

Rotation 6:

From Revolution to Empire: French Miniatures from 1795–1805

During the intense social and political upheaval of the French Revolution (1789–99), patrons continued to commission portraits in miniature, but they were not immune to the changes that the Revolution brought about in fashion, or to the climate of anxiety that gripped the nation.

Four men painted in 1795 represent conservative attitudes toward male portraiture during a critical year between the Reign of Terror (1793–94), during which tens of thousands of people were executed, and the Directory (1795–99), which struggled to restore order to the nation. François Dumont's *Portrait of a Man* represents his sitter in a delicate cream-colored waistcoat and billowing necktie [3]. Set against a pale blue background, Dumont creates a lighter atmosphere than we see in portraits by Charles de Chatillon and Lié Louis Périn [4, 2]. In Chatillon's *Portrait of a Man*, the sitter wears a miniature with a wheat sheaf made of hair—a reminder of a loved one [fig. A, to the right].

Périn's *Portrait of Noël-François Charles Cailles des Fontaines* is also restrained and introspective, appropriate for this sitter who was a lawyer at bailiff's court in the provincial city of Caen. Marie Gabrielle Capet was an early female member of the French Academy and skilled in pastel, oil painting, and miniatures. Her *Portrait of a Man in a Landscape* ambitiously incorporates a scene in which a man rows a boat against a rocky coast [5]. The seaside setting probably relates to the vocation of the man represented and casts him in a dramatic light. This work was originally the lid of a snuff box, the bezel of which has been converted to a frame.

Dumont was an important figure in French miniature painting, and his work spans pre- and post-revolutionary France. We do not know the identity of the sitter in his *Portrait of a Woman in a Brown Dress* [1]. The rich, dark tones create a quiet, introspective mood, drawing attention to her warm and open expression. The tenor is quite different in Dumont's *Portrait of Mademoiselle Marie-Anne Adelaide Le Normand* [7]. She was a fortuneteller consulted by revolutionary leaders and Empress Josephine. After having his fortune told, one visitor described her this way: "It was impossible for imagination to conceive a more hideous being. She looked like a monstrous toad, bloated and venomous. She had one wall-eye, but

the other was a piercer . . . the walls of the room were covered with huge bats, nailed by their wings to the ceiling, stuffed owls, cabalistic signs, skeletons."

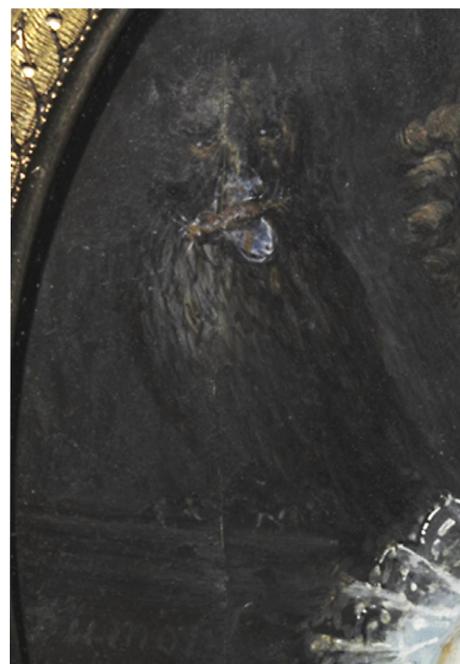


fig. A (top)
Detail of Charles
de Chatillon's
Portrait of a Man

fig. B (bottom)
Detail of François
Dumont's *Portrait*
of Mademoiselle
Marie-Anne
Adelaide Le
Normand