

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

(Montauban 1780 – Paris 1867)

Portrait of a Woman



Oil on canvas - 11 3/8 x 8 1/4 in (29 x 21 cm) - Framed : 13 x 16 in (33 x 40.5 cm)

Provenance: purchased at a public auction in Asheville (North Carolina, USA) in January 2024.

Frame: Troubadour-style frame in stuccoed and gilded wood.

This *Portrait of a Woman* by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres is a discovery. We would like to thank Mr. Eric Bertin, Mr. Sylvain Bédard, Lecturer at the University of Montreal, and Mr Andrew Carrington Shelton, Professor at Ohio State University, all three of whom confirmed the painting's authenticity after a first-hand examination of the canvas. We reproduce Sylvain Bédard's analysis below.

A *Portrait of a Woman* by Ingres.

The Missing Painting from the 1802 Salon?

Our knowledge of Ingres's paintings is unlikely to undergo major changes, except in the specific genre of portraiture, where we may still hope for a few rare discoveries, all linked to the artist's early Parisian period (August 1797 to September 1806).

Thus, the portrait that the artist, in the two handwritten lists he compiled of his *Œuvre*,[1] refers to as 'Mesplet's Friend' (*Notebook IX*) or 'A Friend of Mesplet' (*Notebook X*), has been identified as that of the musician and composer Albert-Auguste Androt (1781–1804), painted in 1803 **(fig. 1**) and housed at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University. This solid attribution was made possible by research conducted by Hélène Toussaint, Georges Brunel and Isabelle Julia, Éric Bertin, and finally Georges Vigne.[2] For our part, we have proposed identifying an anonymous painting in the collection of the National Gallery in London (**fig. 2**) as the sketch for the portrait of Mlle Harvey, which the artist mentions in his *Cahier X*; a work (circa 1803) long considered lost by the painter's specialists.[3]

A portrait of a woman, which went up for public auction in the United States in early 2024 and is now part of a private collection in Paris, also possesses all the qualities of an autograph painting by the young Ingres **(fig. 3**).[4]

Cropped at the waist and turned slightly to her left (a compositional style often used by the artist in his early portraits of women), the model is dressed in a muslin tunic-style gown, adorned with an ermine boa—a luxurious accessory also featured in the 1805 portrait of Mademoiselle Rivière **(fig. 4**)—which would soon be supplanted in the hearts of ladies by the cashmere shawl. Ingres took great care in rendering his models' dresses and headdresses, not hesitating, in one famous instance, to act as a milliner himself![5] As a result, this woman's attire allows us to date her portrait to the very early years of the 19th century, a time when the Directoire gown, with its long train, was gradually giving way to its Empire counterpart—more fitted at the bottom, more low-cut at the top, and often featuring, as here, pretty puffed sleeves. The lady, wearing gloves and depicted outdoors—like the young Rivière - holds her hat, a beautiful bottle-green one, clasped to her left arm; to her right, we can make out what appears to be the top of a tree silhouetted, like a shadow puppet, against a sky barely lighter in color.

As is often the case with Ingres, the painted surface features many exquisite details, such as the brilliant modeling of the face, the vermilion of the lips, the glint of light on the earring, the discreet presence of a comb secured at the back of the hairstyle, and the white ribbon on the suede glove, rendered with delicate precision. The model's penetrating gaze, her slight smile, and the sense of serenity she exudes are also strikingly effective and cannot fail to catch the eye. These qualities in the psychological observation of the individual are similarly found in the young Androt—who possesses an extraordinary 'presence'—, or in Monsieur Rivière (1805, at the Louvre), with his good-natured smile, perfectly in keeping with the personality

of this bourgeois, renowned as a *bon vivant* (**fig. 5**).[6] Here is a portrait of a young woman with a radiant complexion, which, incidentally, foreshadows that of Madame Rivière from 1805 (**fig. 6**)—a nonchalant beauty lost in the folds of her Indian shawl—or that of Madame Aymon, known as 'La belle Zélie', from 1806 (**fig. 7**), a masterpiece of restrained sensuality. Our model's hairstyle is also similar to that of the two ladies, with their pretty curls in the fashion of the time.

