







RICHARD COSWAY (British, 1742–1821)

Portrait of a Man

c. 1790

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 5.9 x 5 cm (2³/₈ x 2 in.)

Signature: none

Setting: gold frame with blue and white enamel

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1942.1137

Provenance

Before 1928

Leo Schidlof (1886–1966, Paris).

1928

Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for \$465; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 31, 1942.

1942

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.

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection*, p. 26, no. 6, pl. XVI. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

PAINTED DURING THE EARLY part of Richard Cosway's mature career, this portrait of an unknown man exhibits the artist's characteristic proportionality, with head enlarged in relation to the shoulders and eyes enlarged in relation to the rest of the face. The effect is to draw the viewer's attention to the sitter's eyes, which heightens the already intimate experience of looking at a miniature. Whereas miniatures by his rival John Smart (1741–1811) capitalize on the fine details of facial expression, Cosway's pastel tones and soft-focus painterly style have a more equalizing effect on the genders of his sitters. Gentlemen were, however, painted according to different conventions than female sitters and can seem more individualized than Cosway's female faces, which oftentimes feel subordinate to coiffure and costume.

This young sitter wears a high collar popular in the late 1780s and has powdered his hair, worn *en queue* rather than wearing a wig, which by 1790 was used primarily by older, conservative men. In 1795 the English government began to tax hair powder, resulting in the rapid



abandonment of both wigs and powdered hair.¹ Measuring under 2 inches high, this miniature is modest in size for Cosway during this period, when the format of his miniatures expanded to 3 inches. Factors such as size, elaborateness of costume, and how much of the body was depicted all determined how much an artist would charge for a miniature. Smaller miniatures were obviously more portable and adaptable to being worn as jewelry. CORY KORKOW

¹ John Barrell, *The Spirit of Despotism: Invasions of Privacy in the 1790s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 145–209.