THE LIMNER COMPANY

JEAN-BAPTISTE SOYER (1752 - 1828)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman in a blue ‘pékin’ coat, black waistcoat, and white stock and cravat

Circa: circa 1790s

circa 1790s

Watercolour on ivory (licence E4NCP1F1)

Oval, 58 mm (2 ¼ in) high

Born in Nancy, Lorraine, Soyer was trained alongside Claudot and Giradet. He remained there until at least 1790, when he married, though he is known to have worked and exhibited in Paris in the early 19th century. The Tansey Miniatures Foundation holds an important collection of his works in miniature, including two signed portraits, which are rare within Soyer’s oeuvre. Though not signed, the present work is attributed to Soyer through the sitter’s distinctive smile, red lips, and strong strokes of white on his stock and cravat.

Coats with high collars and large lapels, like that worn in this miniature, were popular in the 1790s. Though as the revolution progressed, silks came to be replaced with more humble cottons and wools, the fabric used to create this sitter’s coat combines the two materials, symbolising a shift from the extravagant materials used in Marie Antoinette’s court to the more sombre ones favoured by the revolutionaries. This type of fabric, which combines multiple materials, is called ‘pékin’. Similar coats are worn in two other miniatures by Soyer, both in the Tansey Foundation collection (10260 and 11149), though the rendering of the textures is certainly more advanced in the present example.