THE LIMNER COMPANY



JEREMIAH MEYER R.A. (1735 - 1789)

Portrait miniature of a young woman, possibly Penelope Pitt, later Viscountess Ligonier (1749-1827), wearing a pink dress with black lace trim, her hair worn short and with a pearl headband

Circa: Circa 1760s

enamel on copper

Circa 1760s

Previously known as a miniature of a 'Miss Pitt', further research into the identification of the young lady depicted here has led to the suggestion that she is Penelope Pitt. Penelope was the daughter of George Pitt, first Baron Rivers, and Penelope Atkins. She became well-known later on in her life following her marriage to Edward, Viscount Ligonier, in 1766. Soon after they were married, Penelope began an affair with Italian poet Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), which led to an adultery trial and duel between Edward and Vittorio. She was not the only member of her family to enjoy these connections with literary figures; her sister Louisa Pitt (1754/6-1791) had embarked on an affair with her husband's cousin, the infamous William Beckford (1760-1844), following her marriage under a decade after Penelope had first caused scandal.

When this miniature was painted, likely to have been in the 1760s due to the style and apparent age of Penelope, she was still only a young girl. Meyer has painted her with short, what we would now call 'boyish' hair, and flushed cheeks, which both emphasise her youth. Both the lace trim on her dress and the pearls she wears in her hair were strong trends in women's fashion of the period. Later known images of Penelope include a 1770 portrait by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) and a miniature portrait by Penelope Carwardine (1729-1804).

Jeremiah Meyer was born in Germany and worked in England, becoming a fashionable portrait painter during his career. He was patronised by the many important social figures of the period, including the Royal Family. He was well versed in painting with enamel, as well as the watercolour on ivory used in this particular miniature. In 1768, Meyer was appointed as a Royal Academician, where he contributed to important changes, including the establishment of a pension fund for academicians in need in 1775.

He continued to exhibit at the RA until 1783, and died only a few years later in Kew.