THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1742 - 1811)

Portrait miniature of a young Boy, wearing cream coat with blue velvet collar and matching waistcoat

Circa: Dated 1761

Dated 1761

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 7XYD3NA5

Gold frame set with cushion-shaped rubies and seed pearls

Signed with initials and dated ‘JS/ 1761’ (the final figure slightly illegible)

45 mm (1 $^{3}/_{4}$ inches) high

Painted in the very early years of his professional career, this portrait of a young boy stands out in Smart’s oeuvre. At this date, in the early 1760s, Smart was just embarking on his professional career. In fact, if the date can be seen correctly as 1761, this would be the earliest example of Smart working in his recognisable technique which he had fully developed by the mid 1760s.

Smart’s personal life in the early 1760s was also full of changes – he was newly married, in June 1763, to Miss Marianne Howard and it seems that their first child was born in January of the same year (prior to their marriage). A daughter was born to the couple in 1766 – Anna-Maria – who would eventually accompany her father to India – her sister, Sophia, two years later in 1768.[1] It seems that the family were not initially prosperous, and Smart may have rented rather than owned his first studio in the relatively affluent Dean Street in Soho, London.

Commissions gathered pace, however, as Smart quickly became known as one of the most talented portrait miniaturists working in England. By 1765, he was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Artists and was able to show his work at Maiden Lane, Covent Garden and Lambe's Auction Rooms on Pall Mall (where the Royal Academy held its inaugural exhibition).

The boy in the present work, although unknown, may have been in his early teens at the time of portrait's commission. Dressed in a fashionable pale yellow moleskin coat, with blue velvet collar and matching waistcoat, Smart has captured the starched lace of the shirt underneath. Caught in a natural pose looking away from the viewer, there is a freedom in the painting of this portrait which eventually gave way to the exacting candour that Smart's clientele expected from his brush.

[1] This new information was discovered by Lawrence Hendra during research for the exhibition 'John Smart; A Genius Magnified', held at the Philip Mould Gallery, 25 November – 9 December 2014.