THE LIMNER COMPANY



PHILIP JEAN (1755 - 1802)

Portrait miniature of John Pitt, 2nd Earl of Chatham (1756-1835), wearing a blue coat and white stock, his wig powdered white, in front of a red drapery background; circa 1780

Circa: Circa 1780

Circa 1780
Watercolour on ivory

Philip Jean did not begin his career as an artist, and had instead been in the Navy as a young man. Following this career change, he began to exhibit at the Royal Academy between 1787 and 1802. He was also patronised by the royal family, having painted full-length portraits of George III and Queen Charlotte. There is a clear influence of successful miniaturists such as George Engleheart and Richard Cosway in his work, and many miniatures feature a distinct background, such as the red drapery included here.

Often overshadowed by his father and younger brother, William Pitt the Elder and Younger, respectively, John Pitt became the 2nd Earl of Chatham upon his father's death in 1778. Historically, he has been remembered for his laziness, monikered 'The Late Lord'[1] and known for not getting up before noon. The criticisms of the earl do not stop there, and he has also been remembered for his failure at Walcheren in 1809. Here, he acted too slowly in leading a large expeditionary force to the Dutch Island, with the aim of destroying the French Fleet at Antwerp. Many of the troops developed 'Walcheren Fever', and in the end, one in ten died, and the French were able to reinforce their port.

After this, John Pitt was disregarded, and he spent the rest of his life living away from society. The present miniature must have been painted at an earlier date, also given that Philip Jean died in 1802, when Pitt's glory was still relatively intact, despite accusations of his laziness. Other liknesses of 'The Lazy Lord' exist, including one by Hoppner, now known in prints, and a portrait of the Earl as a younger man by Martin Archer Shee[2] (1769-1850).

[1] The title of a biography of the Earl, by Dr Jacqueline Reiter.

[2] Sold at Sotheby's, 5 June 2008, lot 77.