THE LIMNER COMPANY



MATTHEW SNELLING (1621 - 1678)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, in black habit slashed on front and sleeves to reveal white, white lawn collar with tassels, long brown curling hair; tan-coloured curtain and sky background, gold edge border

Circa: 1655

1655

Watercolour on parchment, laid down on playing card with two diamonds

Signed with initials and dated on backing card ‘M.S / 1655’

Gilt-metal frame, mother-of-pearl reverse

Oval, 61 mm (2 $^{3}/_{8}$ inches) high

English Miniature painter Matthew Snelling worked in London during the mid-17th century. The son of a mayor of King’s Lynn, his oeuvre is so small (covering the years 1647-1674) that some have suggested limning as a sort of diversion for the well-to-do man in the emerging upper classes. George Vertue even suggested that Snelling may have earned a living as an artist’s supplier, referencing in one of his notebooks of him supplying ‘parcels of Pink’ to Mary Beale in 1654 and 1658. Through his family, Snelling certainly would have known the Beales well and shared East Anglian connections with them and miniaturist Nathanial Thach (1617-after 1652).

One of Snelling’s miniatures appears in the Michael Rosse sale of 1723, which suggests Snelling was also acquainted with Susannah-Penelope Rosse and her artist father Richard Gibson. Working in London in the mid-17th century, privy to a central hub of court artists and artisans, would have exposed him to the most important miniature painters of the day.

Many of Snelling's limning techniques may have been gleaned from Samuel Cooper (1609-1672), who was ten years his senior. The connection between the two men goes back to the earlier part of Cooper's career, when he drew the young man in 1644 (whereabouts now unknown). Snelling's style was likely most heavily influenced by English poet and miniaturist Thomas Flatman (1635-1688) – the miniature in question was reattributed to Flatman in the 1990s but has since been re-identified as Snelling. An almost identical composition by Snelling with a tan-coloured curtain and a sky background but with a female sitter was last sold at Bonhams 21 November 2007.