THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1741 - 1811)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, Traditionally identified as Viscountess Townshend, later Anne, 1st Marchioness Townshend (b.c.1752-1819), wearing a blue fur-trimmed coat, white embroidered dress, her hair powdered auburn and worn up

Circa: 1777

1777

Watercolour on ivory (licence R3AP5FEW)

Oval, 45mm (1 ¾ in) high

Signed with initials and dated ‘J.S/1777’

Gold reeded frame

This portrait resembles both another portrait of Viscountess Townshend by Smart and portraits of the Viscountess by Angelica Kauffman (1741-1807) and Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792).[1] The second portrait by Smart is illustrated in Foskett’s 1964 monograph of the artist, and bears the date 1775.[2] In both miniature portraits, she wears a high updo, fur-trimmed coat and a similar style of dress underneath. However, the sitter in the present example is much more subdued in her style, possibly reflecting a change in her lifestyle following some years of marriage since the first portrait was painted.

Anne was the second wife of George, 4th Viscount and later 1st Marquess Townshend (1724-1807). She had been born to Sir William Montgomery, 1st Baronet of Magbiehill (1717-1788) and Hannah Tomkyns in the early 1750s, and was known for her beauty, something that is certainly reflected in this work. Smart had an incredible amount of skill in depicting fine details, such as the sitter’s eyelashes and the baby hairs framing her face. The result here is an extremely delicate rendering of Anne, who gazes softly out of the frame of the portrait. She adopts the same position in Smart’s earlier portrait, though this is slightly larger, so it is possible that the second version was commissioned as a more portable and intimate option.

John Smart painted similarly skillful portraits of important members of society throughout his career as a miniature painter. These included, for a period beginning in 1785, citizens in India, where he travelled to continue receiving commissions at a time when portrait miniatures were popular amongst members of the East India Company. His bright, lifelike, and sensitive works are seen as some of the finest examples of miniature painting of his period.

[1] D. Foskett, John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures, London, 1964, p.36, ill. fig.29, plate X; At Burghley House, reference PIC155.

[2] At M H De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, 75.2.13.

Exhibitions

London, Philip Mould & company, John Smart: A Genius Magnified, 25 November-9 December 2014, cat.no. 17.

Literature:

E. Rutherford et.al., John Smart: A Genius Magnified, London, 2014, p. 46-47.