

THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD GIBSON (1615 - 1690)

Probably a self-portrait of the artist, wearing lawn collar, his hair long and curled

Circa: Circa 1660

Circa 1660

A counter-proof - black and red chalks, possibly reworked, on laid paper prepared with a pink wash.

16.2 x 12.6 cm (6 ³/₈ x 5 inches)

Inscribed verso: 'Mr Gibson the Dwarf / Husband to Mrs. Gibson the Dwarf'.

While we cannot be completely certain that this is a self-portrait, the features of Richard Gibson are well-known from other portraits of him, including a drawing by Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680). This drawing, now in the British Museum, was previously thought to have been a self-portrait by Gibson, but is now firmly attributed to Lely.[1]

The re-attribution of the present work to Gibson himself is based on other chalk drawings by the artist, two of which are also in the British Museum.[2] These drawings, both of young girls, show strong similarities in the drawing of the sitter's eyes with the current work, with the eye furthest from the viewer shown on a slightly lower plane and the eyes also drawn with heavy upper and lower lids. Although there are differences in these finished and coloured portraits of girls, the drawing of the faces shows a consistent pattern in the handling of the eyes.[3]

If accepted as a self-portrait, it would be the only one by Gibson, who clearly, like his fellow miniaturists, drew his immediate family and friends for pleasure. Datable to circa 1660, the pose shows a knowledge of Lely's own self-portrait from the same date.[4] Although Lely's image is far grander, with his hand gesturing towards his own countenance, the stance of the body, with the eyes toward the viewer (presumably looking into a mirror) are all suggestive of a study of the self. Furthermore, the

portrait was probably sold in the sale of Michael Rosse, son-in-law of the artist (married to Gibson's daughter, Susannah-Penelope), in 1723.[5] Its presence in the Tower/s family collection, is also suggestive of a self portrait, as Tower was said to be close to the artist.⁶ Part of a group of drawings by Cooper, Gibson and Susannah-Penelope Rosse, they remained together for 300 years before an auction sale in 2023.

Richard Gibson (1605/15-1690) had a long and fascinating life and a successful career as a miniaturist or limner.[7] As a dwarf, who was 3 feet 10 inches in height, he was unique in breaking from the servitude of English court life to direct his own profession. What is clear is that he was a talent to nurture from an early age - his early training was under Francis Cleyn (c. 1582-1658) and from the late 1630s he entered the service of the Lord Chamberlain, Philip, 4th Earl of Pembroke. It was in Lord Pembroke's household that Gibson met his future wife, Anne Sheppard (d. 1707), who was also a dwarf. Their marriage, in February 1641, was one of the last court festivities in London before the onset of the Civil War.

After his death in 1650, Lord Pembroke's patronage was taken up by his grandson, the 2nd Earl of Carnarvon. Throughout this period and after the Restoration in 1660, Gibson's work was much in demand. It is thought that this self-portrait could have been taken during this high point of Gibson's career, although before being made 'picture maker' to Charles II after the death, in 1672, of the previous incumbent, Samuel Cooper. The following year, Gibson relinquished the post when he was appointed drawings master to the daughters of James, Duke of York. In 1677, he accompanied Princess Mary to the Hague at the time of her marriage to Prince William of Orange, remaining in the Netherlands for over ten years. He returned to London when Princess Mary and William of Orange acceded to the British throne 1688. Of the five surviving children of Richard and Anne Gibson, one was the miniaturist Susannah-Penelope Rosse, who may have been the original recipient of this drawing given that it most likely appeared in her husband's possessions in the auction of 1723.

[1]For a discussion of the re-attribution see https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1881-0611-157. Lely's double portrait of Richard Gibson with his wife Anne Sheppard (formerly Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth), probably painted about 1649-50, and another portrait by Lely of 1658 (an early copy of which is in the National Portrait Gallery, London), all concur with the features in the present drawing. Sir Oliver Millar also suggested that a painting of a sleeping dwarf (Millar (1978) 16) is also a portrait of Gibson, datable in the late 1640s.

[2] Museum numbers 1900,0717.40 and 1900,0717.41.

[3] This distinctive handling of the eye area can also be seen in a fine drawing by Gibson of an unknown young woman, also once in the possession of William Towers (d. 1693). See L. Stainton & C. White, *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth*, British Museum catalogue, 1987, p. 102. This distinctive handling of the eye area can also be seen in a fine drawing by Gibson of an unknown young woman, also once in the possession of William Towers (d. 1693). See L. Stainton & C. White, *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth*, British Museum catalogue, 1987, p. 102.

[4] Sold from a Private Collection at Sotheby's, 6 July 2016, lot 216.

[5] Sotheby's, London, July 5 2023, lot 17.

[6] D. Foskett, London, Samuel Cooper, 1609-1672, 1974, p.85.

[7] Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Gibson, Richard [called Dwarf Gibson] , J. Murdoch, 2004.