THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD GIBSON (1615 - 1690)

Portrait drawing of an unknown Gentleman, possibly Michael Rosse (d.c. 1735) wearing coat with ribbon decoration and jabot, his hand across his lower body

Circa: Circa 1675

Circa 1675

Black and white chalk on laid paper prepared with a pink wash

Dark wood frame with inner mount

143 x 111 mm (5 $^{5}/_{8}$ x 4 $^{3}/_{8}$ inches)

Richard Gibson was a successful portrait miniaturist, and the King's Limner to Charles II during the year 1672. Here we see a fine example of his work, unique in its unfinished nature, but recognisable for its style, and placed within a tradition of family portraits by the artist. To contemporaries, the artist was known as 'Gibson the Dwarf', and stood at 3ft10in. Throughout his career he became associated with other well-known artists, and significant families in England.

One possibility for the sitter in this portrait is Michael Rosse (d. circa 1735), who married Richard Gibson's daughter, the artist Susannah-Penelope Rosse, around the suggested date of this drawing. Given the provenance for this drawing, the family connection and the geographical closeness of artist and sitter, this seems to be a theory worth pursuing.

Rosse likely married Susannah-Penelope in the late 1660s or early 1670s. The couple possibly moved in with Rosse's parents, occupying Samuel Cooper's former house on Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, which the senior Rosses had occupied since 1673 and later to Long Acre, a stone's throw away, from 1676-7, before settling once again on the south side of Henrietta Street. Like the Rosses, the Gibsons lived in fashionable Covent Garden – initially on Long Acre and later also in Cooper's former home on their return from Holland. The current drawing, if indeed it does show Michael Rosse, must have been

made before Richard Gibson left for the Netherlands in 1677 to accompany Mary, the daughter of James II, on her marriage to William of Orange. His relationship with Mary would later allow him to remain close to the royal family, and he returned to England two years before his death, in 1688, as she ascended to the throne.

Michael Rosse was a jeweller who worked closely with the royal family and court – there is a suggestion that he made the bejewelled settings into which the (often very tiny) portrait miniatures painted by his wife could be set.[1] The court circles in which the couple operated are reflected in Susannah-Penelope's extant portraits and anecdotes made by her contemporaries. Her husband's collection of art, which was sold in 1723, contained nearly thirty of her portrait miniatures.

Given the closeness of the Gibson and Rosse families, it is no surprise that the group of drawings from which the present work survives, also included portraits of other members of both families (the collection was passed down through the Tower family, the ancestors of whom were contemporaries of and said to have been acquainted with Gibson[2]). Michael Rosse and Susannah-Penelope's only child, a daughter named Elizabeth (known as 'Betsy'), drawn by her grandfather Richard Gibson, was also in the group and descended from the same source. Many of the drawings in the group were clearly only intended for personal records, including the 'dead child', presumed to be a baby from John Hoskins Jnr.'s first marriage. Likely drawn in the 1650s, this would have been a treasured memento of the lost child. The group of drawings indicates the devoted and interconnected relationships of artists living and working in the same sphere.

[1] The latest suggestion of this conjecture has been made in Ed. T. Barber, Now You See Us; Women Artists in Britain 1520-1920, Tate Britain, London, 2024, p. 47.

[2] D. Foskett, London, 1974, Samuel Cooper, 1609-1672, p.85.