THE LIMNER COMPANY



Nathaniel Plimer (1757 - 1822)

Portrait miniature of a Young Lady, facing right in blue riding habit with gold buttons, stripped yellow and gold waistcoat, yellow frilled cravat, black top hat with white plumes and gold rosette in her long powdered curly hair

7.6 cm (3 inches)

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: AMNCZFLL

Silver-gilt frame, the reverse with initials OH in seed pearls on blue glass with seed pearl surround, lock of hair, gold wire and seed pearls on opalescent glass within blue glass surround.

This magnificent portrait of a lady dressed in a riding habit must be one of Nathaniel Plimer's masterpieces. His skill as an artist has often been underestimated, but this miniature demonstrates his mastering of watercolour in the variety of textures painted in the portrait – and his careful rendition of the sitter's face.

Born to a watchmaker in Shropshire, Nathaniel, elder brother of Andrew Plimer (1763-1837), left home to find work in London in 1781. He was apprenticed to the enamellist Henry Bone (1755-1834) while Andrew was manservant to Richard Cosway (1742-1821). Cosway supported both Nathaniel and Andrew Plimer with practical and financial assistance when he discovered his servant's ambition to become an artist. By 1785, Andrew had established his own studio in Maddox Street, and then, from 1787 until 1810, at 2 and, later, at 8 Golden Square, London. Nathaniel exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1787 to 1815 and at the Incorporated Society of Artists in Suffolk Street, London, in 1790–91. From 1804 to 1814 he was resident in Edinburgh where he was an inaugural member and exhibitor at the Associated Society of Artists (1808). Nathaniel is thought to have returned to London about 1815 and to have died there in 1822, leaving four children, the youngest of whom, Adela, married Andrew Geddes, the Scottish portrait painter.

The sitter here, currently unidentified, is wearing highly fashionable riding dress. Fashion plates of this date show ladies dressed in a tailored jacket or redingote, a long skirt, tailored shirt or chemisette, a hat, low heel boots, glove and a necktie or stock, based on the male coat and waistcoat of the day. There was something daring about the look, it had been worn by the scandalous Seymour Dorothy

Fleming (1758-1818), styled Lady Worsley from 1775 to 1805, who was rumoured to have had 27 lovers and her marriage ending as one of the most salacious and highly publicised divorces in history. [1] Contemporary commentary reveals a general disapproval of this outfit for women, with the maleness of the cut seen as disruptive to society's gender norms of the time.

[1] A painting (1775/6) by Joshua Reynolds of Lady Worsley in a riding habit adapted from the uniform of her husband's regiment; now at Harewood House.

Literature:

D. Foskett, Collecting Miniatures, Woodbridge, 1979, illustrated opp. P. 277 (praised as 'of outstanding quality'), colour pl. 29D; D. Foskett, Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide, Woodbridge, 1987, illustrated opp. P. 377, colour pl. 29D