THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1741 - 1811)

A Gentleman, believed to be James Dunlop of Garnkirk (1741-1816), wearing a green coat, embroidered waistcoat, solitaire, and white stock, with pink powdered hair; 1770

Circa: 1770

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 5RYYKQH8

Signed with initials and dated '*J.S/1770*'

Oval, 40mm (1 ½ in) high

James Dunlop of Garnkirk has been identified as the sitter of this portrait through an inscription that was sold with the miniature when it left his descendants' collection in 2005. There are other portraits known to depict the sitter, including one by George Romney (1734-1802), sold from the Paul Mellon collection in 1989.

The son of Colin Dunlop, Lord Provost of Glasgow, James purchased Garnkirk from his uncle, also James. Four years following the completion of this miniature, he would marry his cousin, Marion Buchanan of Mount Vernon (1754-1828), the daughter of George Buchanan of Mount Vernon (1728-1762) and Lilias Dunlop of Garnkirk. There are some focal differences between the portrait by Romney and this miniature, however this could be down to artistic licence, and a difference in the age of the sitter at the time of both of these portraits. One of the most notable features of this portrait is the colour of Dunlop's hair. Coloured powder, in this case pink, was fashionably applied to wigs in the late 18th century by both men and women. Though we are mostly used to seeing this done with white powder, many portrait miniatures by Smart provide examples of just how many different colours were also used. Contemporary advertisements attest to the fact that various colours and scents in powder were available.

In 1770, Smart was at an early stage in his career as a miniature painter, but clearly already fluent in the highly detailed, highly coloured portraits he would become renowned for painting. Not only has he managed to capture a fine level of textural details across the different fabrics that the sitter wears, but Smart has also created an immense amount of depth in Dunlop's complexion. If this is who the portrait depicts, the miniature may have been presented to Dunlop's wife as a wedding gift, to be worn around her wrist or on her person.