THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Portrait miniature of a Lady before a mountainous landscape wearing a white dress with a pale yellow sash around her waist, a shawl about her shoulders, her hair curled and worn up

Circa: circa 1790s

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Watercolour on ivory (licence X5XT99SS)

Oval, 99 mm (3 29/32 in) high

Gold frame, the reverse glazed to reveal hair

Critic and essayist William Hazlitt (1778-1830) stated that Cosway's miniatures 'were not fashionable – they were fashion itself.' [1]

This highly attractive portrait of a young lady exemplifies the ideal to which female portraiture was held at the end of the 18th century. An excellent draughtsman, we can admire here how Cosway achieved this with the lightest of touch. Posed with tendrils of hair blowing around her face and elegant neck, long tapered fingers cradling her chin and the shawl carried by the wind, the portrait leans towards the Mannerist tendency noted in some of Cosway's early oil paintings.

It is an unusually large ivory portrait for Cosway. While he did paint oils (mainly early in his career) and larger portrait drawings, ivories of this size are rare in Cosway's *oeuvre* and often used for royal portraits.[2] It signifies that the present portrait was likely an expensive and important commission, and

the prominence of the landscape in the composition – also unusual for Cosway's miniatures – suggests she may have belonged to a landowning family from a mountainous region such as Scotland.

[1] Lloyd, S., *Richard & Maria Cosway; Regency Artists of Taste and Fashion*, 1995 (Scottish National Portrait Gallery), p. 13.

[2] See for example a portrait of George, Prince of Wales, later King George IV (1762-1830), in armour with the sash of the Order of the Garter, c.1800-10, sold by Philip Mould & Co. https://historicalportraits.com/artworks/5291-richard-cosway-george-prince-of-wales-later-king-george-iv-c.-1800-10/ , and a portrait of King George IV at the National Portrait Gallery [NPG 5890].