# THE LIMNER COMPANY



**RICHARD GIBSON (1615 - 1690)**

**Portrait miniature of a Nobleman wearing lawn collar, long natural black wig and armour**

Circa: Circa late 1660s

Circa late 1660s

Watercolour on parchment

Oval, 4.4 cm (1 7/8 inches) high

Born in Cumberland, Richard Gibson worked as an apprentice in tapestry before entering the household of Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke. By 1639, he was employed in the English court as a Page of the Back-Stairs.[1] We know that Gibson was actively painting in court, thanks to the writings of Abraham van der Doort, keeper of the Royal Collection. In Doort's catalogue, he writes of Gibson copying "The Picture of Adonis Venus Cupid and some dogs by done after Titian"."[2] He writes of Gibson's painting services being called upon along with that of David des Granges, John Hoskins and Peter Oliver, all employed at the court at about the time same.

After the death of Pembroke, Gibson worked with Charles, 2nd Earl of Carnarvon, grandson of his late master. By the 1660s, he changed his signature from 'DG', for 'Dwarf' or maybe 'Dick', to 'RG', for 'Richard'. We aren't certain if Gibson's initial signature was meant to represent 'Dwarf' or 'Dick', a common form of his name in the 1620s and 1630s. We do know from Doort that Gibson was known as 'Dick' throughout his entire life[3], but by the 1660s had gained tremendous success as a miniature painter, and as such changing his signature would be a pertinent display of his new status.

Despite Gibson's continuous success in court, his career as King's Limner was cut short. Following Samuel Cooper's death in 1672, Gibson held the title of King's Limner for just one year before being succeeded by Nicholas Dixon (1660-1708). Gibson was then given the role of master of the Duke of York's daughters.

The blue background in this portrait miniature is famously Hilliard's artistic invention – but also used by Holbein, Isaac Oliver, and later Samuel Cooper. Although it is uncommon to find such vibrantly blue backgrounds in Gibson's miniatures, it may be of importance regarding the date this work. It is common in Cooper's works in the late 1660s to have this blue background (see portrait of Sir Thomas Smith example at the Tate), so Gibson, always the exceptional copyist, may have been looking at Cooper's work in court at that time.

[1] The Page of the Backstairs was originally used to describe a page of the bedchamber, but later became known as the head position of pages overseeing the male staff.

[2] 7 'Abraham Van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I', ed.

OLIVER MILLAR, Walpole Society, XXXVII, [1958-60], pp.104

[3] Murdoch, John, and V. J. Murrell. "The Monogramist DG: Dwarf Gibson and His Patrons." The Burlington Magazine 123, no. 938 (1981): 282–91. http://www.jstor.org/stable/880238.