THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1742 - 1811)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing blue gown over white chemise

Circa: 1769

1769

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: KFDWEZEP

Signed and dated with initials, JS/ 1769

Associated gilt-metal frame with spiral cresting

Oval, 4.2 cm (1 5/8 inches) high

As noted in the 2014 exhibition catalogue at Philip Mould & Company, this portrait is unusual in John Smart's oeuvre. This must have been a special commission from a patron, who wished to have a version of another (earlier) painting or portrait miniature in Smart's hand. Very few examples of Smart working in this way have been recorded, but a miniature by him of Joseph Wilcocks (1673-1756) after a portrait by Enoch Seaman (c. 1694-1744) came on the market in 2008.[2]

Although Smart is not known as a copyist (he seems to have enjoyed more than enough work with live commissions), he would have studied earlier portraiture in his training. Smart also drew for his own pleasure – as evidenced by sketches from his journeys to and from India, where he spent ten years between 1785-95.

Although a source for the current portrait has not been found, the sitter's dress dates to circa 1720. The image could be based on a portrait by Bernard Lens (1682-1740) or Christian Richter (1678-1732), who were both working around this time. The inclusion of Smart's usual initials and a dated of 1769 show that this copy was not intended to pass as an earlier work. The portrait shows a fascinating fusion

between Smart's own technique and style and that of an earlier, professional miniaturist and provides an insight into the commissions he was receiving at this early stage of his career.

[1] This miniature was previously owned by the noted collector and connoisseur, Jacob H.A E. Visser, Hilversum (1890-1965), a cloth merchant from Manchester and Hilversum. Visser seems to have owned other portrait miniatures, including a 17th-century portrait of gentleman traditionally called Andrew Marvell (The Limner Company), and Samuel Cooper's portrait of a Gentleman, circa 1665, sold Sotheby's, London, 4th July, 2019, lot 15. Information provided by Dr Bodo Hofstetter (private correspondence, June 2024).

[2] Sotheby's, London, Important Miniatures from a Private Collection, 16 April 2008, lot 16 (noted in the catalogue entry for the present miniature in the Philip Mould Exhibition catalogue, page 20).

Exhibitions

'John Smart; A Genius Magnified', Philip Mould & Company, 25 November – 9 December 2014, cat. No. 4

Literature:

L. Hendra and E. Rutherford, Catalogue 'John Smart; A Genius Magnified', Philip Mould & Company, 25 November – 9 December 2014, cat. No. 4, p. 20-21.