

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JEAN-URBAIN GUÉRIN (1760 - 1836)

George-Frédéric Bapst (1756-1826), en buste, in profile to the left, in coat, waistcoat and frilled cravat, powdered hair en queue, painted in brown camaïeu heightened with white on a dark-blue ground

Circa: Circa 1785

Watercolour on ivory (licence PDLQL15B)

Signed 'G[...]' (bottom centre)

Brass frame on wooden base, the backing paper inscribed in old handwriting '*Georges Frédéric Bapst (dit l'Aveugle) fils de Georges Michel Bapst et de Suzanne Elisabeth Strass Né le 23 Juin 1756 Mort célibataire le 18 Mai 1826*'.

2 9/16 in. (66 mm.) diam.

Born into an old and renowned Alsacian family of goldsmiths, George-Frédéric Bapst was a central figure in the jewellery associated with the French Royal family. He was the son of Georges-Michel, who was apprenticed to Pierre-André Jacquemin, a royal jeweller, but became the first member of the Bapst family to serve royalty directly, with the title 'Supplier to the Court of France'. The Bapst family coat of arms includes a tiara to indicate their long association with jewellery making.[1]

Painted during a time of great opulence, on the eve of the French Revolution, this portrait of Bapst shows him at the apex of his career in the last 1770s. A few years earlier he had designed and made the sword of Louis XV (1784) and 'Maison Bapst' made jewels for several members of the royal family including the daughter of King Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. Marie Antoinette's love of jewels was first indulged via the firm of Bapst, and it seems fitting that her jeweller chose one of her favourite miniaturists, Guerin, to paint his own portrait.

Many works by Bapst are still extant and available to see in public collections, including the 'Maria Therese Tiara'. This diamond and emerald tiara, or diadem, was made circa 1819-20 by Bapst for

Princess Marie Thérèse, Duchess of Angoulême, the only surviving child of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, who was queen of France for less than half an hour. The tiara was worn by Empress Eugenie, and then was sold when the country auctioned off all its crown jewels in 1887. On loan to the Victoria & Albert Museum in London for many years, the anonymous owner decided to sell it in 2002 and it is now in the Louvre, Paris.[2]

This profile portrait by Guérin dates to the early part of his career as an artist. He initially learned painting from his father, later from Huin, and after 1785, from Regnault and David in Paris. Soon he devoted himself to miniature painting, probably under the guidance of the miniaturist Jean-Baptiste Weyler, who also came from Alsace.

Guérin was ostracised in 1792 and found refuge in Alsace, returning to Paris in 1794 after the execution of Robespierre. He exhibited portrait miniatures at the Paris Salon from 1798 to 1827, including the portrait of General Kléber. He returned to Obernai in Alsace in 1833. The attribution here to Guérin is supported by comparison with a miniature in the Louvre of an unknown man in profile, which dates to circa 1789.[3]

[1] The firm became known as 'Bapst freres' after producing Charles X's coronation regalia in 1824 and later 'Bapst et Falize' was founded in 1879 by representatives of the two famous jeweller families.

[2] An export ban was placed on the tiara, but the museum failed to find the funds to keep it in the UK and the Louvre managed to purchase it.

[3] See P. Jean-Richard, *Miniatures sur ivoire*. Musée du Louvre. Musée d'Orsay, Paris 1994, no. 253.