THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL (17th century)

The Head of a Lady, traditionally identified as Barbara Villiers, 1st Duchess of Cleveland (1640-1709); circa 1680

Circa: Circa 1680

Black lead and ink on laid paper

Stained black wood frame

Rectangular, 126mm (5in) high

The artist of this portrait, which dates to the 1680s, was likely influenced by artists such as Sir Peter Lely, Samuel Cooper and Richard Gibson, all of whom produced drawings which were highly valued in the 17th century. Several drawings which remained in Lely's studio after his death, were subsequently sold as framed and appreciated as works of art in their own right (as opposed to preparatory studies).

The unfinished nature of the drawing would have been much appreciated in this period as an insight into the artist's creative processes. In an intimate portrait, such as this, might have made the recipient feel closer to the sitter - the artist's concentration on the face focusing attention on the sitter's expression as she looks directly out of the portrait. Evidence shows that there was considerable interest in obtaining examples of the miniaturist Samuel Cooper's unfinished work after his death in 1672. Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who had been painted by Cooper in 1669, opened negotiations for the purchase of the sketches belonging to Mrs Cooper in 1674 but declined to buy, because of the price. A sketch by Cooper of Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland c. 1660-61, was described in 1683 by Francesco Terriesi, an agent acting for Cosimo III de' Medici, as 'Duchess of Cleveland, face and head finished and beautiful, but nothing else' and was priced at £30, slightly lower than the £50 demanded for other sketches from the same group.

Traditionally, this drawing has been identified as Barbara Villiers, 1st Duchess of Cleveland. Villiers achieved fame as the mistress to King Charles II (1630-1685). Her influence remained throughout the 1660s, until in 1671 Louise de Keroualle caught the eye of the King and she replaced Villiers as his

principal mistress. However, a facial comparison to other known portraits of Villiers confirms that the present is unlikely to represent her, but closely conforms to the ideals of beauty in this period.

The excellent condition of the present work suggests that it too may have come from an artist'sstudio or preserved in a folio.