FOSTER & GANE

A rare Limoges enamel convex roundel portrait of a bearded man by Léonard Limosin (c.1505 - c.1577)

£48,000



REF: 5663

Diameter: 14.5 cm (5.7")

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Description

The half-length portrait on a midnight blue ground depicting the sitter holding gloves in his right hand. Monogrammed L.L. to the bottom right for Léonard Limosin.

France, circa 1550s

Provenance: The Legh Family, Adlington Hall, Cheshire. From the Drawing Room, where it hung beneath a portrait of Uriah Legh. Purchased directly from Adlington Hall by Foster & Gane.

Condition: Areas of the enamel sensitively restored. Condition report available on request

This fine depiction of a bearded man holding his gloves is a rare portrait by Léonard Limosin in the form of a roundel. A rectangular, and stylistically distinct, version of the same portrait, equally inscribed L.L., was formerly in the Rothschild collection and sold at Christie's Paris on
5 November 2014 (lot 35).

The unidentified sitter is lacking the chain around his neck in the present version of the portrait, as well as showing a longer, more markedly forked beard. The clothing and facial features, in particular the delicate stippling of the shading, are arguably less stylised and more finely painted than in the Rothschild plaque, making the present portrait a particularly evocative likeness.

Our roundel hails from the Legh family collection at Adlington Hall, whose oldest extant part dates to the late 15th century. According to family legend, the sitter is said to represent Cardinal Campeggio (1474-1539), who was sent to England in 1528 to try the case between King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. The plaque is believed to have been given by Campeggio to Cardinal Wolsey, who 'in turn is believed to have given it to the Leghs'. This narrative is sadly implausible, not least because the portrait cannot date as early as the 1520s.

The subtly shaded green ledge with fabric below on which the figure rests is a characteristic feature of Limosin's portraits from the 1540s to the 1560s; it finds a parallel, for example, in the presumed portrait of Antoine de Bourbon at the Frick Collection, New York (object number:
1916.4.18). The same enamel provides a stylistic comparison for the appearance of the cap and the rendering of facial features and the beard, with long, straight strands of hair. Comparisons in scale and style can also be drawn to the roundel in the Waddesdon Bequest in the British Museum, which is presumed to be a portrait of Francis de Lorraine, Duke of Guise (object number: WB.25). This was most likely part of a series of roundels commissioned for the wedding of Antoine of Bourbon and Jeanne d'Albret. Not all accounted for, our roundel could well have been part of the same commission.

Though the sitter remains anonymous, we can certainly deduce he was a man of high standing. There are three key elements of our roundel that suggest the status of the sitter: firstly, the fact that he is clasping gloves signifies his ownership of a fiefdom; secondly, the silver detailing in his clothing - only princes of the blood were allowed to be seen "wearing, or having on their person and gold or silver fabric. or any material of gold or of silver [...] either in their robes, sayes, doublets,
trunk hose, the trimmings of their clothing, ornaments, or anything else"; finally, and m...

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