THE LIMNER COMPANY



GERVASE SPENCER (c.1715 - 1763)

Portrait miniature of Charles Fitzroy (1737-97), 1st Lord Southampton, semi-profile to the left, wearing state coat of an officer of the 1st Foot Guards, with blue facings and gold lace, gilded brass gorget, and a crimson sash, 1759

Circa: 1759

1759

Watercolour on ivory (licence 867CYMD9)

Signed and dated ‘G. S/ 1759’, left

Oval, 32 mm (1 $^{1}/_{4}$ in) high

Charles Fitzroy, here wearing the state coat of an officer of the 1st Foot Guards, held this position between 1752 and 1762. During his time in the regiment, he rose from Ensign (March 1752) to Lieutenant and Captain (from June 1756), then to Captain and Lieutenant-Colonel (from May 1758). Fitzroy fought in the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) – at the battles of Minden and Vellinghausen – before beginning a political career which resulted in a peerage in 1780.

This work is rather similar to a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) in the Royal Collection (RCIN 400974), dated circa 1760. Gervase Spencer was close to Reynolds, and there is an untraced portrait by him of Spencer at work. The Royal Collection portrait of Fitzroy is dated to c.1760- Fitzroy first sat for Reynolds in this year. The present work instead comes from 1759, and it is possible that Fitzroy chose to pose in the same manner for Reynolds because he liked how this looked in Spencer’s hand.

Gervase Spencer was a gentleman’s servant before discovering a talent for art. Although self-taught, his work caught the eye of George Vertue, who described him in 1740 as ‘a young man […] who […] a few years ago was in the capacity of a footman to Dr. W[…] - and now professes liming with some success

[…] in a curious neat manner and masterly'. His work was commissioned by the royal family, and a portrait miniature of George III is in the Royal Collection at Windsor.

We are grateful to Dr J. A. Houlding for their military expertise.