

# THE LIMNER COMPANY



**PETER CROSS (Circa 1645 - 1724)**

**Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, wearing white jabot decorated with white embroidery, blue robes, powdered wig**

Circa: dated 1699

dated 1699

Watercolour on vellum

Signed with gold monogram 'PC'; the reverse inscribed in Cross's hand 'finished it 20 of July 99/ P Cross fecit'

Silver-gilt frame with scrolled top

Oval, 3 1/4 in (85 mm) high

While the early training of Peter Cross remains shrouded in mystery, he managed to secure some of the most important commissions during Queen Anne's reign, swiftly establishing himself as the preeminent miniaturist in London during the 1680s and 90s. The present work sits firmly in this period, dated firmly to 1699, and likely shows one of the sitters from the noble classes who flocked to Cross in this decade.

Identified portraits by Cross at Welbeck show he was painting the Duke of Monmouth, the Duke of Newcastle and the Duchess of Lauderdale – i.e. all of the most important politically and socially elite persons of the period. Given that the present work has remained in a collection in Ireland, the suggestion that this portrait represents James FitzJames Butler, 2nd Duke of Ormonde, KG (1665–1745), has been put forward.

Born around 1645, Cross was the fourth son and youngest of seven children of Anthony Cross (1585-1651/2), who became a freeman of the Draper's Company in 1612. Historical conjecture suggests that he may have received his artistic education from retired artists such as John Hoskins or potentially in France, where his stippling technique had a longer tradition than in England. Without a doubt, Cross stretched the boundaries of traditional miniature painting techniques to their limits. His approach or style reminds one of that of Samuel Cooper (1609-1672) although much finer. His bold and confident works on vellum and trademark polychromatic stippling technique, as seen in the present work, stand as a

testament to his exquisite workmanship and artistic prowess.

Cross continued to work into the eighteenth century, during which he imparted invaluable knowledge, skill and experience of miniature painting to George Vertue (1684-1756), an early eighteenth-century collector of facts about British art. However, Vertue famously misinterpreted Cross's monogrammed signature, resulting in a prolonged and widespread misunderstanding regarding Cross's identity as an artist. Vertue misread Cross's elaborate entwined monogram "PC" as "LC", leading to the erroneous attribution of Cross's miniatures to two distinct miniaturists: Peter and Lawrence Cross. The miniatures are now all assigned to Peter Cross, although the monogram on the present work shows how the mistake might have been made originally.

In 1678, Cross's talents were duly recognized when he succeeded Nicholas Dixon as Limner in Ordinary to the King, Charles II. Notably during this period, he famously restored a damaged portrait miniature thought to depict Mary Queen of Scots, which belonged to the Duke of Hamilton. His instructions were to make the portrait as beautiful as possible, adhering to the prevailing standards of beauty. The result of his efforts was a skilfully executed and beautifully revamped portrait, albeit one that bore little resemblance to the actual likeness of the queen.

By the end of his life, Cross had amassed a valuable collection of miniatures by Isaac Oliver, Peter Oliver, Sir John Hoskins, Samuel Cooper amongst others. This collection was later sold at his residence, the "Blue Anchor" in Covent Garden in 1722. He passed away in 1724, having lived beyond the age of 70. Cross's miniatures now grace some of the most esteemed museums and collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Royal Collection at Windsor and the distinguished collection of the Duke of Buccleuch.