

THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (19th century)

An enamel plaque of a Lady, dressed as a Muse, possibly as a follower of Apollo, in red gown with green embroidered cloak and holding a Lira da braccio ; rock and landscape background

Circa: 19th century

19th century

Enamel on copper

Oval, 160mm (6 1/4in) high

Later turned wood frame with inner gilded mount

This impressively large enamel of a lady holding a Lira da braccio and bow, follows the composition of artists such as Charles Beaubrun (1604-1692), who were working for the courts of Kings Louis XIII and Louis XIV. The half-landscape background and the sitter's appearance as a muse bring to mind such portraits as that of Olympia Mancini (1640-1708) (now in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm). The sitter's fantastical clothing also suggests that she is wearing a costume with allegorical meaning. Here, she may represent the figure of Music, as she tunes her instrument as a metaphor for harmony.

The sitter also wears many jewels – including a brooch of the head of a man. This is typical of earlier jewels popular in Renaissance Italy, which depicted figures with dark skin. These jewels emerged in Europe during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, a time of significant cultural exchange and interest in "exotica". In Venice, the tradition became a local version of this wider trend. The figures often represented a complex mix of the presence of people of African ancestry in Renaissance Europe, from enslaved individuals to freedmen who held respected positions, such as courtiers or skilled artisans.

The size and quality of the enamel plaque suggests that it hails from Limoges, the centre for fine enamel work such as this in the 19th century.

