THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (16th century)

A Lady of the French Court, wearing pearl earring and large, lace ruff

Circa: Circa 1590

Pencil and coloured chalks on laid paper; watermark: Grapes with narrow stem, surmounted by the letters "lll" (Briquet 13196: Lyon, 1582) and later inscription

Polished cassetta frame with burr walnut inlay

Rectangular (trimmed) 240 x 195 mm (9 ½ x 7 ⅔ in)

This sensitive drawing is a rare example of a 16th-century portrait drawing which has survived in remarkably good condition. Possible artists would be Daniel Dumonstier (1574-1646) or the Edinburgh-born François Quesnel (1543-1619), both of whom were working at the French court in the final decade of the 16th century, attempting to fill the role of the mighty Francois Clouet who had died in 1572.[1]

The sitter seems to be following the influential fashion of Gabrielle d'Estrées, Marquise de Monceaux, mistress of Henri IV, King of France (1571-99).[2] She was usually portrayed with her hair combed back high over her head, with a large pearl earring, including in the famous double painting in the Louvre, dated 1594, where she sits in a bath with her sister, Julienne-Hippolyte-Joséphine, Duchess of Villars, pinching her nipple in a gesture assumed to relate to the fertility or pregnancy of the twenty-one year old. [3]

The watermark on this drawing is identical to one found on a drawing, currently catalogued as ‘School of François Clouet, Portrait of Marguerite de Valois’, now in the Morgan Library and Museum, the paper identified as made in Lyon in 1582 (Briquet, 13196).[4]

Although, as with so many French drawings of this period, both the sitter and artist are yet to be

identified, the work still retains the immediacy of an ad vivum sitting.

[1] If by Daniel Dumonstier, this would be a juvenile work as the earliest dated work by him is 1605. Large groups of portraits by Dumonstier are in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (J. Adhémar, 'Les dessins de Daniel Dumonstier au Cabinet des Estampes', Gazette des Beaux-Arts, March 1970, LXXV, pp. 129-150) and in the Louvre (J. Guiffrey and P. Marcel, Inventaire général des dessins du Musée du Louvre et du Musée de Versailles, Ecole Française, Paris, 1949, V, nos. 3799-3827).

[2] A group of portraits of women from the same date were illustrated in the catalogue ‘Les Clouet de Chantilly’, Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Paris, Mai-Jun 1971, as ‘Quelques Dames de la fin du siècle, nos 339-344, p. 329.

[3] Louvre Museum, accession number RF 1937-1.

[4] Briquet, Les Filigranes: Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600.