

# THE LIMNER COMPANY



**JOHN SMART (1742 - 1811)**

**Portrait miniature of Mrs Fenton, wearing a white dress, a red surcoat trimmed with ermine, a drop-pearl brooch and sapphires at her corsage, her upswept, powdered hair dressed with white ribbon**

Circa: 1774

1774

Oval, 5.1 cm (2 inches) high

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: QBK64RA9

Signed, 'J.S . 1774'

Associated gold frame with red guilloché enamel and rough-cut diamond surround.

*We are grateful to Dr Bodo Hofstetter, curator of the Miniatures Cabinet in the Museum Liaunig, Neuhaus, Carinthia, for identifying the sitter of this portrait.*

The present sitter can be identified by a pair of preparatory drawings named as Mr and Mrs Fenton. The drawings have now been separated with the preparatory work for the present miniature now in the Albertina Museum, Vienna, and Mr Fenton's drawing being sold at Galerie Bassenge, Berlin in 2022.[1]  
[2] A Mrs Fenton is recorded among Smart's known sitters in Daphne Foskett's monograph, although no date is given, and a Mr Thomas Fenton recorded and dated 1776.[3] The present finished miniature is dated 1774 and it is therefore likely that the drawings became a pair at a later date.[4] It may be that it was only after this miniature was presented to her husband – possibly as part of their courtship or betrothal - that he decided to sit to the same artist who had captured her so beautifully.

John Smart has been described as 'the finest miniaturist in eighteenth-century Britain'; no major

collection of miniatures can be considered complete if this artist is not represented.[5] He was still a young man when he painted this portrait, and his career was progressing steadily. Having exhibited at the Society of Artists since 1762, he was made Director in 1771. Later, he would be appointed Vice President in 1777 and President in 1778. He was working in an affluent area of London and a decade later would travelled to India, one of many British portraitists who journeyed there in search of the lucrative patronage of the 'wealthy English residents and native princes'.[6] Indeed he was appointed miniature painter to the family of the Nawab of Arcot and was in great demand.[7] Smart returned home in 1795 and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1797 until his death in 1811.

[1] Illustrated in Keil, N., *Die Miniaturen der Albertina in Wien*, Vienna, 1977, pp.47-48, n° 41.

[2] Galeria Bassenge, Berlin, *Old Master Paintings*, 1 December 2022, lot 6044.

[3] Foskett, D., *John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures* (Cory, Adams & Mackay, London), 1964, p.66

[4] Smart's preparatory drawings were likely left in the artist's studio after his death and later sold, some being cut down and framed like oval miniatures. Many were passed down through the generations and eventually sold at auction in the 20th century.

[5] Rutherford, E., & Hendra, L., *John Smart: A Genius Magnified* (Philip Mould & Company), a catalogue for the exhibition held at Philip Mould & Co. 25 November – 9 December 2014, p.8

[6] Foskett, D., *British Portrait Miniatures* (The Hamlyn Publishing Group), 1968 edition, p.112

[7] Ibid

### **Exhibitions**

Philip Mould & Co., *John Smart: A Genius Magnified*, 25 November – 9 December 2014.

### **Literature:**

Foskett, D., *John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures* (Cory, Adams & Mackay, London), 1964, p.66;

Rutherford, E., Hendra, L., *John Smart: A Genius Magnified*, catalogue for the exhibition held at Philip Mould & Co. in 2014, catalogue no.13, pp.38-19 (as 'a young Lady').