













ATTRIBUTED TO JOHN WRIGHT (English, c. 1745-1820)

Portrait of Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington

c. 1806-7

Watercolor on ivory; rectangular, 22 x 18.2 cm (85/8 x 71/8 in.)

Signature: none; annotated on paper backing: Painted by W. C. Ross, 1812; inscribed in watercolor on back of ivory at bottom: Painted by W. C. Ross, 1812

Setting: gilt metal mat

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1942.1154

Provenance

Before 1927

S. J. Phillips, London.

1927

Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) for £100 (\$500); gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 31, 1942.

1942

The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Exhibitions

None.

Bibliography

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection, p. 32, no. 51, pl. XXIV. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

Wellesley, Lord Gerald, and John Steegmann. The Iconography of the First Duke of Wellington, p. 22, under "Hoppner, John, R. A.," no. 2. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1935. JOHN WRIGHT WAS an engraver and miniaturist active primarily in London who exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1795 and 1819. He painted miniatures in ivory on the traditional small, oval surfaces as well as the rectangular format that became increasingly popular during the 1790s. For seven of the twenty exhibitions in which he participated at the Royal Academy, his contributions included groups of portraits that seem to have been framed together—a customary exhibition arrangement for miniatures. Among his contributions for 1807 is listed "Cabinet picture, Miss Willmott." This work is the only one of Wright's academy entries described as a "cabinet picture," a type traditionally characterized prior to this date as a larger miniature on vellum featuring a religious or historical subject. Because we know that this was a portrait at over 7 inches in height, the designation "cabinet picture" must here refer to its unusually large size for ivory.

¹ Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts. A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London: Henry Graves and Co., 1906), 8: pp. 364–65. None of the many works exhibited at the Royal Academy decades later by William Charles Ross or Robert Thorburn, who were well known for their large miniatures, were designated "cabinet pictures."





Wright's style is painterly, and he employed gouache to create saturated brushstrokes that suggest oil painting. Yellow tones predominate in the faces of his portraits. His miniatures are often signed and dated on the reverse and sometimes inscribed with his address. Although only one of Wright's works is in the British Royal Collection, at least one of his miniatures is signed "Miniature painter to His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent." Daphne Foskett notes that Wright painted very few women, though the extant miniatures and the lists of works exhibited by the artist at the Royal Academy contradict this assertion. The National Portrait Gallery in London has a number of engravings after Wright that are themselves after paintings by other artists, including John Hoppner (1758–1810), Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), and Thomas Phillips (1770–1845).

In this miniature Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), is depicted at three-quarter length, with his body facing forward and his head slightly to the right. In his right, buff-gloved hand he holds a black cocked hat with red and gold tassels; his left hand rests on the hilt of a sword. A five o'clock shadow is visible on the famously hirsute soldier, who has gray-blue eyes, bow lips, and powdered dark hair. Wellesley wears the uniform of a major-general (the rank he attained in 1802), which consists of a red coat with a dark blue collar and cuffs—trimmed with gold braid—and epaulets. He wears white breeches, and from his right shoulder, a pale rose sash extends across his chest, on which he wears the star of the Order of the Bath. A rose-colored sash is also wrapped around his waist and is knotted at his right hip. The background features a blue and gray cloudy sky without a visible horizon line.

The miniature remains in its original gilt metal mat (fig. 1). It was formerly housed in a gilt wood frame with a plain, wood easel back that was removed sometime after the miniature entered the museum's collection. Both the paper backing and the back of the ivory are annotated, "Painted by W. C. Ross, 1812." This inscription



Figure 1. Original gilt metal mat.

was presumably added by a later hand, since the portrait bears little resemblance to the more polished and tighter style of William Charles Ross (1794–1860). Although Ross was exhibiting at the Royal Academy by 1809, he initially exhibited oil paintings and was probably not executing accomplished portraits in miniature until after 1812.

This portrait was completed during the height of Wellesley's career as one of the most famous and frequently painted soldiers in the history of Britain. The year 1806 was significant for Wellesley; it was the year he finally married Catherine (Kitty) Pakenham (1773–1831), whose hand he had been denied in 1793 on the grounds that he was deeply in debt and undistinguished. After nine years of military service in India, he returned in 1805 a decorated, highly esteemed, and wealthy solider to whom Pakenham's family could no longer object. In 1806 he was also appointed Chief Secretary of Ireland. He had received the Order of the Bath in 1804 and in this portrait wears the insignia, here consisting of a sash and an eight-pointed silver star that features three crowns at the center encircled by a red ring bearing the motto of the order in gold letters (fig. 2).

² Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987; 2000), p. 345.



The miniature is based on an oil painting by John Hoppner executed in 1806 and exhibited at the Royal Academy (fig. 3). The original painting represents Wellesley full length and life sized, standing in an Indian landscape, his horse held by an Indian servant. The diarist Joseph Farington remarked on the picture's progress twice in 1806, commenting in April that "Hoppner's colouring is brighter than formerly & better. His portraits of Marquiss Wellesley & Mr. Pitt very good." But a month later he commented, "Sir A. Wellesley's Portrait by Hoppner is scattered & discordant." In 1808 the portrait was acquired by public subscription for the Government House, Madras. In 1935 it was still recorded as being located in the Government House, Madras, and is currently in the collection of the Duke of Wellington at the Stratfield Saye House in Hampshire.

A mezzotint engraving of the portrait was executed by W. W. Barney (active c. 1805) in 1808 (fig. 4). Although the miniature could have been painted from the engraving, it was probably created sometime in late 1806 or 1807, between the time that Hoppner exhibited his picture at the Royal Academy and when it was sent to India. These dates give further reason to doubt the credibility of the inscription "W. C. Ross, 1812."

At over 7 inches high, this miniature participates in a lateeighteenth-, early-nineteenth-century trend in Britain to expand the format of miniatures executed in a colorful, painterly style in order to compete in exhibition with oil paintings. Wright's decision to simplify the composition by isolating Wellesley from the drama of the horse and attendant enhances his lush style and the subtle coloration particularly evident in the rose-colored grosgrain sash and the loose yellow, brown, and blue-gray brushstrokes that make up the sitter's



Figure 2. Sash and star of the Order of the Bath (detail).



Figure 3. *Portrait of Colonel Arthur Wellesley,* 1806. John Hoppner (British, 1758–1810). Oil on canvas; dimensions unknown. Stratfield Saye House, Basingstoke, Hampshire.

³ Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kathryn Cave, vol. 7, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 2713, 2762. Entries for Thursday, 10 April and Friday, 16 May 1806.

⁴ William M. Milliken and Harry B. Wehle, *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951), p. 32, no. 51.

⁵ Lord Gerald Wellesley and John Steegmann, *The Iconography of the First Duke of Wellington* (London: J. M. Dent, 1935), pp. 22–23, pl. 4.



face. Evidence of the artist's practice of using the support to dab his brush appears in the bare ivory margins of the upper and lower front surface, on which turquoise, crimson, and ocher brushstrokes are visible (fig. 5). The sash of the Order of the Bath should by definition be crimson, as in Hoppner's portrait, but in Wright's rendering it is pale pink. His training as an engraver is apparent in the careful network of crosshatched lines that comprise the background—especially remarkable considering the unusually large ivory surface. This Romantic portrait of Wellesley lacks the quality of sensitive verisimilitude captured by Richard Cosway (1742–1821)—who also painted the sash of the Order of the Bath a pale pink (fig. 6)—but it demonstrates Wright's skill at transforming a complicated grand manner oil painting into a successful portrait in miniature.

The circumstances of this commission are unknown, but because Wellesley himself was fonder of frank, intimate portraits that did not dramatically depict him in the trappings of uniform and awards, it is unlikely that he commissioned this work himself. Cory Korkow



Figure 4. Engraving by William Whiston Barney (British, active c. 1805), after *Portrait of Colonel Arthur Wellesley*, 1806. John Hoppner (British, 1758–1810). Oil on canvas; dimensions unknown. Stratfield Saye House, Basingstoke, Hampshire. Reproduced in Lord Gerald Wellesley and John Steegmann, *The Iconography of the First Duke of Wellington* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1935), pl. 4.



Figure 5. Brushstrokes on ivory support (detail).



Figure 6. Portrait of Arthur Wellesley, later 1st Duke of Wellington, 1808. Richard Cosway (British, 1742–1821). Watercolor on ivory; 7.1 x 5.6 cm (2⁹/₄ x 2¹/₄ in.). Victoria and Albert Museum, Given by Mrs. Emma Joseph P.6-1941.