THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of a young Lady, possibly a member of the Gordon family, wearing a white dress with a frilled collar and a white sash tied at the high waist; a gold bandeau in her dark brown hair

Circa: circa 1800

circa 1800

Watercolour on ivory (licence HXLDSU45)

Oval, 78 mm (3 ⅛ in) high

Set in a gold frame, the reverse glazed to reveal hairwork centred with gold initials

Versions:

Another version of the present miniature, signed with the artist's initial, is in the Kestner-Museum, Hanover (inv. 1912.46), and formerly in the Mühsam collection, Berlin.

By the time this miniature was painted circa 1800, George Engleheart had been a professional miniaturist for over 20 years. His decades of experience are laid bare in this fine portrait, an example of the poise and flattery that made him such a popular artist.

Having been a student of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Engleheart was well versed in the expectations of society patrons and worked at a considerable pace producing miniatures for the 'great and the good'. According to his fee book, Engleheart painted several thousand miniatures throughout his long career, yet the quality does not diminish. The fee book also records the names of the sitters, showing a very distinguished clientele, as miniatures scholar George Williamson (1858-1942) described: 'The list of eminent names continues on year after year; all the chief persons who were known in town for beauty,

genius, estate, position, or quality, seemed to have sat to Engleheart.'[1] In 1790, he had been appointed Miniature Painter to King George III (1738-1820), whom he appears to have painted at least 25 times.

It has previously been suggested that the present sitter may be a member of 'the Gordon family'. This identity was tentatively proposed when it was sold at Sotheby's in 1967 together with two other miniatures by Engleheart, all originating from the collection of Mrs Diana Cohen. The catalogue entry states that the three miniatures 'may well be members of the Gordon family', which might indicate the pre-eminent family of that name, Duke and Duchess of Gordon, however no reason is given for a connection to this or any Gordon family. Neither can any evidence be found to support it[2], although this portrait compares favourably with one by John Hoppner (1758-1806) depicting Lady Georgiana Gordon, presumably the 4th Duke of Gordon's daughter (1781-1853), which was sold in New York in 1934[3].

Lady Georgiana married John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford (1766-1839) in 1803, around the time this miniature was painted. There are entries in Engleheart's fee book under Gordon, Bedford and Russell, but none with the appropriate (aristocratic) titles for her.

The catalogues for the 1967 and 1998 auctions in which it was sold, illustrate the miniature with a 'gilt metal mount'. The gilt mount must have been swapped at a later date, possibly with Judy & Brian Harden Antiques, to the present, more attractive gold frame in the style commonly seen on Engleheart miniatures. This does, however, mean that the hairwork and gold initials on the reverse of the present frame do not belong to the sitter, and her identity remains a tantalising mystery.

[1] G. C. Williamson, H. L. D. Engleheart, *George Engleheart 1750-1829, Miniature Painter to George III*, 1902 (G. Bell & Sons, London), p. 30.

[2] The portrait of the elder male sitter in the group is also illustrated without the other two in Williamson, opp. p. 33. There the sitter is not identified and the miniature is listed as belonging to the collection of a J. Whitehead, Esq., suggesting there may be no connection to either the other two Englehearts sold with it in 1967, or to the Gordon family.

[3] American Art Association, 'Valuable Oil Paintings' Sale, 20-21 February 1934, lot 201.