THE LIMNER COMPANY



MATTHEW SNELLING (1621 - 1678)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, traditionally identified as Frances Cranfield, Countess of Dorset (1622-1687), wearing a blue dress with pearl brooches and pendant suspended from a black ribbon, a white underslip, her hair curled and decorated with pearls, with a stone and sky background.

Circa: 1655

1655

Watercolour on vellum

Oval, 64 mm (2 ½ in) high

Signed and dated verso 'M.S. fe / Aprill / 1655'

Gilt metal frame with spiral cresting

There are two portraits said to depict Frances Cranfield by Matthew Snelling, which is particularly remarkable given the rarity of works by the artist. Frances was the wife of Richard Sackville, 5th Earl Dorset, and became the Countess of Dorset upon the death of the 4th Earl in 1652. Her father, Lionel Cranfield, 1st Earl Middlesex, had held an influential position within the Jacobean court. One of his numerous positions was keeper of the great wardrobe, and as part of this role he was responsible for overseeing the spending for Anne of Denmark's funeral, as well as the creation of a list of her jewels. Cranfield lost favour over his opposition to a projected war with Spain.

Frances' marriage to Sackville appears to have been a benefit to him - when he received the earldom, he also received responsibility for the debt associated with the family's estates, including Knole in Kent. His financial struggles were helped by Frances' inheritance of her family's estates in Middlesex, including Copt Hall. In fact, their son Charles, 6th Earl of Dorset, later sold Copt Hall in order to support the costs of maintaining Knole.

The two versions of this portrait by Snelling do have noticeable differences, especially in the facial features Frances is given. The version in the Beauchamp collection is one of a pair, with a portrait by Snelling of her husband, and is dated 1654. There is no additional portrait of Richard with which the present work could be placed in a pair, though it should be noted that the present work and the Beauchamp Richard have the same date of 1655. It is possible that the present work was simply a later commission, intended for a different family member.

Only one certain depiction of Frances is known, being the portrait by Van Dyck at Knole. This was copied by John Hoskins, and the current whereabouts of this copy is unknown. It should be noted that the Frances depicted in 1655 has a more rounded chin, eyes, and smaller lips, though an almost identical nose. The Beauchamp version shows her with 'fox' eyes, closer to those used by Van Dyck. It is certainly possible that the current version was intended by Snelling to be more lifelike, and less stylised, as the influence of Van Dyck's hand can certainly be seen in the Beauchamp portrait.

Snelling was an artist of Flemish origin, and Foskett explains his close relationship with the Beale and Thach families, both working in limning and portraiture during the seventeenth century. Many of his works are painted after portraits by Van Dyck, though he also produced original compositions. Of the successful miniature painters of this period, his oeuvre is possibly the smallest, though this does not reduce its quality or significance.

Exhibitions

Beauchamp Collection, exhibited in Edinburgh, The Arts Council Gallery, British Portrait Miniatures, 1965, no. 123, ill. pl. 34.

Literature:

Foskett, *Collecting Miniatures*, 1979, ill. P. 56, pl. 3E.

Foskett, *Miniatures, Dictionary and Guide*, 1987, ill. P. 56, pl. 3E.