Certain parts of the portrait, however, are rendered more sketchily, such as the landscape on the left, which, as we mentioned, is barely hinted at, as is the portion of the dress in the lower right corner, whereas the ermine boa—beautifully fluffy where it is tied around the model's waist—appears less finished in the section covering her shoulder. It is as if the artist had not wanted to take the completion of his canvas any further. We will return to this point later.

We do not have any preparatory drawings related to this portrait. This is not surprising, given that Ingres seems to have almost always created his early portraits by sketching his models directly onto the canvas—it was not until the 1820s that these portraits gave rise to superb preparatory drawings, such as those produced for the Leblanc couple in 1823 (the two canvases at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York). For example, we have no drawings related to the three portraits of the Rivière family, to which the artist must nevertheless have devoted his full attention, since at least two of them were exhibited at the 1806 Salon (that of the wife, Sabine, and that of the young daughter, Caroline).[7] Yet it would be quite exceptional if, for a commission of this magnitude, not a single drawing had survived to the present day! The same is true for the other portraits painted by Ingres before his departure for Rome,[8] with the exception, however, of the official portraits of First Consul Bonaparte (1804, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Liège) and Napoleon 1st on the imperial throne (1806, Paris, Musée de l'Armée, on loan from the Louvre), for which there are indeed a few studies on paper.[9]

This near-total absence of preparatory drawings was not without consequence for the young portraitist, sometimes forcing him to 'correct' certain canvases while they were still in progress. Laboratory analysis of the portrait of Madame Rivière has thus shown that it was significantly altered: initially, the lady was depicted 'seated facing forward in an armchair with a rounded back'.[10] The portrait of Madame Panckoucke (1811, in the Louvre) **(fig. 8)** was also the subject of a significant alteration; the shawl, held by the young woman's left arm, was originally draped around her hips.[11] An infrared reflectography of our painting (**fig. 9**) did not reveal such dramatic alterations, but it shows that the oval of the face has been slightly reduced, while the shoulder line has been widened, thereby giving it a rounder appearance.

Since its acquisition, the work has undergone a minor restoration. It is likely that originally the painting was presented as an oval painted on a rectangular canvas covered with an orange-colored ground. This format (the oval) was one that Ingres reserved almost exclusively for his female models.[12] Then, at a time that cannot be precisely determined, the canvas was trimmed inside the oval on both sides and along the top edge—without compromising the internal balance of the image—and subsequently pasted onto a second canvas mounted over a slightly smaller stretcher than the original one. It is possible that this modification was made when the painting was framed, as the new stretcher fits into the neo-Gothic frame chosen by its owner

at the time. The corners outside the oval and the side strips were painted black at that time, giving the impression of a rectangular painting (**fig. 10**).[13] The restoration, which made it possible to remove these overpaintings, revealed the orange-yellow background color around the oval. It was then decided to paint the putty-filled bands that now frame the original canvas in the background color (**fig. 11**) and to conceal this mounting with a gilded wooden oval (slightly oblong in shape, as it is narrower than the original format), which was inserted into the preserved neo-Gothic frame (**fig. 3**).

The original dimensions of our portrait (29 x 21 cm as of today) must have been quite similar to those of Madame de La Rue (**fig. 12**), dated Year XII (September 24, 1803 – September 24, 1804) and similarly presented in an oval; this oval, painted on a panel, measures 29 x 23.3 cm.[14] This portrait of a young woman—whose identity remains unknown to us—is thus an intensely intimate image, likely intended for a husband or fiancé.

