

## TWO PORTRAITS BY JOHANNES KUPEZKY

*Erich Bachmann*

Johannes Kupezky, who left the Catholic city of Vienna mainly for religious reasons in 1723 and went to live in the Protestant free city of Nürnberg, where he died, occupies a singular place among the great court painters of the late Baroque era similar to that of the Genevan Calvinist and „peintre de la vérité“, Jean-Etienne Liotard, in the rococo period. Both were equally feared and esteemed for the deep psychological insight and inner veracity of their portraits. Both — sometimes to a quite astonishing degree — transcended the stylistic conventions of court portraiture of the age of absolutism and can in many respects be regarded as precursors of classicism and the 19th century.

Among Kupezky's portraits, there are many in which he seems to regard the princes and persons of quality whom he depicts not only with incorrup-

tible impartiality but also with downright distaste, not without inner reservations, even class resentment. He turns the required courtly attitude (Goethe calls „Tournure“ selfconscious dignity tempered by graciousness) into one of arrogance and cold indifference. These characteristics facilitate the identification of two portraits, one in the Wawel in Cracow and the other in the Residenz at Ansbach, as the work of Kupezky. The first depicts an unknown nobleman, the second Carl Wilhelm of Brandenburg-Ansbach, known as the „wild Markgrave“, before his accession. This last portrait, which was formerly believed to be a painting of the Margrave Alexander of Ansbach-Bayreuth by the court painter J. C. Sperling, is certainly one of Kupezky's best works, remarkable for the strength of the psychological characterization and the subtle composition.