THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD CROSSE (1742 - 1810)

A set of portraits of the Cartwright family, clockwise from the top of the frame: Mary Catherine Cartwright (1747-1814), circa 1760s; a gentleman traditionally called Major General Thomas Desaguliers (1721-1780), circa 1770; a lady called Byzantia Cartwright (nee Lane)(d.1738), circa 1710s; and Thomas Cartwright (1735-1772), circa 1765.

Watercolour on ivory Enamel on copper

These miniatures have most likely been grouped posthumously, given the date of the frame in comparison to the portrait, and with the rather strange grouping of sitters, this would make sense. Here, we have the portraits of a married couple- Mary Catherine Cartwright and Thomas Cartwright- and accompanying portraits of one of each of their parents- Byzantia Cartwright (mother of Thomas) and Major General Thomas Desaguliers (Father of Mary). The answer to why only these parents were included is something that we will never fully know. Given the small and delicate nature of these works of art- especially those on enamel as are included here, it is possible that other family members once had portraits, but that these had been lost or destroyed by the time that this group was put together.

Dates of birth and death of the sitters also explain the fact that the miniatures come from two different artists. Byzantia Lane (d.1738) has been depicted by Zincke, a miniature painter from the generation before Richard Crosse, the artist responsible for the portraits of the rest of the family. Because Crosse had only been born in 1742, it would have been impossible for him to have painted the miniature of Byzantia from life.

Confirmation of the identities of the sitter comes from both labels on the backs of the portraits, and comparisons with other portraits. At Aynhoe, the ancestral home of the Cartwright Family, there are both portraits of Byzantia (attributed to Van de Bank) and Thomas Cartwright (by Thomas Hudson). Furthermore, Crosse painted another portrait of Thomas in 1765, where he wears a white and blue coat, instead of the purple he wears here[1]. There are no other existing portraits of Thomas Desaguliers or Mary Catherine Cartwright. Another almost identical portrait to the one here of

Desaguliers was sold by Philip Mould & Company, and is given an alternative identity. Comparisons to other portraits of William Thomas, the sitter of this other miniature, do show similar features, however it is also unclear where the other evidence for this identification came from. It is very possible that Crosse was painting the two at a similar time, or that one has since had a mistaken identity.

Interestingly, two out of three of the portraits by Crosse shown here are painted on enamel. This is not unknown, but is quite unusual for the artist. He had been made painter in enamel to the King during his career; however, many of his surviving works are painted, as with the portrait of Thomas Desaguliers, on ivory. Another fine example of his work on enamel can be found at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter[2]. This was a particularly difficult medium to master, and one that the second artist here, Zincke, was known for being particularly skilled in.

[1] Sold Bonhams, 11 February 1999, lot 96.

[2] Accession number 89/1962