

New Provenance Discovery of Eighteenth-Century French Portraiture

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Fig. 1: Dubois, Portrait of Henriette, Duchess of Orléans, as Hebe, 1790, oil on canvas. Bequest of Marjorie Merriweather Post, 1973 (51.5).

The oval portrait of [Louise Henriette de Bourbon-Conti, Duchess of Orléans](#) (51.5), currently hanging in the Adam bedroom at Hillwood, has been somewhat of a mystery (Fig. 1). While it is not currently known from whom Marjorie Post acquired the painting, photographic documentation of the American Embassy in Brussels indicates that she likely purchased it while living in the Soviet Union between 1937 and 1938, before arriving in Belgium (Fig. 2).

Louise Henriette de Bourbon-Conti (1726-59), Duchess of Orléans, married Louis Philippe, Duc de Chartres, in 1743. The Duchess was a French princess and great-granddaughter of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. Her husband later became the Duke of Orléans, the First Prince of the Blood, and the most important personage after the French royal family. In this portrait, the Duchess is portrayed as Hebe, goddess of youth and the daughter of Zeus and Hera according to Greek mythology. Hebe was a remarkably popular subject in art between 1750 and 1880. Hillwood's portrait has always accurately been believed to be a copy of the original version painted by Jean-Marc Nattier in 1745, today conserved in the collection of the National Museum in Stockholm (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Royal bedroom illustrating the Dubois portrait above the bed, American Embassy, Brussels, c. 1938-39. Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens Archives.



Fig. 3: Jean-Marc Nattier, The Duchesse de Chartres as Hebe, 1744, oil on canvas, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (inv. no. NM 1186).

However, unlike the original, Hillwood's portrait bears unusual red and white numbering on the front, including the inscription "2173" in red on the upper left-hand corner, the inscription "54" in large white letters on the upper right side, and the inscription "603" in very small white letters on the lower right (Fig. 4a-c). On the reverse, the painting is inscribed "Duchesse d'Orleans, mother of the current Duke, by Dubois, a student of David, 1790" (Fig. 5). Until recently, the meaning of these curious numbers and for whom this portrait was commissioned remained unknown.

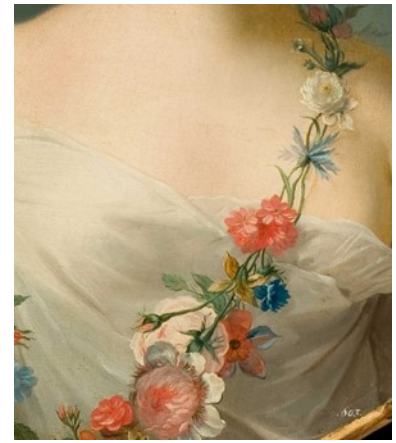


Fig. 4a-c: Details of the red and white inventory marks on the front of Hillwood's portrait. Listed in the catalogue of the King's collection as 2173 (8) and bears the little white number on the front "603."

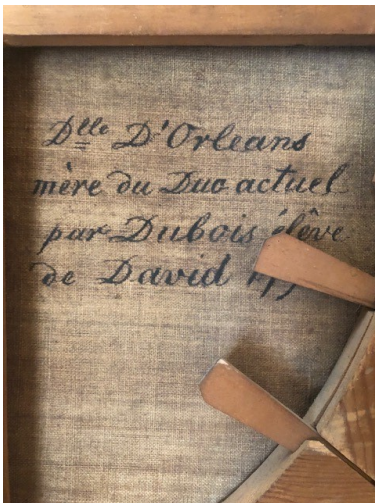


Fig. 5: Inscription on the reverse of the painting "Duchesse d'Orleans, mother of the current Duke, by Dubois, a student of David, 1790."

