THE LIMNER COMPANY



RUPERT BARBER (1719 - 1772)

Portrait of a lady in a green dress with a pink shawl

Circa: Circa 1740/50

Circa 1740/50

Enamel

Oval, 45 mm (1 ¾ in) high

14k gold frame

Irish artist Rupert Barber (1719-1772) was born in Dublin to woollen-draper Jonathan Barber and poet Mary Barber (1685-1755). Rupert's mother was good friends with the renowned Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) whom the artist actually drew in pastel after his death.

Rupert lived in London from 1735 to 1739 working as an apprentice to painter, engraver, dealer, and collector Arthur Pond (1701-1758). Despite having studied under Pond, the exact origins or Barber's knowledge in the notoriously difficult enamel technique are unknown. In a letter Rupert's mother wrote to Swift in 1736, she writes "My son, who is learning to paint, goes on well and, if he be in the least approved of, he may do very well at Bath; for I never yet saw a painter that came hither fail of getting more business than he could do, let him be ever so indifferent."[1] So it is possible Barber got his start as an enamellist in Bath.

By the early 1740s, however, he had returned to Dublin and become an established miniaturist in enamel. While he is recorded as having traveled to England intermittently over the years, it seems the majority of his career was spent in Dublin. In 1742 Barber married Bridget Wilson. His new wife's aunt by law, Mrs. Mary Granville Delany (1700-88), wife of Dr. Patrick Delany, dean of Down, became a key supporter for Barber and his artistic practice. She connected him with wealthy patrons, commissioned him to paint portraits of her friends and family, and even granted him and his family permission to live in a cottage in the gardens at Delville (the Delany family estate in Glasnevin, Dublin) where he also had a

studio.

Despite notable resemblance to known portraits of Mrs. Delany, with her small mouth, distinctive nose, thin eyebrows, and large round eyes, the differences in hair and eye colour make it clear she is not the sitter in the current miniature. Perhaps the woman is a close relative of Mrs. Delany, because, as mentioned above, many of her friends and family members were painted by Barber.

[1] Walter G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (Dublin: Maunsel & Company, 1913), s.v. “Rupert Barber, Crayon and Miniature Painter (fl. 1736-1772),” accessed at Library Ireland, https://www.libraryireland.com/irishartists/rupert-barber.php.