THE LIMNER COMPANY



CHARLES BEALE Jnr. (1660 - circa 1714)

A Lady, called Lady Lonsdale, probably Katherine Lowther Lowther [née Thynne], later Viscountess Lonsdale (1653-1713) wearing white chemise and blue cloak, her blonde hair curled and loose; circa 1680

Circa: Circa 1680

Watercolour and bodycolour on vellum

Inscribed verso '*wife of John Lord Lonsdale/ Bought from Byram/ A Pair with Minit of/ Lord Lonsdale CB*'

Turned wood frame with inner metal border

Oval, 70mm (2 3/4in) high

The present portrait miniature aligns very closely with the work of both Charles Beale Junior and his mother, Mary Beale (1633-1699). Noted as ‘a good copyst in miniature’, many of his works are taken from paintings by Sir Peter Lely.[1] Charles learned to draw and paint by practising in his mother’s studio from a young age and took lessons with the miniaturist Thomas Flatman (1637–1688) one of the earliest and closest friends of the Beales. Flatman shared with Beale a preference for naturalistic likenesses and the idea of painting ‘out of love and friendship or for study and improvement’. [2] The attribution of the present portrait to Charles Beale is based on the portrait of his mother, Mary (now in the collection at Tate Britain), which through a reassessment of documentation, was shown to be by his hand.[3] Sharing the same technique and palette, this work can be added to a small oeuvre by him.

It is difficult to pinpoint whether the present work is copied from an oil painting, possibly one by Mary, or painted ‘out of love’. Certainly, the sitter shows a close resemblance to portraits painted at this period by the court artist Sir Peter Lely, who painted his female subjects with a sensual allure which also translated, perhaps almost more successfully, to portrait miniatures of the period. The great protagonists for this ‘sensual’ style of portraiture were of course the mistresses of King Charles II, and here we see a direct correlation between this portrait and those of Nell Gwyn. Gwyn was the favourite mistress of King Charles II and one of the most colourful characters of the Restoration age. Her image was widely sought after, but high demand both in her own lifetime and later has led to great confusion in

her iconography, with a proliferation of portraits showing unknown, sultry-looking Stuart beauties misidentified as Nell.

The identification of the sitter as Katherine, Viscountess Lonsdale (1653-1713) would date the portrait to around her age of twenty-seven and after her marriage to John Lowther. It is likely that she was in London up until 1680, where several of her children were born. Her husband became Viscount Lonsdale in 1696 and a member of the House of Lords, but after his death she took the unusual step (for a woman at that date) of continuing his political influence in North-West England.

[1] Basil Long, British Miniaturists, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1924), pp. 20–21.

[2] Helen Draper, ‘Mary Beale and her ‘paynting roome’ in Restoration London, (Institute of Historical Research and Courtauld Institute, 2020), p. 98.

[3] Tate Britain, T14107. The portrait was sold to Tate Britain by Philip Mould & Co. – for a full catalogue description see http://www.historicalportraits.com/Gallery.asp?Page=Item&ItemID=1817&Desc=Mary-Beale-%7C-Charles-Beale-II.

Literature:

'Gages d'amour. Les Miniatures’, ABC Decor, no.153-154, July-August 1977, illustrated in colour following p.10 (as by Lawrence Crosse).