THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to JOSEPH WERNER (1637 - 1710)

Philippe II de Bourbon, Duke of Orléans (1674-1723) when a boy, wearing gilt-studded armour and gold-trimmed white cape, the red bow at his neck fastened with lace, landscape background

Circa: circa 1685

Watercolour and bodycolour heightened with gold on vellum

Inscribed on the reverse in pen ‘Philip, Duke of Orleans/ when young/ afterwards Regent of Fr./ Petitot’

Fishskin case with pique work

Oval, 45 by 37 mm

Born to Philip I of Orleáns and Élisabeth Charlotte of the Palatinate, Duchess of Bavaria, Philippe was the grandson of Louis XIII and Ana of Austria, on his father’s side; and of the Palatinate Elector, Karl I Ludwig and Landgrave Charlotte of Hesse-Kassel, on his mother’s. He was Duke of Orléans and Regent of France (1715-1723) until Louis XV came of age. He was also the father-in-law of Louis I of Spain.

Philippe had an unusual upbringing – considered a beautiful child, he was referred to as ‘my little girl’ by his mother, who dressed him in female clothing. He later showed a predilection for cross-dressing, experimenting with women’s wigs and wearing make-up. Married twice, the rumour mill of the time also named numerous male lovers.

In 1692, Philippe made an unusual match in marrying the King's legitimised daughter (and his first cousin), Françoise Marie de Bourbon (known as Mademoiselle de Blois), daughter of the king’s mistress Madame de Montespan. The King was thrilled, and offered a dowry of two million livres with his daughter's hand (not to be paid until the Nine Years' War was over). Philippe’s mother had the

opposite reaction, and upon hearing that her son had agreed to the marriage, slapped his face in full view of the court and turned her back on the king as he bowed to her. Nonetheless, on 18 February 1692, the cousins were married. The young couple, mismatched from the start, never grew to like each other, and soon the young Philippe gave his wife the nickname of Madame Lucifer. In spite of this, they had eight children.

Philippe was also considered a great war hero. He had his first experience of battle at the siege of Mons in 1691, the year before his marriage. He fought with great distinction at the Battle of Steenkerque on 3 August 1692. In the same year he also served at the Siege of Namur. The following year he served at the Battle of Landen; he fought alongside the prince de Conti, who was wounded. During his involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession, he was given a command in Italy (1706) and gained much credit for the Battle of Turin. Later he went to Spain and took part in the Battle of Almansa, a major step in the consolidation of Spain under the Bourbons (1707), where he achieved some important successes.

Always a matter of great speculation and gossip, the deaths within three years of the Dauphin, two of his three sons, his daughter-in-law and the little Duke of Brittany led to widespread rumours that Orléans had poisoned them all to gain the throne. In fact, the Dauphin died of smallpox, the Duc de Berry in a riding accident and the others of measles, but they did great damage to Orléans' reputation, and even Louis XIV seems to have at least half-believed them. Nevertheless, in his will, Louis XIV appointed Orléans president of the council of regency for the young king Louis XV. He was confirmed Regent of France in 1715.

On the majority of the King, which was declared on 15 February 1723, the Duke stepped down as regent. At the death of Cardinal Dubois on 10 August of that year, the young King offered the Duke the position of Prime Minister, and he remained in that office until his death a few months later. Philippe died, as regent, in Versailles on 2 December 1723 in the arms of his mistress the duchesse de Falari and was greatly mourned by Louis XV.

The artist Joseph Werner was born in Switzerland to an artist father of the same name. He gained a reputation for painting miniatures, usually cabinet miniatures. This portrait was likely commissioned when he was summoned to France by Louis XIV. His extraordinary self-portrait, where he shows himself as an allegory of painting, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (dated 1662/ P.168/1931).