THE LIMNER COMPANY

The artist signing SUQUELI (fl. 1816)

Portrait miniature of a young Lady, wearing a yellow dress with white sleeves and lace, a necklace of coral beads, a rose worn at her breast, her hair worn up and dressed with roses

Circa: circa 1820

circa 1820

Watercolour on ivory (licence 3H76PXWC)

Oval, 70 mm (2 $^{3}/_{4}$ in) high

Obverse and reverse both signed on the right hand side, ‘Suqueli’

Gilt-metal frame, the glazed reverse revealing a scene with a pair of doves in a nest of in pink roses, in a leafy green landscape

Portrait miniatures could be part of a loving or devotional exchange between family, friends, and even political allies, but the present miniature is laden with the symbolism of romantic love.

The red rose has been one of the most potent symbols of passionate love since ancient times. Greek myth held that Aphrodite, the goddess of love, created the first red rose when she rushed to comfort her lover, Adonis, and scratched herself on a rose’s thorns; her blood turning the bloom red. And, not many years before the present miniature was painted, the Scottish bard, Robert Burns (1759-1796) had penned the immortal line, “O my Luve’s like a red, red rose” (1794). Not only is the sitter’s hair dressed abundantly with red roses, but she wears one at her breast, close to her heart.

The artist has paid equal attention to the reverse of the miniature, with a delicately painted scene of two doves nesting in some pink roses. Doves were also associated with Aphrodite and later the Roman goddess of Venus, as well being a symbol of peace in the Christian faith. They no doubt represent the hopes for her own union.

While the sitter is unknown, she was likely on the brink of marriage, if not already married, and this miniature intended for her betrothed or husband. She wears a coral necklace, which was thought to have amuletic properties and protect women and young children from illness and injury, particularly in childbirth. The protective qualities were thought to be most effective when worn against bare skin, as here.

The style of painting and clothing places this miniature neatly in the 19th-century Italian school, but very little is known about the artist signing 'Suqueli'. Only a handful of other examples by Suqueli appear to have come to market in recent years, all dating between 1800-1816.[1] It's been suggested the artist hailed from a noble Sardinian family, whose lineage dates back to the 15th century.[2]

[1] All sold at Drouot, Paris: 2nd February 2022, lot 96; 30th June 2021, lot 81; 14th December 2021, lot 50.

[2] See catalogue note for Drouot, Paris, 14th December 2021, lot 50.