THE LIMNER COMPANY



ANDREW PLIMER (1763 - 1837)

Portrait miniature of a Lady wearing a dark grey dress with a voluminous white fichu, a white cap, her hair powdered and coiffed

Circa: 1786

1786

Watercolour on ivory (licence BWTYKJXV)

Oval, 58 mm (2 ¼ in) high

Signed and dated 'A.P/1786'

Gold frame with engraved border edge and lock of hair held with seed pearls on blue glass

This portrait miniature dates to the early phase of Plimer's career when he regularly signed and dated his work, a practice he stopped doing consistently after 1789.

Andrew Plimer and his elder brother, Nathaniel (1757-1822), a fellow miniaturist, were born into a Shropshire family of clockmakers. Both were apprenticed in the trade but must have taken against the family business as the brothers ran away from home in 1779. Together they travelled with a troupe of gypsies and were kept out of mischief painting stage scenery and wagons. After two years on the road, they made their way to London where their recently discovered artistic bent lead Nathaniel into the service of the portrait enamellist, Henry Bone (1755-1834), while Andrew found employment with artist couple Richard and Maria Cosway (1760-1838) in 1781.

Andrew's initial role was as a personal servant to the Cosways, but his artistic ambition was discovered when he was found copying one of Richard's miniatures. Impressed by young Andrew's natural ability, Cosway sent him to study drawing with a Mr. Halle (or Hayle), possibly John Hall, an engraver living in

Soho at the time. He had returned to the Cosways by 1783, who now resided at Schomberg House in Pall Mall, where they hosted artistic salons attended by the most famous society protagonists of the epoque.

Plimer likely continued as Cosway's pupil until he established his own studio in 1785. Initially at Hanover Square, then quickly relocating to Golden Square, Andrew set-up right in the heart of London's fashionable Soho.

Plimer's earliest sitters also rank among London's most fashionable, including the Prince of Wales's morganatic wife, 'Mrs Fitzherbert', and Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Multiple portraits of both women are recorded as signed and dated in 1785 and 1786, suggesting they were produced just prior to his departure from Schomberg House, and/or the women were early visitors to his studio at Hanover Square. Either scenario shows Plimer benefitted greatly at this early stage from his connection to the Cosways.

The present miniature dates to the same year of 1786. Although the sitter's identity is unknown, she was in illustrious company with Plimer's early clientele.