

# THE LIMNER COMPANY



**FRENCH SCHOOL (17th century)**

**Portrait miniature of a Lady of the French royal family, possibly Anne of Austria (1601-1666),  
Queen of France**

Circa: Circa 1660

Circa 1660

Oval, 6.8 cm (2 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches) high

Watercolour and shell gold on vellum

The sitter of this portrait miniature bears a striking resemblance to Anne of Austria, the wife of King Louis XIII of France and Navarre (1601-1643), later Queen Regent for her son, Louis XIV (1638-1715). The coronet and royal blue robe lined with ermine leave us in no doubt that the sitter is royal, and the composition and fashion would situate this image in her later iconography.

Despite being known as Anne 'of Austria', she was, in fact, born and raised in Spain, and, as the daughter of King Phillip III (1578-1621), she was an Infanta of Spain and Portugal. She held the title of Archduchess of Austria from birth, yet she never visited the country, and her popular name as 'Anne of Austria' was due to her Hapsburg heritage, her mother being Margaret of Austria (1584–1611) and her father (her mother's cousin) also a member of the House of Hapsburg.

Anne was married at just 14 years old to King Louis XIII of France, also 14; a union which had an inauspicious start, when the reluctant bridegroom had to be forcibly carried to the bedding ceremony. Her reception from her mother-in-law, Marie de Medici (1575-1642), was also less than warm and the years of her husband's minority[1] were characterised by a distinct froideur. Relief was found in her entourage of Spanish ladies, but they were soon replaced by French ladies-in-waiting in an effort to bring the couple closer.

Their relationship became further strained however when Anne suffered multiple miscarriages and a stillbirth. Louis and Anne's distance was also exacerbated by tensions between France and Spain, and questions over her allegiance, especially with the rise of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) as her husband's chief minister. Richelieu was suspicious of Anne, who attempted to plant informants in her household. She was deeply opposed to him and became embroiled in plots against his life, for which she was found out and punished by the removal of some of her favourite ladies. The plot known as the 'Chalais conspiracy' involved the assassination of Richelieu and the deposition of her husband to be replaced as King by his brother, Gaston, Duke of Orléans (1608-1660); Anne would then divorce Louis and marry Gaston. She admitted involvement in the plan to assassinate Richelieu but furiously denied knowledge of the plot to depose Louis, and it remains unknown whether she was complicit in this aspect of the plan.

When France declared war on Spain in 1635, Anne continued to write - secretly – to her Spanish family and contacts, and was able to correspond in both code and cipher. She again came under Richelieu's suspicion and again confessed, which led to another purge on her household, restrictions on her movement and close monitoring of her correspondence.

Anne would eventually give birth to a son, which, according to one contemporary account (now believed doubtful), was only conceived because Louis had been stranded by a storm with the queen and unable to return to his own apartments. She was now in her late 30s and a successful pregnancy at this stage, after repeated miscarriages, had been unexpected. Nevertheless, she had another healthy son a few years later, and both children would survive to adulthood as King Louis XIV (1638-1715), the longest reigning monarch in history, and Philippe, duc d'Orléans (1640-1701).

Her husband's premature death from illness in 1643 led to Anne becoming Regent of France for the four-year-old Louis. She became close to the first minister, Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661), somewhat surprisingly considering he was the protégé of her enemy, Richelieu. Rumours soon circulated that Anne and Mazarin were lovers, and even had a morganatic marriage, although their surviving correspondence gives no hint of their relationship being anything other than platonic.

Anne left the day-to-day governance to Mazarin, but has received credit for the victory over the very real danger posed to her son's crown by the civil wars known as the Fronde. At different stages several members of the royal family were even among the rebels, including Gaston, the Prince of Condé, the Prince of Conti and duc de Bouillon. The majority of the nobility and regional assemblies also revolted, as well as much of the populace, and, in a precursor of the Revolution that occurred some generations later, Paris became a battlefield. The Fronde was even supported by the Spanish, in direct opposition of Anne and her heirs. It was against all odds therefore that Anne and Louis triumphed and, ironically, emerged with fervent belief in absolute monarchy.

Another achievement as Regent was Anne's approval of the artists' petition which led to the founding of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in 1648. She had also founded an abbey and commissioned the building of Église Notre-Dame du Val-de-Grâce in Paris, which stands today as a prime example of seventeenth-century French baroque architecture. A few years later in 1651, she relinquished the regency when Louis came of age, while retaining a seat on the royal council.

Peace with Spain was made in 1659, and a diplomatic marriage was secured between the French and Spanish with the union of Louis and Infanta Maria Theresa of Austria (1638-1683). Maria Theresa was Anne's niece and Louis's first cousin on both his paternal and maternal sides. In a stark contrast to her own reception as royal bride, Anne took Maria Theresa under her wing and was seemingly determined to educate her niece in French customs, ensure her comfort and protect her from the court gossips.

Following the birth of Louis and Maria Theresa's first child, Anne retired to the abbey she had founded, Val-de-Grâce, where she would die in 1666. When Louis learnt of his mother's death, he was consoled by a courtier who remarked that she had been a great Queen, to which Louis responded, "No monsieur, she was more than a great Queen. She was a great King."

Anne was certainly defiantly loyal, first to her family (at the expense of her husband), later to her beloved sons and daughter-in-law. Her loyalty was returned by the devotion of her sons and ladies, one of whom, Françoise Bertaut, Madame de Motteville (c.1621–1689), penned memoirs on Anne and her court which were published 1723.

[1] Louis legally came of age when he turned 13 in 1614, but his mother did not give up the regency until she was removed by a coup in 1617.