THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD GIBSON (1615 - 1690)

Portrait miniature of an unknown lady, traditionally identified as Anne Apsley, wearing a brown dress and blue cloak over white chemise, held together with jewels

Circa: circa 1675

Circa 1675

Watercolour on vellum

Gilt metal frame with spiral cresting

Oval, 2 3/8 in. (60 mm) high

Historically, the sitter of this portrait has been identified as ‘Anne Apsley’. This identification has since become dissociated with the portrait, and has not been used since it was sold in 1975. It is likely that the change of sitter to just an ‘unknown lady’ has come from the fact that there are no solid records of Anne Apsley being alive in the period in which Gibson was painting, and there are therefore no visual comparisons. Often, miniatures are given names by those who have previously owned them, whether these are correct identifications or not.

Whether or not the portrait is of Anne Apsley, she has been depicted in an extremely flattering manner. By 1675, Richard Gibson had been appointed King’s Limner and was painting many important members of the court, including the King Himself. Working at the same time as him was Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680), who is famed for his series of portraits called the ‘Windsor Beauties’, depicting attractive women from the court. The present miniature appears to be at least influenced by this series, especially in the grand drapery she wears. Though slightly younger than many of the Windsor Beauties, and not a sitter in any of the portraits done by Lely, the sitter here was clearly keen to be depicted in a fashionable manner.

Richard Gibson became the King’s Limner after a long and varied career, working for clients across the political spectrum of Civil War England. He was first trained in producing Tapestries at Mortlake, and

later worked for the Herberts and the Canarvons. In this portrait, he has used his favoured brown, blue, and white palette, often found in his portraits of women from this period. By this point, he signed many of his works ‘RG’, for Richard Gibson, having previously signed ‘DG’, for either Dick Gibson, or Dwarf Gibson, as he was commonly known. His 3 ft 10” stature had earned him this nickname, and had made him well-known within court circles.