THE LIMNER COMPANY



JAMES SCOULER (1741 - 1812)

Portrait miniature of an officer, wearing a red uniform with blue facings, with a powdered bag wig

Circa: 1772

1772

Watercolour on ivory (licence 7M2AUK7P)

Oval, 36mm (1 ½ in) high

Signed and dated ‘Scouler 1772’

Metal frame with diamond surround

Scouler’s career is generally separated into two parts: before and after 1790. The present miniature, painted in 1772, falls into the first period of his career. Foskett (1994) has noted that this first period saw Scouler taking influence from his contemporary John Smart (1741-1811), and this influence is evident in the present miniature.

Though the name of the sitter remains unknown, the miniature may have been commissioned with others of soldiers in the same year. A very similar miniature, depicting a soldier with the same epaulettes, was sold at Leo Schidlof’s auction house in October 1920. It has not been possible to identify the exact uniform worn by this gentleman, though it can be said for certain that he was an officer of an infantry regiment.

Scouler was born to an organ manufacturer, also called James Scouler, in 1741. He grew up in Edinburgh and must have moved to London as a young teenager, given that he received a prize from the Society of Arts in 1755. Following this, he exhibited at numerous societies, including the Incorporated Society of Artists (1761-1768), the Free Society of Artists (1769), and the Royal Academy (1780-1787).

This portrait is exemplary of Scouler's work in this period. The officer's face has been painted with a distinctive level of detail, and the artist's use of long, swooping lines of watercolour is evident in the sitter's cheek and cravat. This detail is more reserved in the officer's clothing, meaning the eyes are drawn to his face, likely an effect intended by the artist.