THE LIMNER COMPANY

GEORGE PATTEN (1801 - 1865)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing a blue silk gown trimmed with white lace, a white sash, and a fur tippet, possibly made of sable, over one shoulder, her hair worn in ringlets

Circa: 1832

1832

Watercolour on ivory (licence XUKCY96A)

Rectangular, 98 mm (3 ⅞ in) high

Signed and dated ‘G. Patten / 1832’ (lower left)

Inscribed ‘Geo Patten pinxt/ 59 Berners St/ Oxford St/ London’ (reverse)

Gilt-metal frame, the reverse to reveal signature

In the years after this portrait was painted, George Patten would go on to be appointed Portrait Painter in Ordinary by Prince Albert. Patten was already an academician at the Royal Academy, where he exhibited between 1819 and 1864 from numerous addresses in London. The one included in the inscription on the reverse of this miniature was first used by him in 1832. He painted full-scale oils as well as miniatures, and history subjects as well as portraiture.

During the 1830s, a stole or scarf, as the lady in this portrait wears, was known as a ‘tippet’. These popular accessories were defined by their long, narrow shape, and were produced alongside muffs as practical and stylish winter accessories. It is not clear which animal’s fur was used to produce the tippet worn here, though it is possible that it is sable, an expensive and exclusive fur which had to be imported from Northern Asia. Wearing such a fur would not only be useful in the cold, but also fashionable and a symbol of the unknown lady’s wealth.

Almost as dramatic as her tippet are the lady's 'leg-of-mutton' sleeves, trimmed with fine lace, which were also extremely popular in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Their billowing size emphasised both the curve of the shoulder (when worn with a low neckline as shown here) and a narrow waist, and signalled a move away from the simplicity of the Regency empire-line dress.

Both fashions are satirised in a print published in 1829 [1]. The lady depicted is drowned by a dress with enormous sleeves, a giant hat, and has a long serpent coiled around her neck. The snake holds an apple in its mouth- a reference to original sin. Here, Patten has painted the young lady in these styles to promote her sense of style and taste, rather than to criticise her.

[1] William Heath, 'The Great Boa Tippet, 1829', published by Thomas McLean, copy in the British Museum, London, 1893,0612.239.

Literature:

D. Foskett, *Collecting Miniatures*, Suffolk, 1979, p.415, fig. B.