

THE LIMNER COMPANY



GERVASE SPENCER (c.1715 - 1763)

A Lady, wearing 'Turkish-style' dress; 1748

Circa: 1748

Enamel on copper

Signed and dated on the counter-enamel 'G. Spencer. pinx./1748'

Oval, 44mm (1.7in) high

Gilt metal mount with stamped detail

This miniature is an example of how Gervase Spencer excelled at painting portraits of women in enamel. As a miniature painter, he also worked on ivory, though most of his portraits were on copper, or sometimes gold, using the difficult medium of enamel. The unidentified woman in this portrait wears fashions inspired by the Ottoman Empire, which were also common amongst portraits of women by Spencer. A notable comparison is the portrait of another unknown woman in the Victoria and Albert Museum[1], previously identified as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762).

Britain had a long history with the Ottoman Empire, being one of the first countries to establish an embassy in Istanbul in 1535. In the 1740s, the war of Austrian Succession meant that British troops were fighting closer to the Ottoman-controlled Mediterranean[2]. Though this did not spell good news for British-Ottoman relations, it did mean that more and more British men were gaining exposure to the cultures, and more importantly in this case fashions, of the empire. The robe that the lady in this miniature wears is known in Turkish as a Kurdi, and typically takes the form of a floor-length robe trimmed with fur. Such robes became popular amongst western women, as did hair turbans, also seen in this portrait.

Whereas later works were often signed on the obverse, this miniature has been signed and dated on the counter-enamel. Therefore, it is a rarer and earlier example of Spencer's work. He became known for his fashionable portraits, and this is certainly not an exception. Though the colours of the woman's

outfit are more subdued than in other examples, such as the V & A portrait, she has still been depicted as a glamorous and wealthy sitter.

[1] Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession number P.4-1943.

[2] M. Talbot, British-Ottoman Relations, 1713-1779: Commerce, Diplomacy, and Violence, Gale International, online at <https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/michael-talbot-british-ottoman-relations-1713-1779-commerce-diplomacy-violence>.