THE LIMNER COMPANY



ANDREW PLIMER (1763 - 1837)

Portrait of Mr. Thomas Pagan, wearing a blue coat and white stock

Circa: Circa 1795-1800

Circa 1795-1800

Watercolour on ivory

Oval, 90mm (3 1/2 in.) high

Gold 'Ouroboros' frame

A record of this miniature has allowed us to identify the sitter as Mr Thomas Pagan. This is presumably the Mr. Thomas Pagan of Muirkirk, Scotland, who was born in around 1741 and died in 1818. He may also be the Mr Thomas Pagan associated with a silhouette by John Miers (1757-1821) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [1], and the husband of 'Mrs Thomas Pagan, painted by Alexander Gallaway (fl.c 1794-1812) and sold at Christie's in 1998 [2]. There is very little information about Mr. Pagan's life apart from these records.

Andrew Plimer's family moved to London in the early 1780s, at which point he became the manservant of Richard Cosway, another well-known miniature painter of the period. After some success in London, including exhibitions at the Royal Academy, Plimer began to travel elsewhere to earn money through commissions. He is known to have travelled as far as Cornwall and Scotland, the latter being where he could have met Mr Thomas Pagan. Alternatively, Pagan may have travelled to London and had his portrait taken there. Given that this miniature has the distinctive sky background that Plimer adopted from around 1790, and is not dated or signed, it can be confidently dated to circa 1795-1800.

One intriguing feature of this portrait is the frame, which is designed to look like an Ouroboros, or a snake eating its own tail. This symbol has numerous meanings and has been adopted by different cultures across history, with different versions featuring in Greek, Ancient Egyptian, and Norse mythology. In this example, the Ouroboros could have been used as a symbol for the eternal love that

the owner had for the sitter.

[1] Accession Number 2000-137-18. It is also possible that this silhouette depicts the sitter's son, also Thomas (1778-1864).

[2] Christie's, Important Portrait Miniatures Including the Walter and Gertrude Rappolt Collection, 14 October 1998, lot 93.

Exhibitions

Antique Dealer's Fair Catalogue, Grosvenor Gallery, 1961.