THE LIMNER COMPANY



ITALIAN SCHOOL (17th century)

Portrait miniature of Ercole III d'Este, Duke of Modena (1727-1803)

Circa: circa 1780

circa 1780

Watercolour on ivory (licence KK47XWDG)

Oval, 3.5 cm (1 $^{3}/_{8}$ inches) high

Engraved gilt-metal frame

Ercole III, the last Este Duke of Modena, was painted here around the time that he took this title, following the death of his father, Francesco III d'Este, in 1780. At this time, he was in an unhappy marriage with Maria Teresa Cybo-Malaspina (1725-1790). The couple had one daughter, Maria Beatrice d'Este (1750-1829) and despite much pressure failed to establish marital relations in order to produce a son. This had caused tensions within the family, as Ercole's father was worried about the legitimate continuation of the male line. Against Ercole's will, his daughter was married to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria (1754-1806).

Modena had a long history with France, and in the eighteenth century, during the wars of the Spanish Succession, the Duke had been ousted from his position by French Troops. During Ercole's time as Duke, he had been able to establish strong connections with European powers, making Modena itself an important city within the continent, and it is said that he fought against the revolutionary forces in support of France.

In 1796, Napoleon invaded Modena, and despite the attempts that Ercole had made to develop diplomatic relations with the Emperor, it became clear that he was not going to be allowed to stay. On May 7th, Ercole left Modena for Venice. It was not safe for him there, and he was met by French troops who forced him to hand over a large amount of money. His abandonment of his duchy soon led to discontent, and by August, locals were showing their support for Napoleon. They welcomed him to the

city in October of the same year.

This portrait, likely to have been painted by an Italian hand, appears to be a copy of a larger-scale portrait in Modena's Ducal Palace[1]. The artist of this other portrait has not been identified, and it is only reproduced in black and white photographs. Ercole is depicted wearing the Order of the Golden Fleece, a blue sash, and numerous medals, highlighting the important political position that he held at the time it was painted.

1. Inventory number 8096