THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of a ‘Miss Hill’, facing right, in décolleté yellow dress with frilled under slip and white bandeau in her powdered hair

Circa: Circa 1787

Circa 1787

Watercolour on ivory

Gold frame with diamond border, engraved reverse

Oval, 51 mm (2 inches) high

George Engleheart was an extremely prolific and well-documented miniature painter. Leaving behind a fee book that recorded the vast number of miniatures that he created in his career means that it is now easier to track when these were painted, and how much he charged his patrons for them. It is in this fee book that a ‘Mrs Hill’ is recorded to have been painted three times, in 1784, 1787, and 1802. While the exact ‘Miss Hill’ in the present miniature is yet to be identified, her dress suggests that she was painted by the artist in 1787.

A ‘Miss Hill’ was also painted by a contemporary of Engleheart’s, Nathaniel Dance (1735-1811)[1]. Though there is no evidence of a connection between the two sitters, it is possible that this ‘Miss Hill’ was a patron known to both of the artists.

The dating of the present miniature is also possible from the style of background shown here. Later in his career, Engleheart more commonly painted a sky in the background of his miniatures, following a general trend in miniature painting. More common within his earlier painting was the grey-brown wash that becomes lighter towards one side of the miniature, that can be seen in the present example. It was also at this earlier point that Engleheart had a heavy focus on fashion and depicted his patrons in flamboyant ways. ‘Miss Hill’, here, wears a glamorously low-cut yellow dress, and has a magnificent head of powered hair.

Engleheart enrolled in the Royal Academy schools in 1769, where he initially trained in landscape painting. He then became an apprentice in Reynold's studios in 1773, where he spent time copying his larger oil paintings into miniatures. This hard work allowed him to develop his high level of skill within the medium, which eventually amassed in 4,853 recorded miniatures being created during his career.

[1] Sotheby's, London, 8 November 1995, lot 57.