







RICHARD COSWAY (British, 1742–1821)

Portrait of Mary Frances (Fanny) Swinburne

c. 1786

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 7 x 5.8 cm (2¾ x 2¼ in.)

Signature: none

Setting: gold and enamel frame set with graduated split pearls

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1941.553

Provenance

Before 1930

Leo Schidlof (1886–1966, Paris).

1930

Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for £250 (\$1,250) in May; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 5, 1941.

1941

The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Exhibitions

None.

Bibliography

Chong, Alan, ed. *European and American Painting in The Cleveland Museum of Art*, p. 282. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1993.

Comstack, Helen. "The Edward B. Greene Collection of Miniatures." *Connoisseur* 128 (October 1951): 139.

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection*, p. 26, no. 7, pl. XVI. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

Winter, Carl. "The British School of Miniature Portrait Painters." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 34 (1948): pl. VII.

MARY FRANCES (FANNY) SWINBURNE (d. 1828) was the eldest daughter of the travel writer Henry Swinburne. This portrait was painted around 1786, when Richard Cosway was reaching the mature stage of his career and was among the most sought-after miniature painters in London. He painted Mary Frances's parents, Henry and Martha, in 1786, and those portraits were later engraved by Mariano Bovi in the same year.¹ A 1907 article by G. C. Williamson mentions a pair of "tinted drawings" of Henry and Martha Swinburne, and notes that "of Mary Benfield [Cosway] painted a very remarkable portrait, one of his finest works, and that also still remains in the possession of her descendants," though it is impossible to know if this portrait could refer to the Cleveland

¹ George Charles Williamson, *Richard Cosway, R. A.* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1905), pp. 118, 139. The location of the original portraits was untraced at the time that Williamson was writing. Bovi's engraving of Henry Swinburne after Cosway also appears as the frontispiece to Swinburne's 1787 book *Journey from Bayonne to Marseilles* and the 1841 compilation of his letters, *The Courts of Europe*.



miniature.² In 1793 Frances Swinburne married Paul Benfield, M.P., a man described as an “adventurer” who brought about her financial ruin.³ Because of a domestic dispute, Cosway was staying with Benfield for a period in 1793 and attended the couple’s wedding.⁴

In this work the sitter’s hair is adorned with pearls—a style commonly seen in portraits of the period. She wears an earring in her right ear (fig. 1). Her bright blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and red lips are accentuated by her mass of curled, powdered hair and her pale skin and gown. This work is a classic example of Cosway’s elegant female portraits, exhibiting the nearly monochromatic palette and free style that would be so decisively rejected in the next century by such artists as Andrew Robertson (1777–1845) and William Charles Ross (1794–1860). The miniature is placed in a twentieth-century revival period gold and blue enamel frame with graduated split pearls. This ornate type of frame was especially popular among early-twentieth-century collectors who felt that it suited the grandeur of miniatures by Cosway and his circle, the female portraits of which were so often composed of the pale tones of gauzy dresses, blue skies, and pearl-ornamented hair.

CORY KORKOW



Figure 1. Pearled hair ornament and earring (detail).

2 George Charles Williamson, “Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan’s Pictures. The English Miniatures. Part V,” *Connoisseur* 18 (June 1907): 73. None of the works by Cosway mentioned were in the Morgan collection.

3 *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), 19: p. 230.

4 Williamson, *Richard Cosway*, pp. 9–10.