

THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to PIAT JOSEPH SAUVAGE (1744 - 1818)

Portrait miniature of Young Woman, traditionally called Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte de France (1778-1851), Madame Royale, profile to the right, wearing draped muslin dress and with bandeau and wheat sheaf decoration in her hair and necklace

Circa: Circa 1787

Watercolour on ivory in *grisaille en camaïeu* on a blue ground (licence number: 94KBTV72)

Set into a gold ring (later silver band)

Octagonal, 34mm high

Marie-Thérèse was fifteen when her mother, Marie-Antoinette, and father, Louis XVI, were executed. Her younger brother, the Dauphin, suffered at the hands of his captors in The Temple and died, his body bearing the marks of abuse, at the age of ten. This portrait likely dates to happier times for the family but they were likely aware that public opinion was beginning to turn by 1787. Public sentiment toward her mother was already negative due to her perceived extravagance and assumed involvement in the 'Affair of the Diamond Necklace'.

Born at Versailles, Marie-Thérèse was the first child born to Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. After a period of seven years during which their marriage remained unconsummated, her birth signalled that the Queen was at least capable of bearing a child, even though the first to be born was, disappointingly, a girl. Her childhood was blissful – spent at court and nicknamed 'Mousseline' by her devoted mother.

Named after her maternal grandmother Empress Maria Theresa, her second name came from her mother's favourite sister, Maria Carolina of Austria. Louis also adored his daughter – fatherhood brought out his playful side and he was noted as spoiling her. In contrast to the image projected of Marie Antoinette she was determined that Marie-Thérèse would have a less cloistered existence than her aunts and invited children from outside the palace walls to play with her, often making her gift her toys to them. In 1781, the royal couple welcomed a son (the first royal child in recent memory born without the public viewing that was part of court tradition), Louis Joseph Xavier Francois, Dauphin of France.

In this ring portrait, Marie-Thérèse seems to be around ten to twelve years of age, her hair adorned with the wheat sheaf symbol of her mother. Although other portraits of her in profile painted en grisaille are extant, none seem to relate to this particular image. The technique accords well with Sauvage, who often left a little of the thinner background paint (in this case, a blue tone) to show through.

Marie-Thérèse continued to commission this type of profile portrait when older, including an example by Jacques Joseph de Gault (1738-after 1812), now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Object Number: 62.122.67). This type of portrait, originally conceived when de Gault was commissioned to paint imitations of antique gems in grisaille for the decoration of snuffboxes, was also used for portraits painted ad vivum. They were part of the renewed interest in Neoclassical style of the period.

Marie-Thérèse was imprisoned with other members of the royal family in the Temple in 1791 and it is possible that this ring was given for safekeeping to a friend or member of the Royal Household. As with so many objects belonging to the monarchy and nobility, the provenance has been lost in the turbulent period in which this work of art existed. After the executions of her parents, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, in 1793, she came to be known as the Orphan of the Temple, where she remained until on December 26, 1795-she was exchanged for several French political prisoners held in Austria by her uncle Francis II. She was then permitted to travel to Vienna. In 1799 she married her first cousin Louis Antoine (1775–1844), duke of Angoulême, son of the future Charles X. Exiled for most of her life, she died at the age of seventy-three.