THE LIMNER COMPANY



THOMAS FLATMAN (1635 - 1688)

Portrait miniature of Luke Pead, wearing a black silk cloak with a lace jabot, his wig worn curled and long

Circa: circa 1670s

circa 1670s

Watercolour on vellum

Oval, 62 mm (2 ⅜ in) high

Signed with artist's monogram, left

Gilt metal frame with spiral cresting

The identification of the gentleman in this portrait as Luke Pead comes from a historical attachment. There is still a label attached to the miniature naming him as such, with a note that he was a 'Trader / 1639 - 1669'. A photograph of the miniature in the Heinz Archive and Library shows the miniature whilst it was in the collection of John Malcolm, with the same identification next to it.

It has not been possible to identify the exact 'Luke Pead' depicted here, though if he was indeed a trader, he perhaps belongs to a family of traders working in London and surrounding counties in the seventeenth century. There is a trade token in the collection of the London Museum (collection number NN17759), said to have been given out by Leonard Pead, of St Lawrence Lane (now Lawrence Lane) in the mid-seventeenth century. Aside from this, we have no information about the life of Luke Pead; however, he must have been a relatively successful trader to have had his portrait taken by Thomas Flatman.

Thomas Flatman was one of the talented artists working in the circle of Samuel Cooper (1609-1672). He did not begin his working life as a miniaturist, and had been at the Inner Temple before beginning to paint and write poetry, instead of practising law. His skill in both forms is mentioned in a poem entitled

‘To the Author on his excellent Poems’, by N. Tate:

‘II.

Kind Heav'n (as to her darling Son) to Thee

A double Portion did impart,

A gift of Painting and of Poesie:

But for thy Rivals in the Painters Art,

If well they Represent, they can effect

No more, nor can we more expect.

But more than this Thy happy Pencils give;

Thy draughts are more than Representative,

For, if we'l credit our own eyes, they Live!

Ah! worthy Friend cou'dst thou maintain the State

Of what with so much ease thou dost Create,

We might reflect on Death with Scorn!

But Pictures like th' Originals decay!

Of Colours those consist, and these of Clay;

A like compos'd of Dust, to Dust alike return!’

In the next verse, Tate mentions that, should his painting fail, Flatman is able to turn to his quill, instead:

‘For if thy Pencils fail,

Change thy Artillery

And Thou’rt secure of Victory,

Employ thy Quill and thou shalt still prevail’

This poem alone represents the perceived ability of Flatman by his peers. And the sense that his portraits themselves are alive is clear in this example; Pead’s face is expressed as if he has just taken in a breath, is perhaps about to pass a witty comment, with one eyebrow arched. Flatman has not only captured the likeness of the sitter, but he has captured this in a very specific moment.

Politically, Flatman was an avid supporter of the King and produced both paintings and poems to demonstrate this. One of these portraits was recently sold by The Limner Company. Given the date of this painting, ascertained through the sitter's clothing and full bottomed wig, this portrait would have been painted following the restoration of the Monarchy in England. Such wigs were popularised by the King himself wearing them. Pead has opted for a light brown shade for his wig, which has the distinctive, perfectly repeated curls. These curls were achieved using tools made from metal and pipe clay, around which the wet wig hair was wound. The whole thing was then baked to dry the wig out so that it would hold its shape- much like the function of a curling iron today.

As has been mentioned, Flatman worked in the circle of artists around Samuel Cooper, and is known to have interacted with artists working in full-scale painting, including the Beales and Sir Peter Lely (1618-1680). In fact, the latter painted a portrait of Flatman, and an engraving after this portrait can be found in the National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG D36964). Given Flatman's connections with other painters, poets, and intellectuals, this miniature stands as a reflection of the booming arts and literature scene in London in the late seventeenth century, as well as a prime example of the fashions popular in the day.

Exhibitions

London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1889, no. 58.

Literature:

J. J. Foster, *Samuel Cooper and the English Miniature Painters of the XVII Century*, London, 1914-16, volume under Flatman, p.111, no.38.