

Master of Claude de France (Tours, active c. 1508 to the early 1520s)

***Saint Luke* (c. 184 x 121 mm.)**

France, Tours, c. 1515-20

Seated before a podium, Saint Luke gazes dreamily at the Gospel he is writing, as his symbol, the ox, sits beside him. The soft lighting, luminous drapery, delicate colors, and fine brushwork confirm the hand of the Master of Claude de France. Baptized in 1975 by Charles Sterling in a monograph on two manuscripts made for Claude de France (1499-1524), daughter of Anne of Brittany and Queen of France, the Master of Claude de France has taken his place as one of the major painters of the French Renaissance. Active in Tours, influenced by Jean Poyet, and probably trained by Jean Bourdichon, the Master of Claude de France produced a series of masterpieces during his relatively short career. The most striking were those made for Claude herself. Around its frame, the present miniature displays the cordelière—symbol of Anne of Brittany, adopted by her daughter Claude.

This exquisite miniature comes from a Book of Hours of which six full-page illuminations are known. Two illuminations in Paris at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (M. 94-95; Brugerolles, 1994, nos. 11-12) represent Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Genevieve and include the text of other Suffrages—Saints Clare and Jerome—on their reverse sides (M.94-95). Two others in New York (Collection Frances Beatty and Allen Adler) depict All Male Martyrs and All Franciscan Saints (Hindman, 1998, nos. 16-17; Wieck, 2004, 251, fig. 11.7; Wieck, 2010, p. 285, fig. 10). The miniatures of Saint Luke and Saint Mark were exhibited in Paris in 1904 (Avril and Reynaud, 1993, pp. 319-21; and Wieck, 2010, p. 287, as “untraced”).

In 1993, Reynaud related the miniatures of Saint Luke and Saint Mark to those of the same subjects in a Prayer Book of Claude de France recently given to the Morgan Library by Mrs. Alexandre Rosenberg (MS M.1166). At the same time, she underscored Bourdichon’s influence on them. Similar compositions appear in miniatures in the Musée Marmottan (MS 154) and the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute (no. 1955.1873) also from a dismembered Book of Hours. Tantalizing are the similarities in page size as reconstructed by Kay Sutton (Paris, Christies, 25 June, 2009, lot 122) between a previously unknown calendar from a dismembered Book of Hours (now also Morgan Library and Museum, M.1171) and the present group of miniatures. Could these fragments all come from the same Book of Hours, reflecting the artist’s late style between 1517 and 1520?

Provenance: Collection of Comte Paul Durrieu, Paris (1855-1925); Private Collection, Europe.

Literature: Avril and Reynaud, 1993; Brugerolles, 1994; Hindman, 1998; Paris, 1904, nos. 123-24; Sterling, 1975; Wieck, 2004; Wieck, 2010.