Is it possible, as for the paintings in the Fogg Art Museum and the National Gallery in London, to link this portrait to the lists of works compiled by Ingres? It would obviously be tempting to associate this one with the entry appearing in *Notebook IX*: '2 portraits of a husband and wife', which is repeated in *Notebook X* ('two portraits of a husband and wife'), but almost all of the painter's specialists today agree that the female counterpart in this pair of portraits—the husband's portrait is still missing—is probably Madame Aymon, whom Ingres does not mention by name in his lists.[15]

There is, however, another painting, which the artist does not mention in his *Cahiers*: the *Portrait of a Woman* that he submitted to the 1802 Salon (under no. 719) and which is now considered lost. We have very little information about this first work the painter submitted to the Louvre exhibition—then known as the Museum of the Arts—since critics of the time largely ignored the artwork,[16] with the exception of the editor of the *Revue du Salon de l'an X*, whose comment was, however, as brief as it was scathing: 'Readers, spare us this one (this portrait): we don't know what to say about it'![17] Could it be our portrait? This hypothesis would allow us to pinpoint its date, while also solving the mystery of the 1802 painting.

But first, how could we explain this scathing remark? Was the young artist's painting really considered that bad? That would be surprising coming from a Prix de Rome winner (Ingres had won the prestigious competition the previous year), who, moreover, had trained in David's studio! Let us also recall that this was likely a private commission, which the young Ingres had every reason to execute with care, as he was just beginning to 'make his mark on the portrait market' in Paris.[18] Could it not simply be these less-refined parts of the canvas (the lower part of the dress, the boa, the landscape) that ultimately displeased our journalist, who was, incidentally, quite unfriendly toward portrait painters in general?[19]

Ingres, as we know, did not always shy away from leaving brushstrokes visible in his portraits, taking pleasure in revealing to the viewer the underside of what constitutes the illusion in painting. Thus, the portrait of his childhood friend Jean-François Gilibert (1805, at the Montauban Museum), with its sections rendered in a smudged style, appeared to him not only

complete but also one of his finest portraits (**fig. 13**).[20] The portrait of Madeleine Chapelle, his young wife (c. 1814, Zurich, E. G. Bührle Foundation Collection), is executed in an even freer style and ranks among the artist's most charming artworks.[21] But it is also true that these paintings, being of a private nature, were not intended for the scrutinizing— and often so unforgiving—gaze of Salon visitors. Could it be, then, that in 1802 Ingres paid the price for taking too many liberties in the technical execution of his portrait, facing critics accustomed to much more 'smoothed-out' canvases? What is certain is that, 'deeply upset' by this failure,[22] the painter did not exhibit at the next Salon, that of 1804, preferring to devote his time to certain drawings after antique sculptures, created for the *Musée français*,[23] and to a whole series of painted portraits.[24] This absence was undoubtedly a way to put the memory of that first missed opportunity with the general public and the critics behind him.

A portrait of a woman that remains, nonetheless, exquisite in our eyes, with a confident, masterful style, beautifully expanding the short list of the master's early Parisian paintings.

Sylvain Bédard

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[1] For more on these two handwritten lists, see Georges Vigne's book, *Ingres* (Paris, 1995), Appendix: 'Ingres, historien de son Œuvre', pp. 324–340.

[2] See G. Vigne's article, which outlines the contributions of each author: 'Un Ami de Mesplet : Le Portrait d'Albert-Auguste Androt par Ingres', *Bulletin du Musée Ingres*, no. 85 (April 2013), p. 23.

[3] Sylvain Bédard, 'Le portrait de Mlle Harvey : une toile du jeune Ingres retrouvée à la National Gallery de Londres ?', *Bulletin du Musée Ingres Bourdelle,* no. 97 (April 2025), pp. 26–36.

[4] Acquired from Brunk Auctions (Asheville, North Carolina). The work's provenance prior to its purchase is unknown. We were able to examine it closely in Paris on April 21, 2025. Mr. Éric Bertin, after examining the canvas on November 14, 2025, in turn confirmed the attribution to Ingres. Professor Andrew Shelton also confirmed the authenticity of this portrait after examining it in Paris on July 1st 2026.

[5] There is a well-known anecdote, often recounted, in which Ingres, while drawing the exquisite portrait of Madame Destouches in Rome (1816, in the Louvre's *Département des Arts graphiques*), is said to have requested her to turn around her hat because he did not like it! On the painter's interest in women's clothing, see in particular Aileen Ribeiro's book, *Ingres in Fashion: Representations of Dress and Appearance in Ingres's Images of Women*, New Haven and London, 1999.

