

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM  
FINE ARTS

**GUILLAUME GUILLON-LETHIÈRE**

Sainte-Anne, Guadeloupe 1760 - Paris 1832

French School

**PORTRAIT OF ADELE PAPIN PLAYING THE HARP**

Oil on canvas

H. 1,79 m; W. 1,47 m

Dedicated on the blue books of sheet music: *Dédié / à sa maman / par / ADELE PAPIN*

Signed and dated lower left: *Gme / LE THIÈRE / AN. 7. [1798-1799]*

DATE: 1798-1799

PROVENANCE:

The sitter's family

Private collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Louvre Archives, KK\*26, entry for Year VII (1799), n°221.

L. M. Henriques, "Coup d'œil sur le Salon de 1799", *Mercure de France*, 1799.

Jean-François Heim, *Les Salons de peinture de la Révolution française 1789-1799*, Paris, 1989, p. 278.

Geneviève Madec Capy, *Guillaume Guillon-Lethière peintre d'histoire (1760-1832)*, Phd dissertation in History of Art and Archaeology, Université Paris IV, 1998, supervised by Bruno Foucart, volume II, p. 398, P 37 (as location unknown).

EXHIBITIONS:

1799 Salon, n° 218, "Une femme à la harpe".

**Primarily a history painter, Guillaume Guillon-Lethière<sup>1</sup> was a major artist who practiced with equal ease all the other genres, proving his original and varied talent. Although he belongs fully to the Neoclassical movement through his choice of themes, he also shared the sensitivities of the precursors of Romanticism.**

Guillaume Le Tiers (1760-1832), or Le Thièrè (because he was the third sibling), was the illegitimate son of the Procureur du Roi in Guadeloupe, Pierre Guillon who was from Martinique, and of Marie-Françoise, a freed Black slave. He would change his name to Guillon-Lethière after being recognized by his father, at the age of 40, in April 1799.

Guillon-Lethière was placed with Jean-Baptiste Decamps (1714-1791) at the École Gratuite de Dessin of Rouen in 1774. Three years later, he joined the studio of Gabriel-François Doyen (1726-1806) in Paris, who seems at the time to have been the essential master for anyone with ambitions to become a history painter.<sup>2</sup> Guillon-Lethière entered the competitions of the

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<sup>1</sup> The doctoral dissertation by Geneviève Madec-Capy, *Guillaume Guillon-Lethière peintre d'histoire (1760-1832)*, Université de Paris IV, 1998, supervised by Bruno Foucart, has not been published.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph-Marie Vien (1716-1806) left to direct the French Academy in Rome, and Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) only opened his studio in Paris around 1780-1781.

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Académie Royale and won the second Grand Prix in 1784 with the *Canaanite Woman at the Feet of Christ*.<sup>3</sup> In October 1786,<sup>4</sup> thanks to the support of the Comte d'Angiviller, Director of the Bâtiments du Roi, and the patronage of Madame de La Pallue, he was awarded a *brevet de pensionnaire* at the French Academy in Rome, usually only given to the winners of the first Grand Prix. He lived at the Palazzo Mancini in Rome for four years from 1786 to 1790.<sup>5</sup>



Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *A Young Woman Leaning on a Portfolio*, 1799, oil on canvas, H. 0,64 m; W. 0,56 m, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, USA.

From 1793, Guillon-Lethière exhibited at the Salon and first attracted the public's attention in 1798 when he received a prize of encouragement at the Salon<sup>6</sup>. Lucien Bonaparte, with whom he shared republican ideals and who remained a close friend all his life,<sup>7</sup> invited him in 1801 to accompany him to Madrid where he had been appointed Ambassador, to help acquire a collection of Spanish masterpieces. The painter spent two years in Spain.

Guillon-Lethière was appointed director of the French Academy in Rome in 1807 and stayed there for ten years, instead of the regulatory six, and was praised for his good management.<sup>8</sup> In 1818, he received the Legion of Honour decoration and was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts,<sup>9</sup> and the following year, he was appointed professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.<sup>10</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup>The *Canaanite Woman at the Feet of Christ*, 1784, oil on canvas, H. 1,47 m; W. 1,14 m, Angers, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 2013.22.11.

