THE LIMNER COMPANY



SALOMON-GUILLAUME COUNIS (1785 - 1859)

Portrait enamel of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), in coronation robes

Circa: circa 1812

circa 1812

Enamel on gold

Oval, 35 mm (1 ⅖ in) high

This portrait sits within the tradition of Napoleonic portraiture, which was widely disseminated during his time as Emperor. Whilst many of these were done by Jean Baptiste Isabey (1767-1855) and Jean Baptiste Jaques Augustin (1759-1832), this example is a work painted after a larger-scale portrait by Girodet, one version of which can be found in the Bowes Museum (B.M. 364). Copies of portraits like this example were important within Napoleon's politics. Though there may usually be an association between portraits being copies and being less ‘important’, this was not the way they were seen by Napoleon. This was more of a practical decision, which meant he only had to sit for one artist for many variants of his portraits, in size and medium, to be produced. The recipient of the portrait was likely deemed important, as the enamel has been painted onto gold. This gives the portrait intrinsic value, which is aside from the high aptitude for painting in this difficult medium that the artist has demonstrated.

Counis was born in Switzerland and moved to Paris in 1806 to train under Girodet. Having Girodet as a teacher would have made him a natural choice for producing a copy of his portrait of Napoleon. It is known that Counis had connections with Napoleon and his family, as in 1810, he met his sister Elisa Bonaparte (1777-1820), Grand Duchess of Tuscany. He would later become peintre en émail de la Cour to the Duchess, and lived and worked in Florence under this title. Though the original portrait by Girodet was painted after this date, it is possible that this enamel was taken after a portrait sent by Napoleon to his sister, as he had commissioned Girodet to paint thirty-six copies.

Other portraits of members of Napoleon’s family by Counis, including multiple portraits of Pauline

Bonaparte (1780-1825), his younger sister, are known. However, this enamel is rare as it is one of the only portraits of Napoleon himself by Counis on the market in recent years.

Exhibitions

Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, *Staging power: Napoleon, Charles John and Alexander*, 30 September 2010 - 23 January 2011, p. 161, no. 14 (as Attributed to Jean-François Soiron);

Rosersberg, Château de Skånelaholm, *La mémoire de Napoléon, 200 ans depuis Waterloo*, 2015, p. 43, no. 14.