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VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA
(Valencia 1772 – 1850 Madrid)

*PORTRAIT OF AN OFFICER OF THE 18TH
HUSSARS, C. 1812-1813*

Oil on canvas, unlined
96 x 75 cm; 37 5/8 x 29 5/8 in.

Provenance

Private collection, UK, since at least 1967;¹
Anonymous sale, Bonhams, London, 4 December 2024, lot 44 (as Attributed to Jacques-Laurent
Agasse).

Reference Literature

J.L. Díez, *Vicente López [1772–1850]: Vida y Obra. Catálogo Razonado*, Aranjuez 1999.

¹ According to the archival records of A.C. Cooper Photographic Studio, who originally documented the painting, they were commissioned to photograph this work in London, along with another one, for Mr. Paul Larson on 5 January 1967, which would suggest a UK provenance of at least the past 58 years. The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art holds a copy of the image (object number PA-F07397-0015), listed with an old attribution to Jacques-Laurent Agasse.

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In this newly discovered *Portrait of an Officer of the 18th Hussars* Vicente López depicts a young cavalry officer in three-quarter view, his gaze calmly meeting the viewer's own. He wears a dark blue hussar jacket heavily ornamented with rows of braided silver lace, further accentuated by a fur-lined pelisse draped over his left shoulder. The richly textured fur catches the light, lending soft grey and ivory notes that contrast with the regimentally dyed cloth beneath. Around his waist sits a crimson sash secured by tasselled cords, and, at his side, a curved cavalry sabre prominently underscores his martial status. The background transitions subtly from muted greens and browns on the left, where a tree trunk and a rocky outcrop emerge, to a more atmospheric expanse of cool sky on the right, thus framing the officer's poised silhouette.

An especially revealing comparable work for the present portrait is the *Portrait of Pedro Caro Sureda, Marqués de la Romana* (P 522, Fig. 1)², the strong three-quarter-length format and sober atmospheric setting of which reflect nearly identical compositional concerns. Both portraits date from the early 1810s - a phase when Vicente López was refining his approach to martial portraiture - and demonstrate his deft balance of crisp contour, sumptuous fabric, and subtly modulated background.³ In this work, the subject's red collar, gold embroidery, and elegantly pointed stance evoke the same sense of poise and lucid brushwork that animates the Hussar's richly detailed jacket and prominent sabre. Despite differences in the precise cut of the uniform, López's typical handling of red-into-blue chromatic transitions, along with metallic ornament, yields a comparable gravitas. Close parallels may also be found in the *Portrait of Fernando VII con uniforme de capitán general* (P 352, Fig. 2), dated 1814, where the monarch's erect posture, vivid red lapels, and quietly shaded sky

² The numeration of the works follows J.L. Díez, *Vicente López [1772–1850]: Vida y Obra. Catálogo Razonado*, Aranjuez 1999.

³ See Díez (1999) pp. 303-319 and 332-345 for a complete survey of López's portraiture.

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likewise underscore the artist's facility for offsetting bold tonal highlights against a restrained background.

The same inclination to dramatise rank through uniform finery is evident in the *Portrait of Joaquín de Pedro y Llorens, V Marqués de San José* (P 679, Fig. 3), painted around 1810-1812, where López devotes careful attention to details, such as the braided toggles and polished accessories - motifs that directly resonate with the Hussar's pronounced frogging and intricately worked fastenings. A comparable clarity of composition appears in the *Portrait of El Capitán Roche Hastings* (P 609, Fig. 4), probably dating to c.1814-1815, also depicting a British official engaged in the Peninsula War. Here, the sitter's forward-facing stance, set before a neutral or softly clouded backdrop, neatly parallels the Hussar's unwavering bearing, while the dark uniform contrasts with the lively flesh and sash in a manner analogous to the interplay of the Officer's pale fur pelt and saturated jacket. Finally, the *Portrait of El Mariscal Louis Gabriel Suchet, Duque de la Albufera* (P 742, Fig. 5), imbued with the French neoclassical conventions that López deftly incorporated into his broader Spanish academic background, illustrates the painter's reliance on strong frontal focus and crisply executed borders of embroidery. Díez's *catalogue raisonné* mentions two other portraits of "caballero inglés" from circa 1814, namely those of a Mr Reig (P 695)⁴ and a Mr Tuper (P 751)⁵, though no photographic documentation nor dimensions accompany these entries. They were listed under no. 172 in the valuation inventory drawn up in August 1814, following the death of Vicente López's wife. The identification of our canvas with one of these two lost pictures remains a suggestive hypothesis.

Collectively, these five works exemplify Vicente López's hallmark emphasis on vibrant chromatic juxtapositions - often intense red against deep blue or black - and a highly controlled sense of illumination, designed to spotlight the sitter's status and character

⁴ Díez (1999) p. 173.

⁵ Díez (1999) p. 185.

