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EST. 1817

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Corneille de la Haye, called Corneille de (The
Hague c.1500/10 – 1575 Lyon)

Madeleine of Valois, Queen of Scotland (1520 – 1537)

Oil on oak panel

5 ½ x 4 ⅝ in. (13.8 x 11.8 cm.)

Painted c.1536 – May 1537



Provenance

Private collection, France, from at least the mid-19th Century, and very likely substantially longer, until 2019.

This beautifully preserved portrait on panel by the Franco-Flemish painter Corneille de la Haye, called Corneille de Lyon, depicts Madeleine de Valois (1520 – 1537), the fifth child and third daughter of the French king, François I. Painted when the artist was at the height of his powers, soon after his arrival at the Valois court in Lyon, the singular virtuosity with which the artist has captured the sweet, slightly melancholy expression of the young princess, places this portrait among the most ravishingly beautiful and endearing of all Corneille's *oeuvre*. The simplicity seems to speak of piety and devotion, while its diminutive scale – even smaller than is usual for this artist – accentuates the jewel-like quality.

This is the only wholly autograph portrait of Madeleine by Corneille known to exist. Other related versions include a *tondo*, in which she wears the same dress (Harvard Art Collection, hitherto identified as an 'Unknown Woman').¹ Two further portraits of Madeleine by the artist, in a different dress with ermine sleeves, were presumably painted posthumously – one at Versailles, and the other previously at Blois (stolen, location unknown today).² The addition of ermine to her later iconography was perhaps to represent her status as Queen. In our portrait, however, Madeleine's sleeves are fashioned from black and

¹ See Anne Dubois de Groer, 'Corneille de La Haye dit Corneille de Lyon', Arthena 1996, ADD-7, p.264.

² Anne Dubois de Groer, *ibid.*, 11 & 11A, pp. 112 – 113.

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white silk, similar to the dress worn by her sister-in-law, Catherine de' Medici (1519 – 1589) in a portrait by Corneille de Lyon, also dated to around 1536 (Polesden Lacey, National Trust).³

Madeleine's necklace, with its lozenge-shaped diamonds interspersed with pearls and rubies, set in between gold aglets, is identical to the one she wears in the group miniature of her mother Claude of France, surrounded by her three surviving daughters and younger sister Renée, along with Eleanor of Hapsburg, from *Le livre d'Heures de la reine Catherine de Médicis*, in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In both, Madeleine wears a dusky red cap, decorated with a circlet of gold and precious stones, possibly also pearls and diamonds. The small rubies in Madeleine's necklace, their size consistent with a virgin bride, are the alter ego of roses in the lore of lapidary, and both are primary attributes of Venus. The rose stands for the pleasure and pain of love and the ruby the same, but also for blood and for passion. Pearls, like Venus, are born of the sea and the shell and are thus one of her many attributes. Consequently, the pearls and diamonds together are likely to be a signal to the recipient of Madeleine's enduring love, James V of Scotland.

It would have been painted around the time of James and Madeleine's courtship and marriage, *circa* 1536 – May 1537. As part of the 'Auld Alliance' between France and Scotland, under the terms of the Treaty of Rouen, James V was able to claim a French princess as his wife, and although he was initially contracted to a 'daughter of the Prince of the Blood', Marie de Bourbon, when the Scottish king travelled to France to meet his betrothed in September 1536, he instead fell in love with Francis I's favourite daughter, sixteen-year-old Princess Madeleine. The feeling was apparently mutual, and the couple persuaded the French king to break the contract with Marie de Bourbon, and give consent to their marriage. This he did reluctantly, as Madeleine had notoriously delicate health – she was already racked with tuberculosis. Nonetheless, they were married at Notre Dame on 1 January 1537, waiting till the milder weather of spring before they left for Scotland, in turn providing us with a neat *terminus ante quem* for the portrait. They arrived in Leith on 19 May 1537, but by this time Madeleine's health was fast deteriorating, and on 7 July 1537 she died in her husband's arms at Holyroodhouse – before she had even had her coronation ceremony. The royal marriage was one of the shortest in history, a mere six months and seven days. Madeleine's short reign led to her being known as James's 'Summer Queen'.

³ Anne Dubois de Groer, *ibid.*, 18, pp. 121 – 122.

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Madeleine's death precipitated the British royal lineage we know today. Had she lived to produce an heir, there would have been no Mary Queen of Scots, daughter of James V by his second wife, Marie de Guise. Mary's son, James VI of Scotland and I of England, would not have been born or succeeded Elizabeth I to the English throne. Nor would his son Charles I have been born, and the Civil War and Cromwell's interregnum might never have happened. There would have been no Caroline Restoration and the Hanoverians would never have succeeded to the English throne. We'd never have had Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II would not be here today. It is a fascinating historical 'what if?'