THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of an Officer

Circa: circa 1790

circa 1790

Watercolour on ivory (licence VBUMEE3A)

Oval, 42 mm (1 2/3 in) high

Set in the original gold bracelet clasp frame with pearl border

According to his uniform, this unnamed officer appears to have been a subaltern of a British Line infantry regiment, specifically belonging to a regiment that was distinguished by having its officers' coats decorated with silver lace and having its coats faced white or pale grey. The regiment's precedence number would have appeared on the buttons, but it is difficult to recognize any number. However, looking closely at the bottom button, one might make out the shape of an anchor. If this is the case, the sitter would have been a subaltern of the Corps of Marines (after 1802, The Royal Marines), the officers of which wore white facings, silver lace, and silver buttons that bore the 'fouled anchor' symbol. Further to this, the single epaulette on the gentleman's shoulder would have denoted the subaltern rank, meaning the sitter was an ensign, lieutenant, or captain.[1]

The artist responsible for this portrait miniature is English painter George Engleheart (1750-1829). He was born to German plaster-modeller Francis Engelheart and his wife Anne Dawney in Kew in 1750. In 1769, Engleheart was accepted into the Royal Academy in London where he began his professional training as a pupil of Irish landscape artist George Barret (c. 1730-1784). Engleheart then went on to work in the studio of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) from 1773 to 1776. During this apprenticeship, Engleheart carefully reproduced some of Reynolds' large-scale oil paintings in miniature, allowing him to dissect the intricacies of Reynolds' technique. It is perhaps through his mentors, Barrett and Reynolds, that Engleheart came to define his own practice, refining his skills in watercolour under the former and portraiture under the latter. Engleheart was a well-renowned miniaturist in his time, granted multiple sittings with King George III of whom he seems to have painted twenty-five portraits. Nearly a decade and a half after his first recorded sittings with him, Engleheart was finally named Miniature

Painter to the King in 1790.[2]

Engleheart has been praised for his ability to capture the true likeness of his sitters, as opposed to the idealised forms used by his contemporary Richard Cosway (1742-1821).[3] In the current miniature, the officer's direct yet soft gaze and the slightly upturned corners of his mouth speak to his disposition, while the unibrow and cleft chin, among other features, would have been identifying markers for this particular individual.

[1] We are grateful to Stephen Wood for his advice regarding the uniform in this portrait.

[2] George C. Williamson and Henry L.D. Engleheart, *George Engleheart 1750 –1829: Miniature Painter to George III* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1902), 23 and 27.

[3] *Ibid.*, 74-75.