

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1742 - 1811)

JOHN SMART (1741-1811) Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing fur-bordered mauve dress with embroidered pointed lace collar, a pear-bordered yellow bodice with mauve bow, her pink-powdered hair worn curled and decorated with an ostrich feather

Circa: Dated 1785

Dated 1785

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 777YXWXQ

Signed with initials and dated 'J.S. / 1785'

54 mm (2 1/8 inches) high

Painted a few months prior to John Smart leaving for India in April 1785, this portrait is almost his swansong to his English clientele. In what must be hailed as one of his masterpieces, Smart here has produced an image which is striking in colour and composition.

Surprisingly, no corresponding drawing has allowed identification of the sitter, but she must have been one of the most fashionable women he painted in London. Dressed as for a ball, the sitter's dress is cut low, with her sapphire brooch placed proactively over her nipple.

This portrait shows that Smart was at the height of his powers when he left for India and unsurprisingly was able to command endless commissions from British and Indian sitters. He stayed for ten years, until 1795, and enjoyed an incredibly successful career before returning to his native London.

Exhibitions

London, Christie's, Art Treasures Exhibition, 1932, no. 387 (lent by S.J.Philips); London, Philip Mould Gallery, John Smart; A Genius Magnified, 25th November to 9th December 2014, no. 22.