<sup>4</sup>A. de Montaignon and J. Guiffrey (éd.), *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome*, vol. XV: 1785-1790, Paris, 1905, p. 36, p. 39-40.

<sup>5</sup>Annie and Gabriel Verger, *Dictionnaire Biographique des Pensionnaires de l'Académie de France à Rome 1666 – 1968*, vol. II, Dijon, 2011, p. 940-941 (Arrival on 12 November 1786, Departure on 12 November 1790).

<sup>6</sup>He won a prize for *Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos*, oil on canvas, H. 3,15 m; W. 3,48 m, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 6226.

<sup>7</sup>Guillon-Lethière painted at least two portraits of him: the *Portrait of Lucien Bonaparte*, 1806, oil on canvas, H. 2,23 m; W. 1,63 m, sale, Paris, 15 December 1993, no. 89; a copy by Robert Lefèvre (1755-1830) after Guillon-Lethière of the portrait *Lucien Bonaparte, Prince de Canino* is at Rueil-Malmaison, Châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau.

<sup>8</sup>Quatremère de Quincy, "Notice historique sur la vie et les ouvrages de M. Lethière", *Suite du Recueil de notices historiques lues dans les séances publiques de l'Académie royale des beaux-arts à l'Institut*, Paris, 1837, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup>Annie and Gabriel Verger, *Dictionnaire biographique des pensionnaires de l'Académie de France à Rome 1666 – 1968*, vol. II, Dijon, 2011, p. 941 (elected on 28 March 1818 member of the Institut at the Académie des Beaux-Arts).

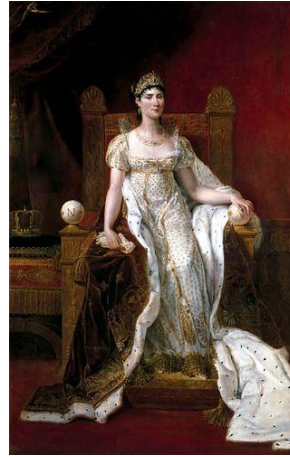
<sup>10</sup>Frédéric Chappéy, "Les professeurs de l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts (1794-1873)", *Romantisme*, 1996, no. 93, Arts et institutions, p. 99 (appointed professor on 10 October 1831, until his death in 1832).

# JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM FINE ARTS

1822, he painted his famous *Oath of the Ancestors*<sup>11</sup> a forceful tribute to the insurgents of Haiti. The prominent part he played in the art world was remarkable given his status as an illegitimate child, and even more as he was a mulatto, which did not facilitate his career as an artist.



Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Marie-Anne Élisabeth Bonaparte, Grand-Duchess of Tuscany (1777-1820)*, 1806, oil on canvas, H. 2,17 m; W. 1,41 m, Versailles, Musée National du Château



Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Joséphine de Beauharnais, Empress of the French (1763-1814)*, 1807, oil on canvas, H. 2,25 m; W. 1,49 m, Versailles, Musée National du Château

## Portrait Gallery

Far from keeping to subjects from ancient history that he depicted in very large works, such as *Brutus Sentencing his Sons to Death*<sup>12</sup> and *The Death of Virginia*,<sup>13</sup> Guillon-Lethière also proved to be a talented portraitist.<sup>14</sup> In her catalogue raisonné, Geneviève Madec-Capy<sup>15</sup> mentions six portraits of women including our painting as well as two formal portraits: *Élisabeth Bonaparte*<sup>16</sup> and *Joséphine de Beauharnais*<sup>17</sup>, respectively the Emperor's sister and wife.

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<sup>11</sup> Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *The Oath of the Ancestors*, 1822, oil on canvas, H. 4,00 m; W. 3,00 m, Port-au-Prince, Banque de la République d'Haïti.

<sup>12</sup> *Brutus Sentencing his Sons to Death*, 1811, oil on canvas, H. 4,40 m; W. 7,83 m, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 6228.

<sup>13</sup> *The Death of Virginia*, 1828, oil on canvas, H. 4,58 m; W. 7,78 m, Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. 6229.

<sup>14</sup> Aside from history painting, including ancient and modern history, allegories and religious painting, Lethière also made portraits and genre paintings, and even landscapes. See Geneviève Capy, Gérard-Florent Laballe, "Guillaume Guillon dit Lethière", *La Révolution en Haute-Normandie 1789-1802*, Rouen, 1988, p. 308-309.

