

THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (18th century)

Portrait of a young girl, wearing a pink dress and gauze headdress

Circa: Circa 1790

Watercolour on ivory (licence PYAP6WHP)

Circular, 54mm diam.

Gilt-metal mount

The circular format of this miniature, and style of painting of this unidentified young girl, allows us to suggest that it was painted in the final decade of the eighteenth century in France. This format of miniature painting also suggests that the miniature was originally intended for a snuff box - as the taking of snuff - which was sniffed or inhaled - became a universal obsession in both England and France. The demand for snuffboxes was at its height in the later 18th century and the decoration often consisted of a portrait miniature of a loved one.

The sitter here has been depicted with large, brown eyes, likely intended to emphasise her youth. Most intriguing about her appearance is the fabric head dress she wears, which appears to have been wrapped and tied around her hair. Though in this period a large number of women chose to style their hair with large, powdered wigs, some did favour turbans like these. For an example of this, one can look at the self-portrait of Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun, in the Uffizi Gallery[1]. It is possible that her hair has been tied back in this style to remain out of her way, for practical reasons, as Vigée Le Brun may have been similarly doing to keep her hair out of her face while painting.

The unknown artist has also added a sense of lightness to the portrait by adding gauze to the outer layer of her pink dress. This is particularly evident as the fabric falls just below her shoulders, and they have used a technique with opaque lines of white to emphasise where this gauze is folding and is thicker as it lays upon the lower fabric.

[1] Inventory number: 1890 n. 1905