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OVAL MEDALLION DEPICTING A FULL-LENGTH PORTRAIT OF LOUIS XIV, AFTER A PAINTING BY HYACINTHE RIGAUD

PARIS

LOUIS-PHILIPPE PERIOD, CIRCA 1840

PAINTED ENAMEL

DIMENSIONS :

WITHOUT FRAME : HEIGHT 25 3/16 IN – WIDTH : 20 1/16 IN

WITH FRAME : HEIGHT 40 IN – WIDTH 30 IN

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The enameling artist was directly inspired by the famous painting of Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743) depicting King Louis XIV, 63 years old in the full-length clad in a ceremonial costume. Several versions of this painting are known to exist, most notably one in The Louvre Museum and another in the National museum of Château de Versailles shown below.

Hyacinthe RIGAUD, *Portrait en pied de Louis XIV âgé de 63 ans en grand costume royal*, 1702.
Oil on canvas, 313 x 205 cm, National Museum of Château de Versailles, Inv. MV2041

Considering however the oval format, the enameller had to make minor changes to its composition. A number of different techniques were necessary for the creation of this work. To begin, an oval-shaped background in beaten and polished metal shows a perspective view with pilasters, columns and alcoves, on top of which the artist placed an extensive drapery made from darkened metal illuminated with golden heraldic lily and foliated scrolls that frame the royal figure. The full-length portrait of the King himself is depicted in polychrome enamel that was probably painted using the technique known as *de l'email au pinceau*, a method that originated among the

painters of clocks in 18th century Geneva. This exceptional blend of techniques, together with the royal theme, allows us to date the medallion to the end of the 1830s or the start of the 1840s, a period that saw the start of a new enthusiasm for the painted enamels of Limoges and the development of new experimental techniques. As far as we know, there is no registered portraits of Louis XIV painted in enamel, whether he is standing with a royal outfit or only showing a portrait bust. The piece presented here is therefore unique.

For more than two hundred years, the art of painted enamels, developed in Limoges in the 15th and 16th centuries, had almost disappeared. It was not until the rediscovery of old enamels at the end of the 18th century, but especially the first half of the following century, to see the emergence of new particularly active artistic centers. Indeed, the revival of painted enamels in France begins with a better knowledge of this type of works of art and in an artistic context prone to its resurgence.

When in 1791 Alexandre Lenoir opened the Musée des Monuments français he included a number of enameled Limoges panels, which immediately aroused the curiosity of certain collectors. But it was actually at the beginning of the 19th century, at a time when the neo-medieval style was popularized by such works as Victor Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris, that the importance of this aesthetic came to be more widely recognized. Old Limousin enamels then reappear punctually in public sales in the first half of the nineteenth century and much more widely in the second half of the century.

Around 1830-1840, as the trade of old enamels grew, so did the demand amongst collectors. Consequently a number of artists took up this technique and soon demonstrated a level of ability and mastery that was often far superior to that of their Limousin predecessors. The leaders in the field achieved this by developing complex techniques that they combined with their knowledge as gold and silversmiths. It can be asserted that the first examples of enamels that were produced using techniques previously found only amongst silver and goldsmiths are the works of François-Désiré Froment-Meurice (1802-1855) and Charles Wagner (1799-1841), both already well known at the time. The work of the latter of these two is particularly interesting because at the end of the 1820s Wagner patented some techniques linked to enamel work. Among these inventions is one, patented in 1837, which corresponds to a metal alloy used as a support for large scale enameled figures.