THE LIMNER COMPANY



CLAUDE FRANÇOIS HENRI PETIT DE VILLENEUVE (1760 - 1824)

Memorial Portrait miniature of a Dog, lying on a red velvet cushion, next to his master's monogrammed stone tomb, dated '1823 (or 5?)/ 1824 either side of a violet flower'

Circa: Dated 1824

Dated 1824

Watercolour on ivory

Signed and dated 'F. Petit/ 1824'

Gilded metal frame

Oval, 135 mm (5 $^{1}/_{4}$ inches) high

Claude Francois Henri, Petit de Villeneuve was the grandson of a Parisian goldsmith, and had a lineage that included prominent watchmakers, his great-grandparent being the renowned Jean-Baptiste Dutertre de Véteuil (1705-1773). Interestingly, his surname was not derived from the purchase of land but from the addition of his mother's family name. His use of the full name was inconsistent throughout his career, and he was apparently adopted after his father's death. His brothers chose different surnames, (Simon and Jean-Baptiste Petit were identified as such by Pahin de la Blancherie in the Salons de la Correspondance in 1781-82, but Simon does not figure in the family's records).

Claude Francois married Rosalie, or Rozalie, Paupe in Paris. Historical documents reveal that she was the daughter of Jacques-Nicolas Paupe, a merchant in Paris, and his wife, Rose Moliere. Jacques-Nicolas Paupe was not only an art collector but a friend of draughtsman Aigna-Thomas Desfriches (1715-1800). He owned paintings by notable artists such as Greuze, Fragonard, Danloux and Taunay. Paupe was also a major patron of Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), commissioning around 20 paintings over a decade. The Paupe family had connections with Troyes. Rosalie's death is not recorded, but we do know that Claude Francois remarried in 1796 to Louise-Therese Andry, who's family also had connections in Troyes, potentially suggesting Jansenist sympathies.

The artist's birth and death certificates were reconstituted at the request of his grandson, an architect, in 1872. Among the document found was his student certificate from the Académie Royal de Peinture et de Sculpture. Claude Francois exhibited his works at the Salon de la Correspondance from 1781, showcasing both miniatures and other pieces. He continued to exhibit in various Paris Salons in 1808, 1810, 1814, and 1817. His artistic skills extended to working with oil, miniatures and pastels. After the Restoration period, he was honored with the Médaille de la Fidélité.

In 1820, a sale of his artworks took place at 11, Rue des Blancs-Manteaux following the closing of his studio. The date of this portrait miniature, 1824, is the same year that the artist died – and many years after he apparently gave up painting. The commission must have been a very personal or important one to have brought him back from retirement. For France, this was time of royal transition – as Louis XVIII died in September 1824 and his brother Charles X came to the throne.

This particular miniature portrait of a lone dog resting on a pillow is very unusual within the oeuvre. The breed seems to be a border terrier, described by Anne Roslin-Williams in 1790 as "pepper-and-mustard coloured" (The Dogs of the British Isles, 1872), which became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century. An example from the same period to the miniature by Claude Francois would be James Ward's 'Portrait of Fanny, a favourite dog' (1822) in the Sir John Soane Museum, London. Often used as working dogs, terriers usually had their ears cropped in order to stand straight. Both Fanny and the dog in Petit's miniature however show the dog's ears uncropped, indicating that they were a beloved family pet. Here, the dog appears to be mourning the death of its owner, its loyal stance beside the carved stone tomb denoting devotion.

The flowers painted in between the dates bring a potential political dimension to this seemingly straightforward image. The flower may be a pansy – a flower long associated with remembrance and often used as a symbol of mourning – or a violet. After, Napoleon's abdication and banishment to island of Elba in 1814, he told his followers that he would return when the violets were again in season. As a result of this statement, violets became a symbol that his supporters recognized, so much so that when he escaped and reappeared in Paris in 1815, he was presented with a bouquet of violets and called Le Père de La Violette. His wife, Josephine de Beauharnais (1763-1814) was also known to cultivate Parma violets in her private gardens. However, after the restoration of Louis XVIII to the French throne in 1815, violets also became a symbol of sedition, of rebellion against authority of state or monarch. This is potentially relevant in relation to Claude Francois's possible ties to Jansenists circles through his marriages. The failure of Jansenist schemes together with the success of Napoleon's 1801 Concordat, made Janesinist-inspired political activities incredibly difficult.