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RICHARD COSWAY (British, 1742–1821)

Portrait of Catherine Clemens and Her Son, John Marcus Clemens

c. 1800

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 9 x 7.3 cm (3½ x 2⅞ in.)

Signature: none

Setting: gold frame set with graduated split pearls

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1941.552

Provenance

Before 1930
Leo Schidlof (1886–1966, Paris).

1930
Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for £250 ($1,250); gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 5, 1941.

1941
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Exhibitions

1950
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Four Centuries of Miniature Painting,* January 18–March 19.

1956
Musées d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève, *Chefs-d'Oeuvres de la Miniature et de la Gouache,* June 15–August 15, no. 99, pl. 99.

1991
The Cleveland Museum of Art, *Object Lessons: Cleveland Creates an Art Museum,* June 6–September 8.

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): 138 (repr.).

Connoisseur 138 (October 1956): 82 (repr.).

Lister, Raymond. "The Edward B. Greene Collection of Portrait Miniatures." *Apollo* 55 (January 1952): 20 (repr. in color on cover).

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection,* p. 26, no. 8, pl. VI. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

Think (International Business Machines Corp.) (March 1950): 16 (repr.).

RICHARD COSWAY WAS ADEPT at painting children. This sensitive portrait of Catherine Clemens and her son, John Marcus, was painted around 1800 and exemplifies the prettiness for which Cosway was so well known. The artist's trademark turquoise blue sky is reflected in the boy's brilliant blue eyes and the bow on the frock that slips informally off his shoulder. This miniature also showcases Cosway's mature technique of delicate stipplework throughout the faces, contrasted with looser brushstrokes for the hair and garments. Both John Marcus and his mother are swathed in white ruffled fabric, against which the paleness of their skin seems even more pronounced. Like his contemporaries, Cosway used the bare ivory ground to enhance the creaminess of flesh tones. John Marcus wears a coral necklace, frequently given to children during this period as a talisman believed to ward off illness. His innocent, childish gesture of reaching down his mother's dress for her breast is awkward considering his disproportionately large size. The fact that he is still young enough to wear a gown rather than breeches suggests that he is under four years of age, and yet his head and lips are larger than his mother's. During the final decades of the eighteenth century, aristocratic women as prominent as the Duchess of Devonshire were electing to breastfeed

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their children rather than send them to wet nurses, and this may be a delicate reference to Catherine Clemens's philosophy of "natural" parenting. Generally speaking, a portrait of a mother and her son might serve several purposes in addition to being a charming keepsake. It could celebrate the fulfillment of a woman's critical responsibility to produce an heir to the family fortune, or act as an antidote to charges of scandal or extravagance by exhibiting a woman as actively grounded in her children's development. Portraits of mothers with their children were much more common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain than were portraits of fathers with their children.

More than just a touching portrait of a mother and child, this painting represents a new attitude toward rearing children rooted in late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy. Replacing the age-old wisdom that children were the inheritors of original sin and thus parents must be vigilant disciplinarians was the notion that childhood was a period of innocence that ought to be treasured by nurturing fathers and mothers.[1] The close and playful bond between John Marcus and his mother is the result of this modern celebration of childhood and is comparable to Benjamin West's portrait of his wife and son (fig. 1). West was a contemporary of Cosway, but this oil painting in the neoclassical style and Italian Renaissance vernacular is as different stylistically from Cosway as the two pictures are united in sentiment. Painted during a period when mothers were exhorted to more intimate relationships with their children, these late-eighteenth-century portraits represent a very different attitude toward childhood than that seen in Anthony van Dyck's early-seventeenth-century *Portrait of a Woman and Child*, in which the child is dressed stiffly as an adult and receives only a hint of physical intimacy from the mother (fig. 2). Although he painted many miniatures of children, portraits of mothers with their children are relatively rare within Cosway's oeuvre.

CORY KORKOW

Figure 1. *Elizabeth Shewell West and Her Son, Raphael,* c. 1770. Benjamin West (American, 1738–1820). Oil on canvas; 66.5 x 66.3 cm (26⅛ x 26 in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Charles W. Harkness Gift 1927.393.

Figure 2. *Portrait of a Woman and Child,* c. 1623–25. Anthony van Dyck (Flemish, 1599–1641). Oil on canvas; 217.8 x 146 cm (85⅝ x 57½ in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund 1954.392.

1 See James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British Art and the Origins of Modern Childhood, 1730–1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); *Pictures of Innocence: Portraits of Children from Hogarth to Lawrence,* essay by Martin Postle, exh. cat., Holburne Museum of Art and tour (Bath, England, 2005).