THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN WRIGHT (- (d.1820))

Portrait miniature of Frances Fitzroy, née Mundy (d.1797), turned to the left, her head resting on her hand, wearing a white dress, and a blue band in her hair

Circa: circa 1795

circa 1795

Watercolour on ivory (licence W7ZXYSSG)

Oval, 89 mm (3 1/2 in) high

Gilt Metal Frame

The sitter of the present work was previously identified as Frances Fitzroy (née Stewart), the second wife of General Lord Charles Fitzroy (1764-1829). Further research has revealed that the woman painted here by Wright is instead Frances Fitzroy (née Mundy), the first wife of General Fitzroy. The miniature appears to be a copy of a portrait by John Hoppner, now in the Rough Point collection, Newport [1]. John Wright was friends with Hoppner and is known to have taken other copies of his larger oil portraits.

Given the date of the original Hoppner composition and that Frances and Charles were married in 1795, this miniature has been dated to this year. The portrait may have been intended as a gift to Charles to commemorate his marriage. Wright has portrayed Frances in a lighter tone than Hoppner, more typical in miniature painting. However, she remains in a contemplative pose, looking gently to her right.

Tragically, Frances died only two years after this portrait is believed to have been taken. It was after this that Charles remarried, to another Frances, previously assumed to be the sitter here. She left behind a son, Charles Augustus Fitzroy, born in 1796. Little else is known about the sitter, other than that her Father, Edward Millar Mundy (c.1750-1822), had been a member of parliament.

The story of John Wright is also rather tragic, given that he committed suicide in 1820. Before this date, he had a successful career not only moving in the circles of other renowned portrait painters, like Hoppner and Lawrence, but also exhibiting at the Royal Academy between 1795 and 1819. Foskett describes his faces as having a yellowish tinge, which can certainly be seen in the gently flushed cheeks of Frances here. His distinctive, strong brush strokes used to create definition are clear throughout the fabric worn by Frances. Other examples of his work can be found in the Victoria & Albert Museum and the National Portrait Gallery [2].

[1] For more information on this portrait, see: https://newportalri.org/items/show/13328.

[2] The Wright in the National Portrait Gallery is a watercolour, of Sir George Howland Beaumont (NPG 3157). This is another medium in which Wright was known to have worked.