THE LIMNER COMPANY



Studio of FRANCIS CLOUET (Circa 1520 - 1572)

Portrait miniature of Charles IX (1550-74), King of France, as a boy, wearing black doublet with gold embroidery and fur trim and black velvet cap with white ostrich feather

Watercolour and bodycolour on parchment

Set into a later turned ivory frame inset with tortoiseshell

Oval, 35mm (1 $^{3}/_{8}$ inches) high

Very few portraits that can be attributed with confidence to François Clouet's hand survive today. Following his father and teacher, Jean Clouet, (1485-1540/1541), François is first documented as a court portraitist in 1540 when he appears in the royal account books as 'paintre et varlet de chambre.'

François Clouet was painter and 'valet de chambre' to four successive French monarchs: François I (r. 1515-1547), Henri II (r. 1547-1559), François II (r. 1559-1560), and Charles IX (r. 1560-1574). Like his contemporary Hans Holbein, his duties included producing coats-of-arms and ornamental gilding. In 1547 and again in 1559, he was involved in making death masks and fabricating decorations for the funeral ceremonies of François I and Henri II. He is likely to have also run a workshop to supervise work by other artists and craftsmen. Although the present delicately painted work is unlikely to be by Clouet's hand, it probably came from his studio or was painted by someone acquainted with his work. This portrait does not follow the exact technique or facial modelling of the master, but it also appears to be somewhat original in composition and clothing.

Demand for portrait miniatures of Charles IX, who was nine years old when he came to the throne, would have been extremely high. A miniature in the Royal Collection by Clouet's hand was incorrectly identified as his brother, Francis II, from the first record of its existence in the Royal Collection, when Abraham van der Doort described it in his inventory of Charles I's collection as 'The - Picture of the Dolphin ffrancis of ffraunce in a - black Capp and white feather in a black habitt lined with white furr adorn'd wth gould which Dolphin was the first husband to Queene Mary - of Scotland'. That the brother's

identities were confused is not surprising - Francis II and Charles IX shared a strong family resemblance.

The basis for the present miniature has been established as a red and black chalk drawing in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, depicting Charles IX in 1561. Unlike portrait miniatures or limnings by English artists, such as Nicholas Hilliard, in the 16th century, French limners worked from drawings which they relied on for copies.

Other portrait miniatures by François to survive but include three further miniatures of Charles IX, as well as the miniature of Mary, Queen of Scots also in the Royal Collection. One of the miniatures of Charles IX is mounted jointly with another of his mother, Catherine de Médicis, in a highly elaborate gold portrait box in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.[1]

When Clouet died in 1572, a vacuum was left which no singular artist could fill. When Nicholas Hilliard arrived in France in September 1576, he was hailed by many for his ability, even gaining praise from such writers as Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), poet and member of the Pléiade. However, the present work displays none of Hilliard's technique and was more likely painted by an artist previously acquainted with Clouet.

[1] The box has been associated with a recorded gift made by Charles IX to Queen Anna Maria of Spain in 1572 and is therefore some ten years later than the example in the Royal Collection.