THE LIMNER COMPANY

FRENCH SCHOOL (18th century)

Portrait oil of a Nobleman, wearing armour, fur-trimmed blue cap, white jabot and powdered wig

Circa: circa 1705

circa 1705

Oil on copper

Oval, 60 mm (2 $^{3}/_{8}$ in) high

Set into the original fishskin case with gold piqué work

The sitter in this portrait was possibly part of the court of the exiled ‘Old Pretender’, James Francis Edward Stuart (1688–1766), who maintained a Jacobite court-in-exile primarily at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye in France. This haven was provided by Louis XIV after the 1688 Glorious Revolution. Recognised by France as the rightful King of England, Scotland, and Ireland, James resided there until 1713, later briefly holding court in Bar-le-Duc before moving to Rome.

The court was served by loyal nobles who helped to raise money for the cause of the ‘King over the Water’, who regularly sent their own portraits back, as well as those of James and his family. Often small oil portraits on copper or portrait miniatures were easy to send – they were portable and able to be hidden. The court employed French artists such as Alexis-Simon Belle (1674–1734), who was the official painter in Paris and produced numerous portraits of James and his court. Smaller versions in oil could be painted at the same time as large portraits.

This portrait is particularly special as it remains in the original travelling case, the metal with stretched fish skin and with a decorative pattern of gold pins known as ‘piqué work’.