THE LIMNER COMPANY



EMMA ELEANORA KENDRICK (Circa 1788 - 1871)

Sophonisba with the bowl of poison

Ink and wash on paper

87mm x 85mm

Emma Eleanora Kendrick was a British miniature painter active during the reigns of King George IV and William IV. The daughter of the sculptor, Joseph Kendrick (b. 1755), Kendrick was presumably introduced to painting through the studio or artist friends of her father. Between 1810 and 1817, she was awarded several prices by the Society of Arts and exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1811 to 1840. In 1831 was appointed miniature painter to Princess Elisabeth of Hesse-Homburg and William IV and subsequently gained patronage from royalty and other eminent aristocratic families.

In 1830, Kenrick published Conversations on the Art of Miniature Painting, a volume recording the art of miniature painting through a dialogue with the artist and an imaginary lady ‘Ellen’. Beyond limning however, Kendrick was an accomplished watercolourist and produced numerous paintings of classical, mythological and literary subjects.

The subject of this drawing - Sophonisba, or Saphanba'al, daughter of Hasdrubal - married Syphax whom she thus won over to the Carthaginian cause. When Masinissa and Laelius overthrew Syphax in 203 B.C., Sophonisba took poison sent to her by Masinissa, now enamoured of her and unable by any other means to save her from captivity at Rome. Her new husband encouraged her to die with dignity rather than become a captive. She chose suicide by poison.

The present work show’s Kendrick’s intimate knowledge of the Royal Collection as the image is copied from a sepia drawing attributed to Guercino, which entered the Royal Collection during the reign of George III [RCIN 902420]. The collection also houses the copy of the drawing etched by Bartolozzi, and

Kendrick may have used this as her source. The Bartolozzi etching of the same subject was also copied by Lady Elizabeth Spencer (1764-1812), daughter of the 4th Duke of Marlborough [still in the Royal Collection RCIN 913564].

It is likely that this study was undertaken in the early part of Kendrick's career, when she was still making copies after Old Masters in the same vein as Spencer's copy – as a suitable way to learn but without having to study a real person or tout for commissions – in other words, a genteel form of art for women. Unlike Spencer's Georgian beautification of Sophonisba, Kendrick remains true to Guercino's character of the subject, whose face shows the resignation of her fate.