

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Armand-Thomas Hue, Marquis de Miromesnil

Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741-1828)

Date 1777

Medium Marble

Dimensions 25 1/2 × 22 1/16 × 13 3/4 in. (64.8 × 56 × 35 cm)

Credit Line Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1935

Accession Number 1935.2.78

Currently On View

Second Floor, Room 34, Walnut Room

Commentary The Marquis de Miromesnil (1723-96), of Norman stock, was appointed "premier président" of the Norman parliament at Rouen in 1757. He served in that post until Louis XVI named him "Garde des Sceaux" (Minister of Justice) in 1774. During the Revolution he was briefly imprisoned. It was probably during those years that his title MARQUIS was effaced from the inscription on the back of the Frick bust: A. T. HUE...DE MIROMENIL. FAIT PAR HOUDON EN 1777. Three other versions of the portrait survive, two in marble, one in plaster, all very similar and presumably dependent on the same model, which the sculptor would have done from life. Houdon has suggested the importance and rectitude of this supreme magistrate of French justice through the stability and solidity of his shape and clothing. The layers of stiff, heavy cloth, the ample sleeves swelling from pleated shoulders, the high, tight collar falling in straight lappets, the neatly buttoned cassock all represent the uniform of office. The head as well as the body is encased, the huge, formal wig seeming to inhibit the turn of his attention. But then in exquisite contrast, the face is all mobility and subtle nuance. As one moves around the bust, the expression changes. The sensitive lips seem about to comment with ironic wit on these encumbrances of office. The supple flesh hints at a smile. The eyes, not quite matched in shape, appear to shine, thanks to the sculptor's virtuoso wielding of the chisel. The Frick bust of Miromesnil is dated the same year as Houdon's portrait of the Comtesse du Cayla, also in the Frick. The contrast between them illuminates the range and genius of this master of sculptural techniques, who captured with such acute understanding the special qualities of his subjects. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Madame le Bret, Château de Bretteville, Seine-Inférieure. Marquis de Flers. Henri de Courtivron. Wildenstein. C. Ledyard Blair (1919). Wildenstein. Frick, 1935. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: German, Netherlandish, French and British. Volume IV*. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.