

THE LIMNER COMPANY



GIUSEPPE ROTA (1777 - 1821)

King Karl XIV Johan of Sweden and II of Norway (1763-1844), in general's uniform with the Swedish sash of the Order of the Seraphim, red curtain background

Circa: 1808

1808

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 7FPUP4N5

Gilt-metal mount

Oval, 40 mm (1 ⁵/₈ inches) high

King Karl XIV Johan had an unusual route to the throne, being adopted and elected as crown prince by the childless King Karl XIII. Born in Southern France as Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte, he had had a long career and was one of Napoleon's marshals, serving with esteemed military talent. His relationship with Napoleon was, however, turbulent, despite being part of the extended Imperial family via his marriage.

It was Bernadotte's military prowess which had appealed to King Karl XIII's decision to appoint him as king, as the Swedes hoped that he would take Finland back from Russia. Instead, he allied himself with Alexander I and Russia. Sweden was then given free rein to the west, and took Norway instead in 1814.

In late November 1813, Charles John invaded Denmark aiming to knock Napoleon's last major ally out of the War to secure the Coalition's northern flank in preparation for the invasion of France in 1814 and to secure Norway for Sweden as stipulated in the several treaties that created the Sixth Coalition. In 1814, the date of this miniature, King Frederick VI of Denmark was forced to sign the treaty that ceded Norway to Sweden.

Bernadotte's wife Désirée Clary was not happy in the cold Swedish climate, and decided to return home to Paris for several years. They had a son together, Oskar, who later became King Oskar I. Karl XIV Johan died after a stroke at the age of 81. On his deathbed he was heard to say 'Nobody has had a career in life like mine'.

The portrait miniature here, signed 'R' for 'Rota', is taken from an earlier (1808) full-length oil by François Gérard. The portrait is housed in the Bernadotte Gallery at the Royal Palace of Stockholm. This miniature may have been gifted to a supporter of the last military actions taken by Sweden in 1814. In this turbulent period it was even suggested that Bernadotte should replace Napoleon, ruling France as a Constitutional Monarch. What followed instead was a prolonged period of peace and prosperity for Sweden.