THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHANN CHRISTIAN FREUND (1788 - 1822)

Portrait miniature of Louis XVI (1754-1793), King of France and Navarre (1774-1792),
Circa: After 1784
Watercolour on ivory

Inscribed (verso) 'Painted by / JC Freund'

Gold frame, the reverse with a glazed panel showing hairwork and seed pearls.

This portrait miniature is of the portrait type derived from Joseph Boze's (1744-1826) celebrated portrait commissioned by the French King and originally executed in pastel in the Spring of 1784. The image won the artist fame across Europe when it was engraved by Benoît-Louis Henriquez in 1786. Johann Christian Freund, a miniature painter represented in the Tansey Collection, was a German miniaturist, and may have painted this portrait after seeing the example completed by Boze. He has paid deference to the Boze portrait and the sitter with the inclusion of the rich embroidery on his otherwise plain blue coat, as well as the red sash and cross of the Royal French Order of Saint-Louis and the blue ribbon sash and breast star of the Order of Saint-Esprit.

At the time of the Boze portrait, France was already in colossal debt and later in the decade would erupt in violent revolution, which some historians argue started as early as 1788. It is difficult to precisely date the present portrait, which could have been taken from the 1786 engraving or presented as a memento mori after his execution in 1793. Either way, it would have been an immediately recognisable portrait of Louis.

A comparable example can be found in the collection of the Historical Centre of the National Archives, Paris [fig. 1]. Also by an unknown artist, it is dated between 1789-1793 and shows the King and Queen in profile - he in the same attire as the present work - alongside two of their children. It was seized in 1793 during the Reign of Terror from the former bailiff at the Grand Chancellery, Charles-Simon Vanesson, and used as evidence against him. The arrest and search report specifically mentions the discovery. The Revolutionary regime had forbidden any representation of royalty, and on 10th August

1792, royal statues had been removed from public places. A year later, the National Convention ordered the destruction of the tombs of the kings at Saint-Denis, the destruction of royal portraits, and even the destruction of the Gallery of Kings (biblical king of Judah, not France) on the western façade of Notre-Dame Cathedral.

As during the English Civil War a century earlier and King Charles I's subsequent beheading, portrait miniatures of the doomed monarch could be used to demonstrate allegiance to the royalist cause. As something small and portable, they were easily hidden on one's person, or amongst belongings, to be discreetly presented at the owner's choosing. They also took on a talismanic quality after the death of the King for supporters of the royal family.