

THE LIMNER COMPANY



GERVASE SPENCER (c.1715 - 1763)

Portrait miniature of Charles Fitzroy (1737-97), 1st Lord Southampton, semi-profile to the left, wearing scarlet coat with blue and gold facings and brass gorget and a crimson sash

Circa: 1759

Watercolour on ivory (licence 867CYMD9)

Oval, 1 1/4 inches (32mm) high

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.

This miniature shows the soldier and politician Charles Fitzroy. 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. The likeness here is based on a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds [Royal Collection], whom Spencer knew well (there is an untraced portrait by Reynolds of Spencer at work). Reynolds' portrait of Fitzroy has traditionally been dated to 1760-1, but this newly identified miniature, dated 1759, confirms that sittings took place earlier, for Fitzroy was not in England between 1759 and 1762. The miniature may have been commissioned as a memento of Fitzroy (who had recently married) at around the time he left for war.