THE LIMNER COMPANY



MARIE-ANNE FRAGONARD (nee Gérard) (1745 - 1823)

Portrait miniature of a Young Boy wearing a frilled collar and black cap

Oval, 9 cm (3 $^{1}/_{2}$ inches) high

Circa 1772-82

Watercolour on ivory

Gilded metal frame

Versions: Private Collection (Clarke Collection) on long term loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, 1999. Exhibited in1888 at Hôtel de Chimay, Paris (an extension of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts) as the property of Michel Heine of Paris. Dated c.1772-1782 by Stephen Lloyd in British Art Journal Vol.II, No.1, p.80.

Despite an exhibition being held of her portrait miniatures during her lifetime, for over two hundred years Marie-Anne Fragonard's works have been continually misattributed. Close in style to the work of her celebrated husband, Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), known for such works as the Wallace Collection's 'The Swing', she, like many other women artists, has stayed in the shadow of her husband. [1]

Both Marie-Anne and her sister were pupils of the famous Fragonard – but while her younger sister Marguerite was able to pursue a career as an artist, Marie-Anne fell under the radar. Marguerite Gérard, who joined the Fragonard household at the age of eight, was the first woman in France to succeed as a genre painter. Her life was in direct contrast to her sister's – as an unmarried and child-free woman, Marguerite was given access to her brother in law's contacts, was able to work at Louvre and see important private art collections. It has been suggested that she was in a relationship with her brother in law, but this cannot be proved. Certainly, Marie-Anne remained devoted to her painter husband, relinquishing her own talent and raising their children.

Marie-Anne's career began well – a private exhibition of her miniatures during her lifetime at Salon de la Correspondance took place in 1783, as well as the sale of 30 of her miniatures at auction between 1778-1785. A sketch from circa 1786 (now in the Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Grasse, France) shows the family seated informally on a bench – including Marguerite and the children of Marie-Anne and Jean Honoré. With Marguerite and the children training as artists as soon as they were able to hold a stylus, it seems that Marie-Anne's career took a back seat – or was at the very least confined to portrait miniatures, painted hastily with great skill when she was able to. The present work appears extremely close to a portrait in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and may represent the same sitter.

[1] It was only in 1996 that Pierre Rosenberg proposed Marie-Anne as the artist of these works. See P. Rosenberg, 'De qui sont les miniatures de Fragonard', Revue de l'Art, vol. 111, 1996, pp. 66-76.