



**RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)**

**Study of a Vestal Virgin**

Circa: Circa 1790s

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Pen brown ink and pencil on paper

Numbered 54 (lower left)

16.2 by 10.9 cm., 6 ¼ by 4 ¼ in.

Richard Cosway was the foremost miniaturist of the Regency era. His ability to enhance the beauty and elegance of his sitters was revered amongst both patrons and peers. Cosway was also a talented draughtsman and from the 1760s onwards exhibited drawings 'stained' or 'tinged' with watercolour in addition to miniatures at the Society of Arts and Free Society of Artists. When the Royal Academy was founded in 1768, they elected few miniaturists and it is perhaps for this reason that the artist chose to exhibit so many of his drawings and paintings. In the 1780s, Cosway married the artist and musician Maria Hadfield and together held a fashionable salon from their Pall Mall residence. During this period, Cosway attracted the patronage of George, Prince of Wales (later George IV) and his reputation continued to grow within and beyond the Prince's close circle.

The present work is a beautiful example of Cosway's exemplar output during this period. Delicately executed with sinuous lines of pen, brown ink and pencil, Cosway's Vestal Virgin appears gracefully and elegantly upon the page. Captured perhaps in a romantic moment of reflection, there is an ethereal sentiment about the drawing and its composition. Whilst there has not been a comparable subject identified, the work is very similar in composition, full-length lady wearing classical robes, to many drawings Cosway executed of society women, such as Lady Hamilton, towards the end of the eighteenth century.