# THE LIMNER COMPANY



**THOMAS FLATMAN (1635 - 1688)**

**Portrait miniature of a Young Gentleman, wearing black robes and white lawn collar; landscape and cloudy sky background**

Circa: 1668

1668

*Watercolour on parchment*

Oval, 2 3/8 in. (61 mm) high

Signed in gold with monogram and dated ‘TF. / [1]668.’ (mid-left)

Silver-gilt frame with spiral cresting

Born in London in 1635, Thomas Flatman (1635-1688), the son of a clerk in Chancery, received his education in Winchester and New College, Oxford. Trained as a barrister, he was later admitted to the Inner Temple in 1655 and called to the Bar in May 1662. A diverse talent, Flatman’s range of interests in law, poetry and painting were quite unusual for the time.

Flatman later became associated with a small religious and aesthetic circle that included the Beale family, Dean Sancroft (later Archbishop of Caterbury), and the Revd Samuel Woodford.[1] He was particularly closely associated with the Beales, living with them for a time (even teaching their son the art of limning). Flatman’s other roommate Samuel Woodford (1636-1700), an Anglican divine and poet, eventually married the Beales’ daughter Alice on October 1661.

As well as being a miniaturist, he earned a reputation of being a pious and melancholic poet. His literary works are now relatively obscure, nonetheless they were highly regarded by his contemporaries. Flatman’s dated miniatures span from 1661 to 1683, however many of his miniatures have been mistakenly attributed to Samuel Cooper, with some even bearing false signatures. He was one of the few miniaturists who used pure gold to highlight the sitter’s coat, a technique also employed by Cooper.

Despite his deliberate attempts to emulate Cooper's style, Flatman never was able to achieve the excellence of his master. Vertue, however, rated him as highly as John Hoskins, and only a little below Cooper.[2] His works are characterised by an opacity in colour, particularly when contrasted with Cooper's' his earlier miniatures feature a less appealing brownish hue, frequently set against a sky background, with blues harsher than any in Cooper's repertoire.[3] His subjects always look out of the miniature frame with an almost audacious and candid expression. Across his poetry and painting alike, Flatman was captivated by the depiction of the artistic temperament.[4] His self-portrait, previously in the Duke of Buccleuch's collection and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, is an example of this. Flatman paints himself with exaggerated bags beneath the eyes, revealing his exhausting melancholy so evident in his poems.

[1] Daphne Foskett, Samuel Cooper and his Contemporaries, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1974

[2] Reynolds, Graham. "A Miniature Self-Portrait by Thomas Flatman, Limner and Poet." The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 89, no. 528 (1947): 63–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/869436.

[3] Daphne Foskett, Samuel Cooper and his Contemporaries, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1974

[4] Reynolds, Graham. "A Miniature Self-Portrait by Thomas Flatman, Limner and Poet." The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs 89, no. 528 (1947): 63–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/869436.

**Exhibitions**

Brussels, Hotel Goffinet, Exposition de la Miniature, no.152 (lent by J.J Foster, as 'portrait of young theologian, signed and date 1668';

London, National Portrait Gallery, Samuel Cooper and his Contemporaries, 1874, no.175 (lent by Kenneth Guichard).

**Literature:**

J.J Foster, Samuel Cooper and the English Miniature Painters of the XVII Century, London, 1914-1916, pl LXXI, no. 177 (as a 'portrait of a divine') and supplement, p.112, no.50