THE LIMNER COMPANY



OZIAS HUMPHRY (1742 - 1810)

Portrait of Colonel Duff (1742-1803), wearing a blue uniform with red facings, and holding a curved sabre under his left arm

Circa: After 1790

After 1790

15 x 11 cm (5 $^{7}/_{8}$ x 4 $^{3}/_{8}$ inches)

Watercolour and gouache on ivory

This unfinished portrait of Colonel 'Tiger' Patrick Duff is likely to have been painted by Humphry after a large-scale oil portrait, painted by his friend George Romney (1734-1802). Duff had sat for Romney in London in 1790. Though the original portrait is now in a private collection, an engraving of it, in the National Portrait Gallery's collection[1], exemplifies the resemblance that the present portrait bears. This nature of creation of the present portrait explains a few facts related to it; the unfinished nature, the inclusion of a sabre, and that the provenance of the piece is Humphry's, rather than Duff's, family. John Smart (1741-1811) also appears to have painted a copy after this painting in 1791, which was also in the collection of Dr Erika Pohl-Stroher.[2]

Ozias Humphry had travelled to Italy with George Romney in between 1773 and 1777, and may have well had access to the artist's studio while Romney's oil was being painted. After training at William Shipley's drawing academy, he enjoyed strong connections with some of the leading painters in Britain of the day, including Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds. He had been in India himself between 1785 and 1788, despite this not being the place in which he had painted this example. Humphry had one illegitimate son, William Upcott (1779-1845) to whom a large majority of works were left.

Born in Scotland in 1742, Duff had been brought up in a family with strong links to Britain's colonial empire. His uncles, James and Alexander Gordon, were wine merchants in Madeira. While his other cousins became employed in their business, Duff was instead to join the army, and was transferred to the Artillery of the East India Company in 1763. He enjoyed success here, and was later promoted to Commander of the Nawad of Oubh's artillery.

A book about the life of Duff, by Alistair Mutch, recounts the reason that he gained the nickname ‘Tiger’. In 1773, he was ambushed and heavily injured by a tiger, which he was able to kill with a musket. This attack left him with a scar, which Mutch suggests can be seen in the engraving after Romney just below his right eye[3]. It is also possible that the mark on the present portrait (figure 1) is meant to represent this same scar, a symbol of his courage and his connections to Bengal. This was not the only dramatic event of Duff’s life; he had led a mutiny of officers, and ran in a parliamentary election.

[1] Patrick Duff, Mezzotint, by and Published by Charles Howard Hidges after George Romney, NPG D35773.

[2] Sotheby’s, 8 December 2022, lot 525.

[3] A. Mutch, Tiger Duff: India, Madeira and Empire in Eighteenth-Century Scotland, Aberdeen University Press, 2017, p.x.

Literature:

G. Williamson, Life and Works of Ozias Humphry, R.A., John Lane, 1918, ill. p. 140, listed p.269, p.276 (both no. 407); M. Archer, India and British Portraiture, 1770-1825, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.200.