

THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (18th century)

Portrait miniature of an Officer, likely of the French or Austrian Infantry, wearing a blue ribbon sash likely the Sash and Star of the Polish Order of the White Eagle, and a medal on a red ribbon possibly of the Ordre Royal et Militaire de Saint-Louis

Circa: circa 1770s

circa 1770s

Watercolour on ivory (licence ZUNED54Z)

Oval, 65 mm. (2 9/16 in.) high

Erroneously inscribed on the reverse of the frame, '[indecipherable] Portrait du Jeune Duc de Nouailles [...] Par 'Masse' (Jn Bte) 1745'

Although the label on the reverse of this miniature states that it was painted in 1745, the cut of the sitter's coat would date it to several decades later, circa 1770s. The label also erroneously identifies the sitter of this miniature as 'Jeune Duc de Nouailles' ('the Young Duc de Nouailles'), which cannot be sustained in comparison with other portraits of the duc de Nouailles at this date, Louis de Noailles (1713-1793). The attribution to Jean Baptiste Masse (1687-1767) is incorrect as well, based on both the artist's style and approximate dating of the portrait.

The sitter can however be identified as an officer, likely French or Austrian, wearing military uniform. A decorated soldier at least twice over, he clearly had a distinguished career. The cross hanging from the red ribbon around his neck may be that of the Ordre Royal et Militaire de Saint-Louis (Royal and Military Order of St Louis). It was created in 1693 by King Louis XIV of France as the first military honour that could be awarded to commoners as well as nobility. The blue ribbon sash worn from his left shoulder is harder to identify without associated insignia, but may be that of the Danish Order of the Elephant.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, France and Austria formed an alliance with the First Treaty of Versailles (May 1756), promising mutual assistance if attacked by Great Britain or Prussia. The ink

barely dry, France was soon called to support the Austrians when Prussia attacked Saxony (another Austrian ally) in August 1756. Thus began the Seven Years' War, and the terms of the Franco-Austrian alliance were expanded with a second treaty in May 1757.

Whilst they were unable to defeat Prussia in the Seven Years' War, and the French and Austrians were disappointed with each other's performances during the campaign, the alliance held fast for over three decades. One of the strongest links between the allies was the diplomatic marriage of Marie Antoinette (1755-1793), daughter of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria (1717-1780), to the French dauphin Louis Auguste, later King Louis XVI (1754 –1793) of France.