JOHN SMART (British, 1741–1811)

*Portrait of an Officer*

c. 1794

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 6.5 x 5.4 cm (2½ x 2¼ in.)

Signature: none

Setting: contemporary gold frame with plain back

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1942.1157

THE UNKNOWN SITTER has powdered hair, brown eyes, a ruddy complexion, and facial hair stubble. He wears a red military coat with black facings, gold buttons, gold epaulet, a white waistcoat, and frilled cravat. His uniform identifies him as an Indian militia officer, though his precise rank cannot be determined since his left shoulder is not visible. The background is mottled gray. The red of the officer’s coat is also painted in red on the back of the ivory support. Back-painting was a process employed by miniaturists to heighten the brilliancy of certain colors, especially in a sitter’s costume and on the face to enhance bright eyes or pink lips and cheeks. John Smart did not back-paint all of his works, using the technique selectively in portraits in which he wished to achieve a particularly bright color that would show through the back due to the translucency of the thin ivory. The miniature is housed in a contemporary gold frame.

This portrait is unsigned and undated, which was an unusual practice for Smart and may be explained by the existence of a variant

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**Provenance**

1928

1930
Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for $600; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, 1942.

1942
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

**Exhibitions**

1965–66

**Bibliography**


of this portrait signed and dated “JS / 1794 / I” (fig. 1). Daphne Foskett reproduces the signed work in her 1987 catalogue and refers to the Cleveland miniature as a “replica.” The Cleveland portrait may have been a second version by Smart, who sometimes did not sign even the copies he executed himself. This variant is probably the one referred to by Arthur Jaffé as being formerly in the Warneck collection and sold in Paris on 11 April 1924 by the dealer Leo Schidlof. By 1976 it was in the Asprey collection in London. The miniature was then sold at auction at Christie’s, London, on 17 March 1987 (lot 141) and purchased by David Berkeley, Channel Islands. The sales catalogue identifies the gentleman as an officer of the 5th Madras Native Infantry; however, when Berkeley contacted the National Army Museum in London regarding the identification of the uniform, he was told that this attribution was incorrect, as that regiment had black facing colors only after 1798.

1 Private collection.
3 As documented in the CMA curatorial file, a letter dated 30 July 1976 from the CMA Associate Curator Anne Teutschler Lurie to Maurice Asprey confirms that a variant of this portrait was in the Asprey collection at this date.
4 Measures 7.7 centimeters (3 inches) high. Signed and dated JS / 1794 / I. According to the catalogue, the reverse has “plaited hair with bright-cut border.” Sold at Christie’s, London, 17 March 1987, for £13,200; lot 141, repr. p. 47.
5 Letter dated 22 September 1989 to David Berkeley from Jenny Spencer-Smith, head of the Department of Fine and Decorative Arts, the National Army Museum, London.