

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN BOGLE (1746 - 1803)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing a white dress with lace-trimmed fichu, a lilac spotted kerchief in her powdered hair and tied under her chin

Circa: 1786

1786

Watercolour on ivory (licence 79F4MXC9)

Oval, 54mm (2 1/8 inches) high

Later gold brooch clasp frame, signed and dated on the obverse 'JB/ 1786'

The Scottish-born artist John Bogle is often admired for his evocation of personality in his astonishingly detailed portrait miniatures. He might have become a member of the aristocracy but never made any claim to his title, the 'Earl of Menteith'. The only son of John Bogle and a Mrs Mary Graham, it is stated in a genealogical tree drawn by his father that he was a scholar at the Academy in the College of Glasgow. Married to Marion, Mary or May Wilson, only daughter of John Wilson of Spango, Nithsdale, he went to London in 1772 and resided there at Panton Square.

A fascinating letter survives, written the year after this miniature was painted in 1787, to Michael Bogle, stating how difficult it was to make a living by being an artist [1]. He does mention that 'it is enough that I myself suffer the indignities and misconduct of some of my connections'. He appears to have been in poor health 3 months prior to this letter and was unable to conduct his business and he also states 'nor can my nerves bear to be irritated'. However, when he moved from Edinburgh to London in the early 1770s, he met some of the most interesting characters in Georgian England, even accompanying Fanny Burney to witness the trial of Warren Hastings.

This particular portrait would have been painted during his time in London, when he was exhibiting at the Royal Academy – in fact he only exhibited one portrait miniature there, in 1785, of a 'naval officer'.

Very few women seemed to have sat to Bogle for their portrait – and it is perhaps due to his unflinching eye as an artist. He appears not to have been inclined to flatter his sitters, concentrating instead on drawing on a deeper vision of personality and including his sitters perceived flaws. The lady

here, for all of her fine clothing, including a lace-edged fichu stares uncomfortably out at the artist, her face imprisoned by a fashionable, overly large powdered wig [2].

In 1800 he returned to his native Scotland, where he settled in Edinburgh until his death in 1803.

[1] Michael Bogle, a fellow artist, must have been a relation but does not appear in the family tree.

[2] From the French expression 'thrown over', a fichu was a large, square kerchief worn by women to fill in the low neckline of a bodice.