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DISCOVERIES

Portrait of Louis I of Orléans Found in The Agony in the Garden



Prado Museum conservators have uncovered a portrait of Louise I, son of Charles V of France and brother of Charles VI, hidden under overpaint in *The Agony in the Garden*, a 15th-century French painting depicting Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane while Peter, John and James slumber. When a private owner offered it to the Prado for study and potential acquisition, the lab examined it with ultraviolet photography, X-rays, Infra-red reflectography, and tested the pigments and the panel.

The X-rays and Infra-red reflectography revealed the artist had painted two figures on the bottom left which were later painted over with a thick layer of brown. At the feet of the standing Saint Agnes is a kneeling male figure holding a scroll. Dressed in sumptuous clothes that were fashionable around 1400, his posture and position indicates that he was included in the painting because he or his family commissioned the work. Agnes was the patron saint both of his father

King Charles V, to whom he was devoted, and of his wife Valentina Visconti, daughter of the Duke of Milan. There are only three extant portraits of Louis, all of them manuscript illuminations; if the Donor could be confirmed as Louis of Orléans, this would be the only panel painting of him ever found.

Once liberated from their brown prison, the figures were revealed in all their brilliant glory. The colors were far brighter and richer than the colors on the saints and Jesus. The Donor's scroll was found to be inscribed with the first words of the [Psalm 50, aka the Miserere mei](#). This painting is a small piece, probably intended for a use in a private chapel rather than a large church. The Gethsemane theme and the Miserere mei were usually included in funerary artworks, and since Louis' family is not included in the panel, it's likely that it was commissioned by his wife or son after his assassination.



The decorations on the sleeves turned out to be gold nettle leaves and they looked like appliqué rather than a fabric print. The nettle leaf was one of the duke's emblems, one he particularly favored from 1399 until his death in 1407. The distinctive nose and chin are similar in all the images, but his bald pate is only visible in the painting because Louis wears a hat in all three illuminations. He can't wear a hat in Gethsemane, however, because he's in the presence of God, Father and Son, no less.

The work could have been done by Colart de Laon, who worked as a painter and as personal valet to the duke from 1391 until Louis' death. Contemporary sources praise him as one of the most significant artist of the day, but none of his work has been known to survive. For more about the painting and restoration, watch [these subtitled videos](#) on the Prado's website.

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