

The artist behind Prince Philip's final portrait reveals 3 hidden details in the painting — and what they mean

[Armani Syed](#) Apr 22, 2021, 2:12 AM GMT+10



The final portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh by Ralph Heimans.
Ralph Heimans/The Royal Collection

Prince Philip's final portrait marked his retirement from public service in 2017.

Ralph Heimans, the artist, revealed three subtle details in

the work.

It shows a significant room, a portrait of Philip's family, and a nod to his Danish heritage.

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In 2017, [Prince Philip](#) spent one hour sitting for a final portrait before he retired from a long career in public service.

The portrait, by [Ralph Heimans](#), an Australian-British royal painter, depicts [the Duke of Edinburgh](#) in formal attire standing in a long corridor at Windsor Castle. The duke looks regal yet slightly hunched, surrounded by fine art and busts.

Upon closer inspection, however, the portrait is saturated with hidden references to Philip's family, history, and heritage — subtle threads that form the fabric of [the duke's unique life](#). Heimans, who previously painted Prince Charles and the Queen, said these details were intentional, the result of a collaborative effort with Philip.

Heimans reminisced about the short time he spent with the duke, who Heimans said came across as a man with a distinct personality.

"He has this charisma which is quite striking," he told Insider. "His sharp wit, humor, and his forthright nature are

all qualities you can imagine but when you meet him you really do get a flavor."

The corridor depicted in the painting leads to the room where Philip's mother and grandmother were born



The room where Philip's mother and grandmother were born.

Ralph Heimans/The Royal Collection

Heimans said the grand corridor is in the private quarters of Windsor Castle [that Philip shared with Queen Elizabeth II](#) during their 73 years of marriage.

Aside from being their residence, it has emotional significance.

"At the end of that corridor was a room where his mother

and his grandmother were born," Heimans said, referring to Princess Alice of Battenberg, who [gave birth to Philip in Corfu in 1921](#), and Alice's mother, Princess Victoria of Hesse.

"It's also where he stays when he has lived at Windsor Castle," Heimans said of Philip. "And now it turns out that he has also passed away there.

"In some ways, that corridor itself represents his life span," the artist added. "There's something very powerful and symbolic about that space that I think has added to the strength and the poignancy of the portrait."

The portrait includes a painting of Queen Victoria with the Danish royal family, including Philip's mother as a young girl



A painting depicts Queen Victoria and the Danish royal family.
Ralph Heimans/The Royal Collection

At the forefront of the portrait, hanging on the right side, is a painting that depicts Queen Victoria and the Danish royal family, including Alice as a young girl.

Philip was the fifth child and only son of Alice and Prince Andrew of Greece and Denmark. His maternal grandmother, Princess Victoria, was Queen Victoria's granddaughter, [making him and Elizabeth third cousins](#).

Philip sacrificed his European royal titles in order to marry Elizabeth and became the Duke of Edinburgh through [King George VI's Letters Patent](#) on November 19, 1947.

For Heimans, acknowledging the close links between British and Danish royalty before Philip and Elizabeth

married added "poetic resonance" to the corridor because their story "is all encapsulated within that one space."

"It's almost as though the light and shade that passes through that corridor represent times of light and shade within his life," he said. "There's something sort of deeply resonant about the sense of perspective within the painting that represents his life span."

As [The Times reported](#), Philip was vocal before his death about incorporating his roots into his [funeral proceedings](#). The flag laid on Philip's coffin featured the Danish coat of arms and the Greek flag, [George Arkley reported for Insider](#).

Philip's national identity was multifaceted; he was born a Greek prince with Danish heritage, fled to France, and was educated in Britain.

"If anything, I've thought of myself as Scandinavian. Particularly, Danish. We spoke English at home," Philip was quoted as saying in [a 2014 profile in The Independent](#). "The others learned Greek. I could understand a certain amount of it. But then the [conversation] would go into French. Then it went into German, on occasion, because we had German cousins. If you couldn't think of a word in one language, you tended to go off in another."

The duke wears Windsor attire and the Order of the Elephant, Denmark's highest honor



The Order of the Elephant hanging from Philip's sash.

Ralph Heimans/The Royal Collection

The Order of the Elephant, a Danish order of chivalry and Denmark's highest honor, dates back to the 15th century, [the Danish royal family's website says](#). It is now solely used to recognize royals and heads of state.

Heimans' painting was commissioned in partnership with the Danish Museum of National History, so it was a conscious decision to pay tribute to Philip's Danish heritage in the portrait.

"In terms of what he would wear, I suggested a Windsor

attire with the Order of the Elephant, which is the Danish highest order, to say something about his origin, which they were very happy with," Heimans said.

The elephant ornament can be seen hanging from Philip's blue sash, and his positioning implies he's walking away — a conscious sense of finality, according to the artist.

"I wanted to convey that sense of farewell," he said. "If you're standing in that corridor, it's as though he's glancing at the viewer, and you can imagine if it was cinematic that the next scene would be him walking away down that corridor."