[6] Hélène Toussaint, exhibition catalog for *Les portraits d'Ingres. Peintures des musées nationaux*, Paris, Musée du Louvre (May 30–September 30, 1985), no. II, p. 24.

[7] It is unclear whether Mr. Rivière's portrait was included in the exhibition: see *ibid*., p. 25.

[8] The pen-and-ink wash drawing of the two Harvey sisters (1804, in the *Département des Arts graphiques* at the Louvre), which is often associated with their lost painted portrait, strikes us rather as a 'finished' drawing—that is, a work in its own right—though one from which Ingres might subsequently have drawn inspiration for his canvas. The portrait of Madame Béranger—which has also disappeared, never having progressed beyond the sketch stage, and which the artist mentions in his lists—is known to us thanks to an unfinished pen-and-ink drawing that entered the Louvre's *Département des Arts graphiques* in 1999 (pen, brown ink, brown wash, and graphite, 17.2 x 23.5 cm). But it could be either a preparatory

drawing for that portrait, or a *ricordo* of the said painting, faithfully reproducing its unfinished state. The Montauban Museum, for its part, possesses a small sketch for this portrait, showing the lady's reflection in the mirror placed behind her: see Georges Vigne, *Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres 1780-1867. Catalogue raisonné des dessins du musée de Montauban*, Paris, 1995, p. 466, no. 2609, and p. 467 (ill.). The case of the portrait of Madame Duvaucey, at the Musée Condé, painted in Rome in 1807, is more difficult to resolve: in particular, there is a small wash drawing (at the Louvre) that shows a significant variation from the final canvas and may indeed have preceded it: see, in particular, Nicole Garnier-Pelle, 'La mystérieuse Joconde d'Ingres', exhibition catalog for *Ingres. L'artiste et ses princes*, Château de Chantilly, Musée Condé, June 3 – October 1, 2023, pp. 53 and 59 (ill.).

[9] Ingres, to whom Bonaparte had granted only a single modelling session, draw solely the features of his model's face; a head study that has not been found. The Montauban Museum holds two drawings related to this portrait: see G. Vigne, *op. cit.* (in note 8), p. 468, nos. 2617 and 2618 (ill.). As for the pen-and-ink drawing depicting the First Consul (New York, private collection), which appears to serve as a preparatory study for the canvas at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Liège—which it reproduces quite faithfully—it may, once again, be a *ricordo*: see on this subject Louis-Antoine Prat, 'De l'art de figer une histoire', exhibition catalog for *Ingres avant Ingres*, Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts, September 18, 2021–January 9, 2022, p. 176. The portrait of the emperor, for its part, was the subject of a drawn *modello* (pen and brown ink, in a private collection) and of separate studies for the accessories: see H. Toussaint, *op. cit*. (in note 6), no. V, pp. 37–40.

[10] *Ibid*., no. III, p. 28.

[11] *Ibid*., no. VII, p. 46.

[12] Of all the male portraits painted by Ingres that are known to us, only those of Androt and Edme Bochet (1811, in the Louvre) are framed in an oval.

[13] The portrait of Madame Panckoucke, originally oval in shape, underwent a similar transformation between 1921 and 1928, with painted spandrels and the canvas slightly enlarged. The Louvre, where it entered the collection in 1953, restored the work to its original appearance by displaying it in an oval frame.

[14] It is worth noting that both small paintings, each painted in the early 1800s, passed through the United States before finally returning to Europe; the portrait of Madame de La Rue was in the collection of the New York dealer Jacques Seligman in 1951, before being sold to the Zurich collector E. M. Bürhle.

[15] Moreover, the sitter's name is not entirely certain: see, in particular, Philip Conisbee's entry in the exhibition catalog for *Portraits by Ingres. Image of an Epoch*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art October 5, 1999 – January 2, 2000, no. 8, p. 60.

[16] The exhibition booklet provides no further information about this painting, which appears in the first *Supplement*—an indication that the artist's decision to present it to the public was likely made rather late. This might also explain the near-total absence of commentary on this painting.

[17] *Revue du Salon de l'an X ou Examen critique,* p. 159.

