THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait of a Lady, facing to the right, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, topped with ostrich feathers and ribbons, and a black redingote, a pleated jabot underneath

Circa: Circa 1785

Circa 1785

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: BWF4J31Y

Gold frame with diamond-set border, on the reverse engraved with a floral wreath, a diamond and pearl decoration styled as a forget-me-not in the centre.

Oval, 43 mm (1 $^{3}/_{4}$ inches) high

This young lady, yet to be identified, wears a striking black outfit, which contrasts against her bright blue eyes and light hair. Such an outfit is not unknown within the works of Engleheart, whose extant works include examples of women wearing black, such as a portrait of Elizabeth Juliana Monro, sold at Philip Mould[1]. However, this is certainly not the norm, as his portrait miniatures of women would tend to include more colour, especially in the details of clothes that they wear.

Just why she is wearing black is not entirely clear. Though this was a colour associated with mourning in this period, such heavy black clothing would not have been recommended for this purpose. She is clearly quite an extravagant woman, and has decided to adorn her hat with ostrich feathers, which were part of a booming industry in London in this period. These form a significant feature of the miniature and seem to by pushing against the top of the frame, and are handled by Engleheart with an incredible amount of detail, that gives them a sense of weight and movement.

The reverse of this miniature is almost as impressive as the front, and features both a detailed engraving of flowers and ribbons in a wreath-shape, and a forget-me-not formed of diamonds and

pearls. Forget-me-nots have traditionally been associated with faithfulness and fidelity, so could have been added here to symbolise these characteristics of the sitter.

Engleheart would have been in the middle of his career when creating this portrait, which has previously been dated to around 1785. At this point, the plainer brown backgrounds like the one featured here were still common in his miniatures. He had also begun to record his commissions in a fee book, and was practicing independently as a miniaturist in London. This book remains an important source for research on the artist, who painted an impressive number of miniatures throughout his career.

[1] See Philip Mould Historical Poirtraits Archive, Online: https://historicalportraits.com/artists/74-george-engleheart/works/3098-george-engleheart-portrait-miniature-of-elizabeth-juliana-monro-or-munro-late-18th-century/ .