

THE LIMNER COMPANY



HENRY FERGUSON (1665 - 1730)

Self-portrait; circa 1690

Circa: Circa 1690

Oil on card

Inscribed to label, verso: *'peint / par Fairgusen / de Toulouse / son portrait'*

Oval, 75 mm (3 in) high

Recently discovered in Toulouse, where the artist worked for much of his career, this newly identified self-portrait by the Anglo-Dutch landscape painter Henry Ferguson is now the only known example of his foray into portraiture.

Likely painted when the artist was working in the studio of Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723) during his formative years as an artist in London, it must have been considered an important keepsake for the artist, presumably travelling with him from England to France, where it would remain for over 300 years.

Henry Ferguson (or 'Vergazon' as he was known in Europe) was almost certainly the son of the Scottish emigrée artist William Gouw Ferguson (1632–1695) who spent most of his career in the Netherlands after being admitted to the Guild of St Luke in Utrecht in 1648. A migratory artist like William, Henry was one of several Anglo-Dutch artists working in late 17th-century London, where he painted backgrounds for Kneller's portraits, but later settled in Toulouse. While William specialised in still-lives of dead game, Henry was best known for his darkly atmospheric capriccio compositions of architectural ruins, often with fragments of monumental sculpture.

This self-portrait could easily be confused for a work by the artist's master Kneller, with its strong colouring and effective use of chiaroscuro. The confidence in its handling – especially considering its miniature scale - and the immediacy of the subject's gaze would suggest that it was an exercise purely

for the artist's own use.

Its historic Toulouse-based provenance would also indicate that this remained with the artist until his death there in 1730, suggesting it was of great sentimental value to him.