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rather than dissolve them into the environment. Considering these stylistic concerns, the comparable works, and the broader trajectory of López's career, the present portrait could be dated to 1812 in Madrid or to the following year, when the 18th Hussars were actively campaigning in Spain. The regiment's operations spanned significant battles of the Peninsular War - Sahagún and Benavente in 1808, Cacabelos and Corunna in 1809, Burgos in 1812, Morales and Vitoria in 1813, Sorauren later that same year, the crossing into France and the Battle of the Nive in 1813, Orthez in 1814, and ultimately Toulouse in 1814.⁶ The characteristic blue jacket with silver lace and fur pelisse is faithfully captured here, despite the sitter's omission of the typical busby (see Figs 6-7 as a reference). Having converted from the 18th (King's Irish) Regiment of (Light) Dragoons into a hussar regiment in 1807, these troops remained in the Peninsula until 1814, making the discovery of this English soldier's portrait by the Valencian master an extremely rare and historically significant find. It documents an intriguing instance of Allied officer patronage and testifies to López's readiness to portray foreign servicemen during the war. The proposed dating of the present painting significantly sets it at a seminal point in López's biography and artistic trajectory.

In January 1812, Marshal Louis Gabriel Suchet's Napoleonic troops occupied Valencia. As the most prominent painter in the city and Director of Painting at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos, López was obliged to execute several portraits for Suchet, including *El mariscal Suchet y su familia* (1812, París, conde de Cornudet) and *El mariscal Louis Gabriel Suchet, duque de la Albufera* (1812, Eure, Chateau de Vernon, duquesa de la Albufera).⁷ In these works, he aimed to please his French sitters by adopting the neoclassical language of Napoleonic portraiture associated with the circle of Jacques-Louis David. Nevertheless, between 1812 and 1814 he made occasional journeys to Madrid, returning to Valencia for his obligations and local commissions. Alongside these French commissions, López also repeated

⁶ H.E. Malet, *Historical Records of the Eighteenth Hussars*. London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1869, pp. 13-35.

⁷ See Díez (1999) pp. 68-81 and for a detailed biography of the artist in this timeframe.

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a nearly identical version of his monumental *Portrait of Fernando VII for the Ayuntamiento of Xàtiva* (P-346). When Valencia fell under French control, the painter's established renown nevertheless ensured that he continued to work for local institutions. López contributed the highest sum (515 reales) of all members of the Academy to the war levy imposed by the occupation authorities in 1812. After the French withdrawal, he joined his colleagues in accepting the 1812 Constitution in a formal ceremony on 26 September 1813.

In 1814, when Fernando VII, released from his captivity in Valençay, passed through Valencia between 16 April and 15 May on his return to Madrid, López painted the new official portrait of the King wearing the uniform of a captain general (Museo del Prado) already referred to above. During the 1814 visit, the King wrote in his own hand an order dated 26 July to “enviar a llamar a López el pintor” and, on 1 March 1815, appointed him “primer pintor de cámara”. Although he initially requested permission to retain his directorial title and stipend at the Valencian Academy, he resigned on 3 March 1815, after fourteen years in that post. He was permitted to keep the honorary distinction but focused thereafter on royal commissions. From 1815 onward, López worked extensively for the Crown, producing portraits of Fernando VII's successive consorts, including *María Cristina de Borbón* (Museo del Prado, P00865), and grand compositions such as *Fernando VII con el hábito de la Orden del Toisón de Oro* (Rome, Embassy of Spain to the Holy See). In 1814, he was admitted as “miembro de mérito” at the Academia de San Fernando and, two years later, became Director of Painting there. In 1815, he founded the Real Estudio de Pensionados at the expense of the Crown, training young artists in painting and drawing until shortly after the death of the King.⁸

⁸ G. Navarro, C., in *El Siglo XIX en el Prado*, Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007, pp. 475–476.

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Fig. 1. Vicente López, *Portrait of Pedro Caro Sureda, Marqués de la Romana*, c. 1815, oil on panel, 25 x 18.5 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.

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Fig. 2. Vicente López, *Ferdinand VII, in the uniform of a captain-general*, 1814, oil on canvas, 102 x 76 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum.

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Fig. 3. Vicente López, *Portrait of Joaquín de Pedro y Llorens, V Marqués de San José*, c. 1810-1812, oil on canvas, 100 x 74 cm. Private collection.

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Fig. 4. Vicente López, *Portrait of El Capitán Roche Hastings*, c. 1814-1815, oil on canvas, 102.9 x 82.6 cm. Museo de Arte de Ponce. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation.

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Fig. 5. Vicente López, *Portrait of El Mariscal Louis Gabriel Suchet, Duque de la Albufera*, c. 1813, oil on canvas, 53 x 42 cm. Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia.

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Fig. 6. Sir William Allan, *An officer of the 18th Regiment of (Light) Dragoons (Hussars)*, c. 1815, oil on canvas. London, National Army Museum, Study Collection

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Fig. 7. *Pattern 1796, Light Cavalry Trooper's sword and scabbard, c. 1808.*
Made by Osborn and Gunby and issued to G Troop 18th Light Dragoons (Hussars).
London, National Army Museum.