THE LIMNER COMPANY



JAMES SCOULER (1741 - 1812)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, wearing a blue jacket, with white stock and waistcoat

Circa: 1798

Watercolour on ivory (license N4MGHRQB)

Signed and dated ‘Scouler 1798’.

Gilt-metal frame, the reverse decorated with hairwork, seed pearls, and metalwork, with the monogram ‘ES’.

The present work comes from late in Scouler’s career, at a point where his style had evolved significantly from that used in his earlier works. Here, he has painted an unknown gentleman with rather distinctive facial features, including strong, dark eyebrows. These are emphasised by the use of white paint to line the lower lid of the gentleman’s eyes, which are again dark and gaze out at the viewer.

By this point in his career, Scouler had exhibited numerous works at multiple institutions, including the Royal Academy, Society of Artists, and Free Society of Artists. He had been brought up in Edinburgh, as the son of an organ manufacturer. As a teenager, he began his training as a miniaturist, and he had already been awarded a prize by the Society of Arts in 1755 for one of his drawings.

Scouler’s works are represented within large public and private collections, including the Victoria and Albert Museum and Starr Collection. The sheer size and late date of this particular miniature, however, make this a rather unique addition to the artist’s known oeuvre. Many of his works, particularly of women, are painted on a much smaller scale. Furthermore, the accumulation of skill by Scouler is evident in the fine quality of this miniature, especially in comparison to some of these smaller examples.

The sitter of this portrait does not wear a wig, as was the typical fashion for men's hairstyles in the years leading up to the execution of the miniature, though still appears to have powdered hair. This is significant given that, in 1795, a licence fee for buying powder had been put in place, pricing many members of British society out of this cosmetic luxury. Therefore, whoever the gentleman painted here is, he must have been relatively wealthy.