<sup>15</sup> G. Madec-Capy, *Guillaume Guillon-Lethière peintre d'histoire (1760-1832)*, dissertation Paris IV, 1998: P13, *Portrait of a young woman musician*, London, private collection; P38, *A Young Woman Leaning on a Portfolio*, Worcester USA, Worcester Art Museum; P59 *Marie-Anne Élisabeth Bonaparte, Grand-Duchess of Tuscany*, Versailles, Musée National du Château; P60 *Joséphine de Beauharnais, Empress of the French*, Versailles, Musée National du Château; P118 *Portrait of Mademoiselle Lethière*, Quimper, Musée des Beaux-Arts (bust length portrait).

<sup>16</sup> *Marie-Anne Élisabeth Bonaparte, Grand-Duchess of Tuscany*, 1806, oil on canvas, H. 2,17 m; W. 1,41 m, Versailles, Musée National du Château.

<sup>17</sup> *Joséphine de Beauharnais, Empress of the French*, 1807, oil on canvas, H. 2,25 m; W. 1,49 m, Versailles, Musée National du Château.

# JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM

## FINE ARTS

Signed *Le Thière* and dated *an VII*, our painting was shown at the 1799 Salon alongside another portrait,<sup>18</sup> which is similar in its sensitivity but simpler and smaller and may depict one of his pupils.

### **Mademoiselle Papin**

Mademoiselle Adèle Papin (1782-1860), shown in our portrait at the age of 17, came from the Landes *département* in western France. In 1802, she married the Comte Charles Jacques Nicolas Duchâtel (1751-1844), who was thirty years older than her, and a first son, Tanneguy (1803-1867), was born from this union in February 1803. The Comtesse Duchâtel, who attracted the attention of Napoleon Bonaparte, was quickly invited to join Josephine's palace ladies. Soon, rumours spread about a liaison between the Emperor and our sitter, which went as far as to suggest that her second child Napoléon Joseph Léon (1804-1884), was perhaps not the Comte's son...

### **The Harp**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the harp became one of the most popular musical instruments among European aristocracy, especially in France. Some were true works of art, where the arch and soundboard were ornately decorated. Although the style of the instrument shown on our painting is, according to Thierry Maniguet curator at the Musée de la Musique in Paris, typical of the final decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is hard to attribute it to a specific master luthier.<sup>19</sup>

We also know that Adèle Papin was in contact with the harpist and composer François-Joseph Naderman (1781-1835), who was a son of the famous harp maker Jean Henri Naderman. François-Joseph dedicated a collection of sonatas he composed for the harp to her,<sup>20</sup> about ten years after our painting was finished.

### **A Passionate Harpiste**

The artist has reproduced faithfully the precise position of a harpist. Adèle has raised the instrument held by her legs towards her right shoulder; her right hand is properly positioned, the fingers resting on the strings and the wrist is bent, as was the habit. The lovely Empire dress spreading on the ground however does not seem appropriate since the musician has to move the seven pedals continually. Guillon-Lethière has also described each detail of the instrument precisely, especially the festoons on the soundboard, the delicate ornaments towards the top of the column and the tuning pins that hold the strings on the volute shaped arch. The painter has shown equal zeal in depicting the strings whose sinuous ends indicate that they have recently been strung, suggesting that the young woman was a regular player.

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<sup>18</sup> *A Young Woman Leaning on a Portfolio*, 1799, oil on canvas, H. 0,64 m; W. 0,56 m, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, USA (exhibited at the 1799 Salon, no. 219).

<sup>19</sup> Email of 4 May 2021. The fact that the pedal box appears to be slightly wider has led him to suggest certain makers: Antoine Chaillot (active in Paris between about 1778-1816), his son Pierre Chaillot (about 1760-1839), Henry Holtzman (received as a master luthier in 1782, active in Paris), Pierre Krupp, Renault & Chatelain (non-exhaustive list). However he excludes Sébastien Érard.

<sup>20</sup> François-Joseph Naderman, *Sonatas for the Harp*, about 1810. Sale Paris, Drouot, 11 June 2013, no. 70.