THE LIMNER COMPANY



ANNE MARIE BELLE (NÉE CHÉRON) (1663 - 1718)

Portrait Miniature of James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766), 'The Old Pretender', wearing armour, white lace stock and blue sash of the Garter

Circa: Circa 1710s

Circa 1710s

Watercolour on vellum, backed with a playing card (clubs)

Original sharkskin case with gold pinwork

Oval, 72 mm (2 7/8 in) high

Anne Marie Chéron (also called Marie Anne Chéron) was one of three miniaturists known to have been employed at the exiled Stuart court in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Paris. Her main role, as demonstrated by this example, was to translate the oil paintings of her husband, Alexis Simon Belle (1674-1734), into the portable miniature portraits, which played a vital role in Jacobite propaganda. The two artists had married on November 12, 1701. It seems likely that they would have met through being in the same artistic circles- Anne came from a family of artists, her father Henri, brother Louis (1660-1725), and sister Elisabeth (1648-1711) also pursued this career. In fact, it is likely that Anne was introduced to the exiled court through her sister (also a musician and poetess), who worked at the court of Louis XIV. Anne retained her maiden name, which professionally distanced her from her husband. Despite this, her works have remained relatively unknown in comparison to those by her husband, and information about her life and career remains obscure. The couple enjoyed a long employment at the exiled Stuart court, continuously engaged in the production of portraits, many of which would be smuggled by loyal supporters across the English Channel.

This particular portrait of James, Prince of Wales, relates to a type of portrait painted by her husband [1]. Here, James is shown wearing the distinctive blue Garter ribbon over armour but without other royal regalia (for example, the Order of the Thistle). Despite his fervent claim to the British throne, the portrait reflects his ambitions for a peaceful restoration after the death of his half-sister, Queen Anne (r.1701-14). The image was also engraved by François Chéreau the Elder. Chéron has changed some details which appear in the painting, including the placement of the red-lined, fur-trimmed cloak. She also

paints James in full armour, wearing not just a breastplate.

In previous sales, the miniature was accompanied by one of James's sisters, Princess Louisa Maria Theresa Stuart (1692-1712), again a close- but not identical - copy of portraits of the Princess by Belle [2]. Both of these portraits were painted in the 1710s. It is very possible that the miniatures of James and his sister were painted as a pair in 1712. Both siblings had contracted Smallpox in this year, on a visit to the court of Louis XIV, and while James survived, his sister did not. Given the existence of another pair of portraits of the two [3], it is likely that either James or another close member of the exiled court commissioned these in the aftermath of her passing.

Portraits of the exiled James III, or 'The King over the Water' as supporters knew him, were a vital part of keeping the Stuart cause alive. Such works were chiefly political, or propagandist, and designed to create, or maintain loyalty among Stuart followers. Miniatures and smaller scale portraits such as the present example were particularly valued for the ease with which they could be dispatched to followers across Europe, or secreted back to Britain.

[1] There are numerous versions of this type. For one example, see the portrait of James III, 1712, in the UK Government Art Collection. For another, see his portrait at Traquair House (PCF49).

[2] The closest comparisons by Belle have only been found in photographs, in the Heinz Archive. These date from c.1711.

[3] Sold Sotheby's, 1 May 1958, lot 56.