Thanks to the recent scholarship conducted by Dorota Juszcak, curator of paintings at the Royal Lazienki Museum in Warsaw, we now know that between 1789 and 1791, King Stanislaw August Poniatowski of Poland ordered a series of French personalities from the studio of the French neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) (Fig. 6). According to Juszcak, fifty-eight portraits of French subjects were made by David's best pupils. Eleven paintings of women were oval in shape, while the paintings of men were rectangular in format.

By September 1790, six paintings had been rejected by David, including a portrait of the Duchess of Orléans. As a result, a second version of the same subject was completed that same year by David's student, Dubois, and likely retouched by David. Two portraits of the Duchess of Orléans are mentioned in the first batch of paintings sent from Paris to Warsaw in 1791 and both versions are listed in the catalogue of the King's collection.¹ The earlier, rejected version is now in the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland (Fig. 7) and the second "accepted" copy belongs to Hillwood.



Left: Fig. 6: Marcello Bacciarelli (1731-1818), Portrait of Stanislaw August Poniatowski in Coronation Robes, 1764, oil on canvas. Royal Castle, Warsaw, Poland (inv. No ZKW/2729).



Right: Fig. 7: Portrait of Louise Henriette, Duchess of Orléans, painted by the Studio of Jacques-Louis David, after Nattier, Royal Castle, Warsaw, Poland (inv. no. ZKW/3442), phot. Andrzej Ring, Lech Sandzewicz. The portrait is listed in the catalogue of the King's collection as 2173 (7) and bears the small white number on the front "520."

After the King's death in 1798, the collection was inherited by his nephew Prince Józef Poniatowski (1763-1813). The majority of the collection, including the portraits from the French series, was subsequently sold in 1821 by the King's niece, Countess Maria Teresa Tyszkiewicz, to the art-dealer Antoni Fusi and taken to Russia. As a result, the red inventory mark "2173" has now been identified as the collection inventory mark of King Stanislaw August Poniatowski and the white number "603" represents the 1809 inventory mark from the depot of the Royal Library gathered by the King's nephew prior to being sold. Though the exact meaning of the inscription "54" remains unclear, it is not present on the Warsaw portrait, so it likely relates to a nineteenth-century Russian collection.

It is evident from correspondence between Marjorie Post and curator Marvin Ross in 1966 that Post was always intrigued by the portrait of the *Duchess of Orléans* and hoped to someday uncover additional information about its history.² While it seems probable that Marjorie acquired a royal commissioned portrait without knowing, she was a passionate collector of French eighteenth-century paintings and owned the Nattier portrait of the [Duchess of Parma](#) (51.4) and was likely aware of the original Nattier painting in Stockholm. Not only is it extremely gratifying to uncover additional provenance among objects in Hillwood's collection, but this new provenance discovery further exemplifies Post's interest in royal courts outside of France and Russia.

1. See D. Juszcak, H. Małachowicz, *The Royal Castle in Warsaw: a Complete Catalogue of Paintings c. 1520-c. 1900* (Warsaw: The Royal Castle in Warsaw, 2013), pp. 186-188.

2. Object file for 51.5, Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens. Correspondence between Marvin Ross and Marjorie Post indicates that the portrait was in Post's New York apartment at the Sheraton East in 1960 and may not have arrived at Hillwood until the late 1960s.

Facilities Drives Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

Brian Greenfield, Head of Maintenance and Facilities

The facilities team at Hillwood has been putting a lot of effort into saving energy. Since December 2017, we have cycled out more than 450 incandescent and sodium-halide light bulbs in favor of the more energy efficient Light Emitting Diode (LED) type. The change to this long life and energy conscious alternative not only saves a great deal on Hillwood's electrical bill but also reduces carbon emissions and the labor hours needed to replace them. A typical hardware store light bulb will last approximately twelve months and uses over \$30 in electricity. A comparable LED lightbulb will last five years or longer and uses only \$3 a year in electricity. That is a ninety percent energy reduction! By compounding our savings and using LED bulbs that generate very little heat, cooling costs have been significantly reduced as well.



Hillwood's facilities department receives the first sustainability project award from DCSEU