

THE LIMNER COMPANY



GERMAN SCHOOL (19th century)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, possibly Heinrich Barth (1821-1865), wearing grey suit, blue tie and white shirt, standing in a mountainous landscape

Circa: circa 1860

circa 1860

Watercolour on ivory (licence XUXY1A1C)

Oval, 47mm (1 7/8in) high

Gold locket frame

This unusual portrait possibly shows the explorer Heinrich Barth (1821-1865), with a mountain range in the background. Barth is now known as one of the greatest of the European explorers of Africa, as his scholarly preparation, ability to speak and write Arabic, learning African languages, and character meant that he carefully documented the details of the cultures he visited. In 1865, a few years after this miniature could have been painted, he was granted a professorship of geography (without chair or regular pay) at Berlin University and appointed president of the Geographical Society. However, his admission to the Prussian Academy of Sciences was denied, as it was claimed that he had achieved nothing for historiography and linguistics. They did not fully understand his achievements, which have been ratified by scholars over time.

The mountain range in the background of this portrait is difficult to identify with any certainty but it may be the Alps. Barth never married and was described as a 'notoriously private, abrasive, and introverted man' and it is unclear who may have commissioned a miniature of him. He was not given to emotional sensitivity, preferring science which is noted in one of his journals:

'Knowledge is power.

Because science is
The confidante in the wilderness,
The companion in a foreign land,
The storyteller in solitude,
The guide in joy and sorrow,
The weapon against the enemy,
And the ornament for friends.'