

THE LIMNER COMPANY



DIANA HILL (née Dietz) (Circa 1764 - 1844)

Portrait miniature of the artist's husband, Lieutenant (later Major) Thomas Harriott (c.1747-1817), wearing uniform of the 1st Native Infantry, black bicorne hat with a rosette, landscape background

Circa: Dated 1791

Dated 1791

Watercolour on ivory

Signed with initials 'DH/ 1791'

Gilt-metal frame

Oval, 71 mm (2 ³/₄ inches) high

This miniature has now been firmly identified as the artist's husband, Lieutenant (later Major) Thomas Harriott. A virtually identical miniature of the sitter is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, showing Harriott in the same pose and uniform, but without his tricorn hat.[1] It has always been assumed that the artist's initialled signature of 'DH' stood for Diana Hill, but in fact by this date it can be assumed that she was signing as Diana Harriott.

The artist had travelled to India in 1785, after the early death of her husband Haydock Hill (he was just thirty-five years old). For almost a decade Hill had exhibited at the Royal Academy, changing her surname from the original Dietz after her marriage to Haydock Hill in 1781.

As a widow with two young children, Hill decided to seek work in Calcutta, with hope of connections with the East India Company through her brother in law, John Hill. To travel so far unaccompanied, to a country perceived as dangerous with its inhospitable climate, rampant with disease, reveals something of Hill's ambition and tenacity. One of her first sittings came from William Larkins, accountant-general

and a central figure in Calcutta high society, with further important commissions to follow.

The two portraits of her husband Thomas are highly personal works. The couple must have married before 1789 when their first child was born – Diana Maria – who was baptized on the 13 October 1789 - as to whether she survived infancy is not known. Their second child, born 1790, was named Thomas after his father. Evidence of Diana's successful career as an artist in India comes not just from her body of work but also from the envious comments made by artist Ozias Humphry - firstly describing her as a 'pretty young widow with two young children' and secondly declaring : he would 'rather have had all the male painters in England landed in Bengal than a single woman'. She is said to have stopped painting after her marriage to Harriott, but it was perhaps more that her time and energy was devoted to portraying those close to her. With five young children (a boy and girl were born in India in 1790 and 1795 respectively) her time was likely taken up by her growing family.

In February 1806, Thomas resigned his commission and the family returned to England, taking up residence at West Hall, Mortlake. Thomas died April 19, 1817. He left a will leaving Diana and their children as beneficiaries, which was proved June (day unclear) 1817 and was buried at St Mary the Virgin, Mortlake – Diana was buried alongside him after her death, age the age of eighty-four, in 1844. She outlived all but two (possibly three) of her children.

[1] Victoria and Albert Museum, London, P.126-1920.