

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JEAN PETITOT (1607 - 1691)

Portrait enamel of King Louis XIV (1643-1715), wearing gilt studded armour, the blue sash of l'ordre du Saint-Esprit, a lace jabot with a red ribbon bow; circa 1670

Circa: circa 1670

Enamel

Oval, 25 mm (1 in) high

This likeness of Louis XIV^[1], King of France, can be dated to circa 1670 based on contemporary portraits of Louis in his early 30s, particularly those by Claude Lefebvre (bap.1632-1675).

Jean Petitot is considered one of the greatest portrait enamellers, who popularised the medium in the mid to late 17th century. He journeyed to England early in his career, where he worked at the court of King Charles I and is credited with introducing the portrait enamel to England. Petitot painted portrait enamels of the royal family as well a portrait of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) (Portland Collection), arguably one of his masterpieces.

Petitot endured much of the English Civil War but eventually returned to France circa 1650. There he swiftly obtained an official appointment of Court Painter in Enamel to Louis XIV with a pension and apartment in the Louvre. Petitot was thereafter excessively busy producing portrait enamels of the King and the leading protagonists at his court until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 brought his lucrative position to an end, forcing him to leave France after a brief spell in prison.

Petitot worked in partnership with Jacques Bordier (1616-1684), the cousin of Pierre Bordier from whom he learnt the complex art of enamelling, and later Petitot's own brother-in-law. It's thought that Petitot - as the greater draughtsman - drew the portrait and painted the sitter's face, while Bordier would paint the clothes and background. This division of labour no doubt enabled Petitot to work at pace while producing a vast, high-quality output. Later, Petitot's son (one of 17 children), Jean Petitot the Younger

(1653-1702) also worked in his studio.

While the majority of Petitot's portraits are after oil paintings such as Lefebvre's, he also worked from life. Petitot would produce highly finished sketches in watercolour on parchment^[2] during sittings, from which he would work up the painting in enamel at the studio. This presumably also allowed him to produce multiple versions of portraits, which he did many times over for King Louis.

The high demand for portrait enamels of Louis was driven by the custom of giving *boîtes à portrait* (a term for portraits of the King in large, highly jewelled settings which would have been kept in protective cases) as diplomatic gifts. Over 300 examples of the vainglorious 'Sun King' are listed in the *registre des Présents du Roi* but few survive in their original settings. One very rare example can be found in the [Louvre Collection \[inv. no. OA 12280\]](#) and the portrait enamel itself is closely comparable to the present work.

Petitot's portrait enamels have been coveted for by generations of collectors, including George IV (1762-1820)^[3], John Jones (c.1798/1799-1882)^[4], Alfred de Rothschild (1842-1918), and Baroness Burdett-Coutts (1814-1906).

[1] Near identical versions of this portrait enamel by Jean Petitot exist in the Beauchamp Collection and in the Victoria & Albert Museum [accession no. 641-1882]. The former was erroneously called Philippe de France, duc d'Orleans (which can be discounted as the duc had a more oval face) and the latter as an unidentified man in armour. The present sitter can however be positively identified as Louis from a comparable enamel in the Louvre collection [inv. no. OA 12280]. The likeness to his iconography is also undeniable.

[2] Only 3 of Petitot's sketches are known to have survived and all 3 were once in the J. P. Morgan Collection.

[3] Over 50 portrait enamels by Petitot can be found in the Royal Collection today.

[4] See the Jones Bequest at the Victoria & Albert Museum.