

THE LIMNER COMPANY



George Engleheart (1750- - 1829)

Portrait miniature of Miss Sarah Shergold in white dress with frilled trim and turquoise waistband, white choker and bandeau in her powdered hair; 1795

Circa: 1795

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 43KCERDC.

Oval, 2 3/4 in. (70 mm.) high

Gold frame with split pearl border, the reverse with locks of hair tied with split pearls and gold wire on opalescent glass.

George Engleheart became one of the most fascinating portrait miniaturists in Georgian England, alongside Richard Cosway, John Smart and Ozias Humphry. His work spanned almost half a century and presents remarkable insight into wealthy society. This was a period when the British Empire was expanding in both East and West, and Engleheart profited by illustrating a considerable number of military men.[1] His portrait miniatures of women are ever so interesting because they show the shifting trends in fashion, specifically in regard to the move from wigs to powdered hair and then finally natural hair.

Born at Kew in 1750, little is known about his youth and early education, with no stories of his early skill with pencil or brush. However, it is clear his artistic talent did not go unnoticed as his family sent him to the studio of Irish landscape painter George Barret (1730-1784, adopting watercolour as his favourite medium).[2] He may have spent three years in Sir Joshua Reynolds's studio in the early 1770s, but what is clear is that in 1775, Engleheart comes forward as a professional artist on his own account. Lady Townshend became his chief patron in 1775, and only a year later, King George III became the 25-year-old Engleheart's patron (Engleheart seems to have painted George 25 times in all).

By 1776, Engleheart was in such demand he started a Fee Book, the most important record of Engleheart which we possess, containing 101 pages of accounts, followed by 15 pages of index. [3] From this extensive book, we are able to identify the majority of Engleheart's sitters, including the sitter in question, Sarah Shergold. Sarah had her portrait painted on 5 February 1795. It is recorded in the artist's fee book that \$21.1s.0 was paid for this portrait together with a portrait of her sister Miss Elizabeth Tyers Shergold on 10 May 1795 (last sold Bonhams 13 September 2023, lot 196). Engleheart painted the Shergold family on numerous occasions. James Shergold, a wealthy merchant and landowner had three children with Sarah, whom he never married.

[1] G Engleheart Pinxit 1773-1818, A practical guide, John Webley

[2] Miniature Painter to George III, Pub. George Bell & Sons, London, 1902, p. 9

[3] Miniature Painter to George III, Pub. George Bell & Sons, London, 1902, p. 35