THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of Gentleman, wearing a dark coat and white cravat

Circa: 1806

1806

Watercolour on ivory

Signed ‘E’ lower right, signed and dated on reverse

Ivory registration number: X8CBUF8J

Gilt metal frame, with ornate hairwork on reverse

Oval, 84 mm

This miniature, whose sitter is yet to be identified, sits comfortably with the style of Engleheart’s later works, of the first decades of the nineteenth century. It was during this period of his career that he began to use sky backgrounds, as featured here. This period followed a decades-long and illustrious career, the activities of which Engleheart recorded himself in a fee book, now used to identify the sitters of many of his extant miniatures.

Our gentleman’s outfit also bears resemblance to others that Engleheart’s sitters are depicted in, especially in this later period. Though his miniatures of female sitters would often focus on more extravagant fashions of the time, in his portraits of men, this same focus was not often evident. Here, the simple (yet still wonderfully executed) dark coat and white cravat do not distract from the other (just as wonderfully executed) features of the sitter’s face. Especially prominent are his bushy eyebrows, which contrast to the grey hair upon his head. If this was not evidence of the sitter’s age, it could have been powdered to achieve this colour.

Less simple is the reverse of the frame of this miniature, which features elaborate hair work. Not only is the frame bordered by a continuous plait of hair, but the centre has more carefully arranged locks, featuring a set of seed pearls in the centre. Hair work like this was especially common in the period, and this is certainly the case with Engleheart's miniatures. The intention behind what may seem today to be an odd form of decoration would have been to memorialise a family member, possibly even the sitter of the miniature, through an enduring part of their person.