THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL (18th century)

0, sitting to the sound of the flute played by a young boy with two other children under a tree, a dog in the foreground

Circa: circa 1730

Watercolour on ivory (licence EWHFBKTE)

Circular, 42 mm (1 $^{5}/_{8}$ in) diam.

Gilded metal frame with fausse-montre top

Circular,

This sepia miniature is based on a composition from an oil painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) called ‘The Dance’ or ‘Iris, c’est de bonne heure’ (now Staatliche Museen, Berlin). [1] More specifically, it is based on the engraving, which reversed the painting, by Charles Nicolas Cochin prior to 1729. This was one of ten engravings commissioned by Pierre Sirois.[2]

The scene, set in a bucolic landscape, shows elegantly dressed shepherd boys, one of them even playing a musical instrument, eagerly waiting for the dreamy young girl’s dance to begin. The dress in the original painting can be seen as made of typical 1718 English printed silks. Watteau presumably painted the picture during his only trip abroad, to England in 1719/20. The fashion for these scenes by artists from the more naturalistic Rococo movement was at its height and it is no surprise perhaps to find that a smaller version in miniature was commissioned, the sepia tones possibly reflecting the tones of the engraving.

The painting by Watteau has a fascinating history – it was acquired for the collection of Frederick the Great (1712-1786), or for his younger brother Henry (1726-1802). Later it was in Berlin, in the Old Palace, c. 1875. According to Goncourt, it was in the “chambre de parade, Salon Vert" and later was moved to the Neues Palais, Potsdam. After World War I, in 1926, it was returned to the Hohenzollern

family. The family sold their art collection in 1927 and the painting was acquired by the dealer Hugo Moser (1882-1972; art dealer). It moved to New York in 1933 where it was offered at an unspecified sale. The painting was then acquired in 1942 for the museum Hitler planned to build in Linz, Austria. It was in Munich after 1945, with the Treuhand Verwaltung fur Kulturgut and finally the Berlin Gemäldegalerie, deposited there in 1952 by the Federal Republic of Germany.

There is at least one other miniature on vellum after Watteau's composition, sold Paris, Hôtel Drouot (Choppin), March 30, 2009. [3]

[1] With thanks to Lisa Hecht, PhD Institute for Art History, Philipps-University Marburg, Germany for identifying the source.

[2] See a version in the Louvre, Paris, here: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl020561795

[3] lot 63: "École Française du XVIIIe siècle / La danse, «Iris, c'est (sic) de bonne heure avoir l'air a la danse», d'après Watteau / Gouache sur vélin - 19,2 x 23,5 cm.