THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1741 - 1811)

Portrait miniature of Admiral Sir John Lindsay (1737-1788), in gold-bordered naval uniform with gold buttons, white facings, white waistcoat and cravat, wearing the breast-star and red sash of the Order of Bath, powdered hair en queue

Circa: 1787

1787

4.9 cm (1 $^{7}/_{8}$ inches)

Watercolour on ivory

Signed with initials and dated 'J S 1787 I.' (lower left)

Gilt-metal mount within silver-gilt frame, engraved on the reverse 'Admiral Sir John Lindsay By John Smart 1787 Signed'.

This portrait of Admiral Sir John Lindsay (1737-1788) is a top example of John Smart's (1741-1811) highly celebrated work as a miniaturist, famous for his extraordinary attention to detail, a commitment to realism and his reputation as an artist who 'executed perfect character studies'. Admiral Sir John Lindsay, the above sitter, was born to Sir Alexander Lindsay of Everix and Emilia, daughter of David Murray 5th Viscount Stormont and sister of William Murray, first Earl of Mansfield and is particularly notable for his exceptional naval career. Lindsay became lieutenant in 1956 whilst commanding a fireship called Pluto in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), whilst British maritime forces attempted to capture the French Atlantic port of Rochefort. In the subsequent year, 1757, Lindsay was posted on the frigate Trent where he served both at home and at stations in the West Indies, particularly in Havana, Cuba. Lindsay's first distinguished naval success came after the death of Captain Goostrey, of the Cambridge, whilst attempting to lay siege to the Castillo de los Tros Reyes del Morro, a fortress guarding the entrance to Havana's main harbour. After Captain Goostrey was killed in rifle fire, Lindsay took over captaining the Cambridge, where he 'made many strong proofs of his valour'. John Lindsay's decoration began with the knighthood he received on the 10th September 1764 in reward for his bravery. After returning to the West Indies upon a different vessel, the Tartar, Lindsay returned in 1767

and briefly adjourned his life as a seaman, serving instead as MP for Aberdeen Burghs from 1767-1768. Despite marrying Mary, daughter of Sir William Milner in September 1768, it is believed Lindsay also fathered two illegitimate children whilst living in Scotland, named John and Elizabeth (b.c. 1765) and who he bequeathed £1000 to each in trust in his will. However, it would appear that John and Elizabeth were not Lindsay's first illegitimate offspring, due to the existence of his daughter Dido Elizabeth Belle (1761?-1804). Dido's mother was Maria Belle, an enslaved black woman of African origin, whom Lindsay had taken from a Spanish vessel and brought with him to England, where Dido was born. Dido retains historical significance as a black woman who, with her mother Maria Belle having been freed by Lindsay, unusually became a protegee of Lindsay's uncle, William Murry Earl of Mansfield. Lindsay's initial knighthood was superseded in decoration when he was appointed a Knight of Bath in June 1770, which the ODNB describes as a 'remarkable honour for a not very senior sea officer'. The breast-star on Lindsay's blue coat in the above portrait indicates his admittance into this British Order of Chivalry. In 1769, Lindsay sailed to the East Indies as commodore and commander-in-chief of the frigate Stag, thus expanding the reaches of Lindsay's travels and explorations, although this stint was terminated prematurely due to the hostility of the East India Company. After commanding the Prince of George during the Battle of Ushant (1778), Lindsay became an Admiralty Commissioner between April-December 1783 and then commodore and commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean. As part of this esteemed position, Lindsay performed the great honour of entertaining the King and Queen on board the Trusty in Naples in June 1784. It has been held that Lindsay returned to England not long after this event, as his health began to deteriorate, becoming symbolically promoted to 'Rear-Admiral of the Red' in September 1787, indicated by the red sash he wears in the above portrait. The signed date of the portrait produces a little uncertainty regarding Lindsay's sitting, as John Smart famously journeyed to Madras, South India for the period 1786-85, and marked the portraits produced during this period with an 'I' after the date and signature in order to distinguish them. Rather than Lindsay having made one final, secretive naval journey to the East Indies, it is most likely that Smart produced one of his typical, extremely detailed sketches of Lindsay at an earlier date, before sailing for Madras in the spring of 1785 and completing the portrait whilst in India. In fact, as the lot essay for the portrait's sale at Christie's on the 5th June 2007 notes, A Captain Lindsay, later Rear-Admiral Sir John, K.B, is listed as having sat for John Smart in 1781, which is potentially where the origins of the above portrait lie. Smart's habit of producing these extraordinary sketches sets him apart from other miniaturists, and he often was known to sketch his sitters in incredible likeness in 'the preliminary stage in painting their portraits, which he then used to work up to his final portrait'. Given the addition of the red sash, Smart must have received notice of Lindsay's final promotion and included it in the final portrait, whilst in India. The existence of the particular sketch in question is confirmed by a 1928 Christie's sale entitled 'Sketches by John Smart (The Property of a Lady)', where 9 sketches were auctioned, with lot 62 listed as 'Read-Admiral Sir John Lindsay, wearing powdered wig, blue coat trimmed with yellow braid, white waistcoat and Star of the Order of Bath', followed by the highlights of Smart's times at sea. Lindsay died on the 4th June 1888, aged 51, in Marlborough whilst returning from Bath. He was subsequently buried in Westminster Abbey.

The above portrait is exemplary not only of John Smart's unique habit of producing these preliminary sketches, but also of many of Smart's characteristic techniques. Smart, one of the most celebrated British portrait miniaturists of the 18th century, first demonstrated his considerable talent at competitions run by the Society of Arts. Smart was an established miniaturist by 1760, with a growing reputation for his highly naturalistic portrayals of sitters, going to great lengths to ensure he captured every detail, including down to the individual lines around sitters' eyes, as with Lindsay's portrait above. Foskett describes how Smart 'used a red brick colour for the complexion, and left a small 'island' of naked ivory to accentuate the highlights on the cheek', techniques which are exemplified in Smart's portrait of Lindsay. Smart became Director for the Society of Artists in 1771, then Vice-President in 1777 and President in 1778. Despite achieving great professional and financial success in London, with most of his clients coming from the wealthy classes, Smart obtained permission from the East India Company to travel to Madras, arriving in 1785 with a view to exploiting the portraiture market there. On his return to London, Smart quickly began practising again and exhibiting regularly at the Royal Academy from 1797 until his death in 1811. His son, John Smart Jr., followed his father's profession and also became a portrait miniature painter.