THE LIMNER COMPANY



EUROPEAN SCHOOL

Portrait miniature of an Artillery Officer in uniform, wearing a blue jacket with red facings, and a plate of armour, his right arm resting on the muzzle of a cannon

Circa: Circa 1750-1760

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Watercolour on vellum

86 x 62 mm (3 3/8in x 2 1/2 in)

The unknown gentleman in this portrait is likely to be an artillery officer, given that he is resting on a cannon. Aside from this detail, there are no other defining features in his uniform that have allowed his exact rank or nationality to be identified. A portrait sold at Sotheby's in 1990 shows a gentleman in a very similar uniform, identified as being German. Comparisons with portraits of Bonnie Prince Charlie, who sports a similar armour plate and cravat combination in his military portrait, alongside this Sotheby's portrait, allow for the present work to be dated to around 1750-1760.

This was a period in which military uniforms were not standardised, or at least not as distinctive by rank or country as they would become in the nineteenth century. Powdered wigs like the one worn by this officer had begun to gain more popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century, especially amongst soldiers, as this was a practical, yet presentable, solution for styling one's hair. This gentleman sports a wig with a particularly long queue (the length of hair that extends from the back of the wig, like a ponytail), which has been painted here almost as if it is blowing in the wind.

On the reverse of the miniature, there is an inscription which situates the miniature in the collection of a Mr Body [sic], in Goa. There is no further evidence to suggest that this soldier was in Goa, which at the time the portrait was painted was occupied by Portuguese forces. The officer's uniform does not match that worn by Portuguese officers in this period. Instead, it is more likely that the inscription refers to a

later owner, possibly a descendant of the sitter, who lived in Goa.

Much mystery remains around the identity of the sitter and artist responsible for it; this does not detract from the wonderful colouring and detail used within the portrait. The fiery sky in front of which the officer stands is remarkable- this may be the result of a sunset or even artillery fire continuing around him.