

THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Portrait miniature of A Lady, wearing white dress, white bandeau and pendant (possibly a wedding ring)

Circa: 1796

1796

Watercolour on ivory (licence RJ8CBYV4)

Oval, 7.4 cm (2 ⁷/₈ in) high

Signed on reverse

This portrait of a young Lady, dated 1796 by the artist, likely shows the sitter around the time of her wedding. It is possible that she wears her ring on a chain at her neck in order to get it into the portrait, which shows her to just below her waist.

Arguably, this portrait dates to Cosway's most successful artistic period. Although capable of working with bright hues, flourishes and dramatic skies, Cosway responded well to the new fashion of the later 18th century, where women began to wear simple white dresses, usually made of cotton muslin, the higher waist defined by band. Stephen Lloyd notes the origins lay with the Queen of France, who had been guillotined a few years earlier; 'It was a comfortable and flattering dress, suitable for Arcadian pastimes, and popular with Marie Antoinette and her ladies'. [1]

At the date of this miniature, Cosway was still enjoying a long friendship with the Prince of Wales, later King George IV. As an experienced connoisseur and virtuoso, Cosway advised the prince on his art collection, thereby moulding his aesthetic taste. The relationship was most certainly mutually beneficial, with the prince introducing Cosway to a fashionable and influential circle of patrons. In 1785 Cosway was given the official position of 'Miniature Painter to the Prince of Wales', a post he kept until he fell out of favour in 1811. This was almost an immensely important year in Cosway's personal life, as his one

child, Louisa Paolina Angelica, tragically died in 1796 after a short illness. This left both the artist and his wife grief-stricken. As a form of consolation, Maria turned increasingly to her Catholic faith and focussed her energies on girls' education, while Richard immersed himself in mysticism and magic.

The portrait here includes a background of Cosway's characteristic bright blue splash of sky – often termed 'Antwerp Blue' - which contrasts with the grey tones of the sitter's hair and dress.

[1] S. Lloyd, Richard and Maria Cosway; Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 102

Literature:

Foskett, D., (1979) Dictionary of Portrait Miniatures. Antique Collectors Club, p. 363, fig. 104G.