THE LIMNER COMPANY



ROSALBA CARRIERA (1673 - 1757)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman wearing armour breastplate and blue cloak, holding the Coronation Medal of George I[1]

Circa: Circa 1715

Circa 1715

Watercolour, bodycolour and gold paint on ivory

Ivory registration number: Y2SHMCCJ

Later silver-gilt frame with blue enamel border

Oval, 2.9 in (75 mm) wide

Shown proudly holding a gold medal commemorating the Coronation of George I in 1714 (a month after his arrival in England), the sitter here is shown in an armour breastplate and flowing blue cloak.[2] Such medals were distributed at Westminster Abbey during the coronation, but had a strict hierarchy, with gold reserved for those closest to the King, silver for those working for the royal household and members of parliament and bronze versions traditionally thrown into the crowd. The medal was designed by John Croker, who was appointed Chief Engraver of the Royal Mint in 1705, though recent research has led to the credible suggestion that Isaac Newton, Master of the Mint from 1699-1727, was partly responsible for the design.[3]

Although the sitter here is at present unknown, he is likely to have been an Englishman visiting Carriera in Venice at her studio as part of his Grand Tour. His recent presence at the coronation of a new king and the proud recipient of a gold medal indicates both his closeness to the court and his high status. It can be assumed that the sitter here was likely painted the year following the Coronation – so at some point between October 1714 and December 1715.

Carriera painted many men who were visiting the city of Venice, commissioning a miniature from this famous woman artist as a trophy of their time abroad and in appreciation of her talent. Often these visits to her busy studio had to be planned in advance with intermediaries, such as agents and couriers. As the art historian Angela Oberer has noted, ‘Carriera found it essential to rely on a widespread social

network of long-lasting relationships with highly influential commissioners all over Europe.'[4] Her international fame and influence should not be underplayed, as every courtier on the Continent wished to be portrayed by her.

Interestingly, this is the only portrait by the artist showing a sitter holding a medal. Her portrait miniatures in fact rarely show her male sitters holding or doing anything at all – usually the focus was on the sitter's features and dress. The pose of the sitter here recalls Sandro Botticelli's (c.1445-1510) two portraits of men holding similar objects. The first being Portrait of a Man with a Medal of Cosimo the Elder, also known as Portrait of a Youth with a Medal (Uffizi Gallery Florence), the second being Young Man Holding a Roundel, which sold at Sotheby's New York in 2021.[5] As such it is an important portrait in Carriera's oeuvre, showing the depth of her knowledge of her cultural history and her unique place in a long line of celebrated (male) portraitists.

[1] Incorrectly noted in Sotheby's catalogue note as Charles II - 'The head on the medallion is reminiscent of that of King Charles II made by John Roettier to commemorate the Dutch War of 1667. (British Museum 1921,0518.3). The prominent display of a portrait of a Stuart monarch may suggest that the sitter was English and held Jacobite sympathies.'

[2] On the reverse of the medal Britannia can be seen crowning King George I who is seated with his sceptre and orb.

[3] See Royal Collection Trust website page https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/6/collection/443199/medal-commemorating-the-coronation-of-george-i

[4] Oberer A, Life and Work of Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757): The Queen of Pastel. Amsterdam University Press; 2020: p.115-134.

[5] The painting broke many records at auction, selling for $92.2 million. Either portrait might have been well-known to the Italian Carriera. The recently sold portrait of A Young man holding a Roundel came from the collection of Lord Newborough in the 1930s who kept it as part of his collection at Caernarvon in Wales. It is believed to have come to the UK via his ancestor Sir Thomas Wynn, 1st Lord Newborough (1736-1807) who lived in Tuscany.