King Augustus III of Saxony is embedded in this tradition. The king ordered to be presented in the representative pose of *en pied*, that is, from head to toe. Although he was of German origin and did not wear the Sarmatian outfit on a day-to-day basis, he is presented here in the white-and-red *kontusz* outfit with the Order of the White Eagle hanging at his side on a blue ribbon, and a crop of hair shaved according to the style of the nobility. Since in the old Poland the king was elected by the nobility and he was considered to be the first among equals, the attributes of his regal rule gave way, in the portrait, to signs of affinity with the noble state and were moved to the background: the coronation gown is hanging on the armchair, and the regalia, that is, the crown, orb and sceptre, rest on a nearby table.

Elaborated by Tomasz Zaucha, PhD (The National Museum in Kraków), © all rights reserved