[18] Mehdi Korchane, 'Les débuts du portraitiste à Paris' exhibition catalog for *Ingres avant Ingres*, Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts, September 18, 2021 –January 9, 2022, p. 70. While awaiting his departure for Italy, which would only take place in September 1806, Ingres, as the First Prize winner at the Prix de Rome, received a government stipend, which was substantially supplemented by these commissions for private portraits.

[19] The author writes in the epigraph of his brochure:
'On voit tant de portraits blafards,
Qu'en s'en allant chacun s'écrie :
Ce n'est plus le Salon des Arts,
C'est un Salon de Compagnie.'

'We see so many sallow portraits,

That as they leave, everyone exclaims:
This is no longer an art exhibition,
This is a private drawing room.'

[20] Letter from Ingres to Armand Cambon (1819–1885), first director of the Montauban Museum, dated April 27, 1862, quoted in the exhibition catalog for *Ingres 1780–1867*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, February 24 – May 15, 2006, p. 131 (text by Vincent Pomarède).

[21] Regarding this portrait (70 x 57 cm), Daniel Ternois notes: 'It has that sketch-like quality so common in his portraits of close friends', *Ingres*, Paris, 1980, p. 79.

[22] Lee Yoo-Kyong, 'Une entrée en scène peu applaudie : Ingres aux Salons de 1802 et 1806' *Bulletin du Musée Ingres*, no. 71 (April 1998), p. 62.

[23] See Mehdi Korchane, 'Un laboratoire des ombres. Dessiner pour la gravure' exhibition catalog for *Ingres avant Ingres*, Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts, September 18, 2021–January 9, 2022, pp. 205–215.

[24] In addition to the portraits of Mlle. Harvey (which was only sketched) and Madame de La Rue, likely produced sometime in 1803, and that of Androt, painted toward the end of that same year and delivered in early January 1804, the artist undertook the portrait of Bonaparte, a commission received on October 5, 1803, which kept him busy for nearly a year—the canvas was not completed until November 1804. Then, still in 1804, he added his *Self-Portrait at the Age of Twenty-Four*, which was extensively reworked around 1850–1851 (Chantilly, Musée Condé), bust portraits of his father, who had come from Montauban to visit him in Paris, and the portrait of a young sculptor friend, whose identity remains unknown (both at the Musée de Montauban), and finally the double portrait of the Harvey sisters, which has been lost. This was a sustained body of work that included both commissioned—and therefore paid—paintings and others given as gifts to loved ones.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Albert-Auguste Androt***, 1803. Oil on canvas, 75 x 60.8 cm. Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University, Fogg Art Museum.



Fig. 2: **J.-A.-D. Ingres (attributed to),** ***Portrait of a Woman***, c. 1803. Oil on canvas, 95.3 x 76.2 cm. London, National Gallery.



Fig. 3: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Portrait of a Woman,*** c. 1802. Oil on canvas, 29 x 21 cm. Private collection, Paris.



Fig. 4**: J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Mademoiselle Rivière****,* c. 1805-1806. Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 5: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Monsieur Rivière,*** 1805. Oil on canvas, 116 x 89 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 6: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Madame Rivière,*** 1805. Oil on canvas, 116 x 90 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 7: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Madame Aymon, known as La Belle Zélie***, 1806. Oil on canvas, 59 x 49 cm. Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts.



Fig. 8: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Madame Panckoucke***, 1811. Oil on canvas, 94 x 69 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.



Fig. 9: ***Portrait of a Woman*** (see fig. 3 here), infrared reflectography.



Fig. 10: ***Portrait of a Woman*** (see fig. 3 here), before restoration.



Fig. 11: ***Portrait of a Woman*** (see fig. 3 here), after restoration.



Fig. 12: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Madame de La Rue***, Year XII (September 24, 1803 – September 24, 1804). Oil on canvas, 29 x 23.3 cm. Whereabouts unknown.



Fig. 13: **J.-A.-D. Ingres,** ***Portrait of Jean-François Gilibert***, 1805. Oil on canvas, 100 x 91 cm. Montauban, Musée Ingres Bourdelle.