

THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to JACQUES CHARLIER (1706 - 1790)

A boîte-à-miniatures with six miniatures - on the cover, four sides and base – depicting scenes of Venus, Cupid and putti

Circa: Miniatures circa 1760, the later box 1838

Miniatures circa 1760, the later box 1838

Watercolour and bodycolour on ivory (licence L73VPKQX)

Box: 7 x 10 x 8 cm (2 3/4 x 4 x 3 1/8 inches)

Tortoiseshell box lined with gold (the third French standard mark for 18kt gold (1838-1919), the miniatures set in white-enamelled gold mounts; by Alexandre-Jean-Marie Lefèvre (fl.1837-1852).

From whichever direction one examines this box, one sees an image of either Venus or Cupid surrounded by the accoutrements of love and desire: burning torches, arrows, pure white doves, wreaths of flowers, and not to mention nudity. Furthermore, Venus is depicted both clothed (albeit immodestly) and nude, making the viewer more conscious of her naked flesh where it is exposed.

This erotic subject matter is typical of Charlier's output, many of which were mounted in boxes such as this. The majority of his oeuvre were copied after or inspired by François Boucher (1703-1770) and the miniature on the base of the box depicts Venus in a similar composition to Boucher's 'The Toilette of Venus' at the Louvre [RF 288], the pendant to which, 'Venus disarming Love' [RF 289], depicts a comparable scene to that of the miniature on the lid. The latter was euphorically described by one art historian:

'I can only find one word to define it: a psalm of women. This development, this block [...] of bellies, arms, breasts, legs, fresh meat, this fun creating a bouquet of beauties, is a game that no one else in the world has been able to do like Boucher.'¹

While the surrounding figures and some details differ to Boucher's oil paintings, the present artist likely borrowed from them. Interestingly, it's been suggested that the Boucher pair were at Fontainebleau prior to their acquisition by the Louvre in 1881².

Charlier too enjoyed royal patronage. The artists shared patrons at the court of Louis XV (1710-1774), including the fashionable Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764). Charlier had been styled *peintre en miniature du Roi* (painter and miniaturist to the King) since 1753, but had enjoyed royal commissions for some years. Other great patrons were duc de Caylus, who owned between 90-100 miniatures by Charlier, the prince de Conti, who commissioned 12 large miniatures by him for the grand sum of 1,200 livres, and the duc d'Orléans.

Firm attributions to Charlier are not straight-forward owing to the fact that few of Charlier's works are signed. The present artist certainly shows great confidence playing with Boucher's compositions and creating their own and cannot be resigned to merely copyist. The largest collections of works associated with Jacques Charlier can today be found at the Wallace Collection and the Louvre.

1. Gillet, 1929, quoted Ananoff, A., Wildenstein D., *L'opera complete di Boucher*, 1980 (Rizzoli, Milan), p.114

2. Ananoff, A., Wildenstein D., *L'opera complete di Boucher*, 1980 (Rizzoli, Milan), p.114