THE LIMNER COMPANY



JEAN-BAPTISTE ISABEY (1767 - 1855)

Portrait of Charles Victor, Vicomte d'Arlincourt (1789-1856), wearing fur-trimmed cape

Circa: Circa 1824-25

Circa 1824-25

Watercolour and bodycolour on paper

Gilt-metal frame

Oval, 142 mm (5 $^{5}/_{8}$ inches) high

Known as the 'Prince des Romantiques', d'Arlincourt was by the mid 1820s at the height of his literary career. A romantic novelist and playwright, he gained populatity at both the courts of Napolean I and Louis XVIII.

In the present portrait, Isabey shows him holding a note-book which is inscribed with the titles of some of his works: La Caroléide (1818), Le Solitaire (1821), Le Renégat (1822) and Ipsiboé (1823).

The present work is one of at least four known versions painted by Isabey and his studio, the portrait in Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo in Buenos Aires, Argentina being signed and dated 1824; another version is in the Louvre Museum, Paris.

Arlincourt came from an ancient and distinguished noble family. He was born at Château de Mérantais, near the Parc de Versailles, on 24th September 1788.[1] His youth coincided with the reign of Terror and on 8th May 1794 his father Louis-Adrien Prévost d'Arlincourt alongside Antoine Lavoisier and twenty-four other fermiers-généraux was executed at the guillotine. Almost immediately Victor along with his brother Charles and their mother Marie Jeanne née Gourgon de Précy, were taken to Lépinoy,

another family property in Picardie. Arlincourt remained there until he purchased Château de Saint-Paër in Normandy.

At the beginning of the Empire, Marie Jeanne Arlincourt appealed on behalf of her two sons Charles and Victor to the Emperor Napoleon, who duly nominated Charles equerry to the King of Naples and Victor equerry to Madame de Mère, 1808. That same year Victor married Marie Thérèse Joséphine Laure de Cholet, the daughter of the sénateur and comte de l'Empire François-Armand Cholet. At Lépinoy the following year came the birth of their first child Athénaïs (who was later to marry comte Etienne Bernard de Sassaney) and in 1814 the birth of their second daughter Mathilde (who died in 1839). In 1810 Arlincourt wrote his first tragedy Matinée de Charlemagne, which he dedicated in part to Napoleon but was refused by the Théâtre-Français. The following year Napoleon nominated him an auditor of the Council of State and then enrolled him in the army as an Intendant during the Spanish Campaign and the capture of Terragone.

Having been a staunch supporter of Napoleon, after the Emperor's overthrow in 1814, Arlincourt aligned himself with the Bourbons gaining the confidence of Louis XVIII, who awarded him the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur. In 1818 Arlincourt wrote an epic poem also titled Charlemagne or Caroléide, which he presented to the Académie Français but his candidature only received one vote. Undeterred he began writing Le Solitaire (shown in the portrait above, along with Caroléide), which was published in 1821 and brought him considerable acclaim. Within a few months his novel had been reprinted a dozen times, it was also translated into ten different languages and was to inspire numerous songs and paintings as well as Vincenzo Bellini's opera La Straniera of 1828. More success followed with the publication of three further novels, Le Renégat (1822), Ipsiboé (1823) and L'Etrangère (1825). Arlincourt gained a great following, especially among the female public, not least from the duchesse de Berry who was entertained at his newly acquired Château de Saint-Paër with a great pageant and theatrical performances.

Despite a strong following, Arlincourt's style came under attack. In an attempt to reassert himself in 1826 a production of his play Le Siège de Paris appeared at the Théâtre-Français, which was also severely attacked by the critics. He then commenced writing a number of historical novels and during 1841 and 1844 made two prolonged tours of Europe. On his return to France he wrote a new play La Peste Noire, which was performed in 1845 at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu-Comique but was sadly received as coldly as his first; however, his article Dieu le Veut! of 1848 did much to revive his popularity. In 1847 Arlincourt's first wife died but four years later in 1851 he remarried Madame Beaudon de la Maze, née Elizabeth Contenot de Laneuville. Shortly before this, he had travelled to Italy resulting in his L'Italie Rouge in which he recounted his passionate concerns over the Italian unification movement known as the Risorgimento; this again gained him acclaim among his French readers. This and another anti-revolutionary article also of 1850 were to be his last publications. Arlincourt died a few years later on 22nd January 1856.

1] As noted in his main biography "Le Vicomte d'Arlincourt, Prince des Romantiques" by Alfred Marquiset, 1909, although other accounts give his birth date as 1789.

Literature:

Louvre version [inv. No. 3865] in T. H. Colding, Aspects of Miniature Painting; It's Origins and Development, Ejnar Munksgaard - Copenhagen / Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd – Edinburgh, London, 1953, Fig. 211, pp.166, 170;

Another version in M. Friesen, Französische Miniaturen 1770-1880, Darmstadt, 2001, p. 413, fig. 193;

Exhibition catalogue, Jean-Baptiste Isabey (1767-1855), portraitiste de l'Europe, Malmaison, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy, 2005/2006, p. 153