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Press release: *Faces of Distinction. Anthony van Dyck and his portraits of an illustrious circle*

24 April 2013 – 28 June 2013
Opening: 23 April 2013 at 6 p.m.

The Netherlandish artist Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) has secured a place in the history of art not only for his magnificent and sometimes larger than life portraits, but also for his series of prints known as the *Iconographia*, incorporating more than a hundred portraits of the most illustrious figures of his day. The exhibition *Faces of Distinction. Anthony van Dyck and his portraits of an illustrious circle*, mounted by the Department of Prints and Drawings of the ETH Zürich in collaboration with guest curator Carme Rodríguez-Pàmias, presents these masterpieces of portraiture to the Swiss public on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

Thanks to the generous bequest of the Zurich banker Heinrich Schulthess-von Meiss (1813-1898) the Department of Prints and Drawings of the ETH Zürich holds a particularly wide range of works from van Dyck's *Iconographia*. These include several remarkably rare first prints as well as works from the very first edition of the *Iconographia* published by Marten van den Enden, with whom van Dyck worked closely right up to his death in 1641.

Following his apprenticeship under the guidance of Antwerp painter Henrik van Balen (1575-1632), the highly gifted young van Dyck, having been granted the title of master artist at the tender age of 19, entered the studio of the leading Flemish painter of the day, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). This assured him of a prestigious clientele right from the start. The portraits in the *Iconographia* bear witness to the illustrious circles in which the young master artist moved. Alongside monarchs, princes, statesmen, scholars and philosophers, there are also portraits of artists particularly admired by van Dyck. Though many of the portraits were etched after drawings or paintings by van Dyck, some of the portraits were etched by him personally. This spontaneous and unprepossessing approach resulted in some remarkably rare *avant-la-lettre* prints.

The beginnings of the *Iconographia* and the development of the cycle are shrouded in mystery. We can only begin to surmise what may have prompted him to launch such an ambitious project in the time around 1632. Van Dyck, who was thoroughly familiar with the tradition of artists' biographies and portrait books, may well have recognised the opportunities that the printed medium offered as a means of successfully marketing his celebrated talent for portraiture.

For further information and visual material, please contact:
Konstanze Forst-Battaglia, co-curator of the exhibition, , Tel. 044/632 78 76 oder
konstanze.forst-battaglia@gs.ethz.ch