THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to JOAN CARLILE (1600 - 1679)

Portrait of a Lady, wearing blue dress with white lace trim and gold, pearl and diamond brooch at her corsage, pearls at her neck and pearl earrings

Circa: Circa 1650

Circa 1650

Oil on copper

Original silver-gilt frame with turned, ebonised wood reverse

72 mm (2 $^{7}/_{8}$ inches) high

As stated in the 1955 catalogue, 'The Sotheby Collection of English Miniatures of the 16th and 17th Centuries…is one of the most important to remain in private hands. It is also perhaps the oldest in date of formation after the Royal Collection.' Inheriting wealth and standing from his merchant father, with homes in Essex and Hackney, James Sotheby began collecting portrait miniatures in the 1690s, buying from Mr Parry Walton, William III's repairer of pictures and of the Raphael Cartoons at Hampton Court. The great antiquarian George Vertue saw the collection in 1741 and noted 'about 30 or 40 limnings… highly finished'.[1]

Born in St Benet, Gracechruch to Mary Gooding (1609-1697) and James Sotheby (1607-1685), James junior married Anne Robinson (1657-1727) with whom he had four children. Anne's portrait, by Peter Crosse, is now in a private collection but was sold at the same sale in 1955 as the present portrait.

Although the sitter in the present work is unknown, there is no question of the quality of the work, which is an exceptional example of an oil on metal by an English hand (possibly Joan Carlile's, as suggested here). As curator at Tate Britain Tabitha Barber noted in 2009; 'Sotheby was active at the exclusive, top end of the art market, interested only in quality works reserved for sales aimed at 'Persons of Quality

and Gentlemen'. More usually he by-passed auctions altogether, preferring instead to purchase directly from owners and collectors, and from artist-dealers and agents able to obtain the best works. Several of his prized possessions had distinguished provenances, and were works which were known, discussed and admired by connoisseurs of the day.'[2]

Just like a modern collector, Sotheby enjoyed caring for and occasionally reframing his miniatures. These frames are highly recognisable and were made by James Seamer, goldsmith. In the case of the present work, the fine and original frame, with its turned reverse, was likely thought to be irreplaceable.

[1] Vertue, Notebooks, V, Walpole Society, p.11.

[2] Catalogue entry for the portrait of James Sotheby by John Riley, 1689, also purchased at the same sale in 1955 for the Tate Gallery (bt. Agnew on behalf of the gallery for £80).

Exhibitions

Fine Art Society, 1928, Miniatures in Oils, p.80, no. 20 (attributed to Louis du Guernier)