Object reduced from actual size

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JOHN LINNELL (British, 1792–1882)

Portrait of Anne Law, née Towry, 1st Lady Ellenborough

c. 1821

Watercolor on ivory heightened with gum Arabic; rectangular, 23.4 x 20.7 cm (9¼ x 8⅛ in.)

Signature: none

Setting: nineteenth-century standing gilt bronze and red velvet frame, stamped "WW" on the back of the brass mat

Dudley P. Allen Fund, 2010.461

Provenance

c. 1821
Anne Law, 1st Lady Ellenborough (née Towry, c. 1769–1843); by inheritance to her daughter, Frederica Selina Ramsden (née Law, 1805–1879, Oxton Hall, Yorkshire).

1843–79
Frederica Selina Ramsden; by inheritance to her son John Charles Francis Ramsden (1835–1910, Willinghurst, Surrey).

1879–1910
John Charles Francis Ramsden; by inheritance to his son Capt. Frederick William Ramsden (1871–1958, Willinghurst, Surrey).

1910–58
Capt. Frederick William Ramsden; by inheritance to his daughter Moyra Gwendolin Russell-Clarke (née Ramsden, 1900–1981).

1958–81
Moyra Gwendolin Russell-Clarke; by inheritance to her great-niece Julia Ann Llewellyn (née Cooke, b. 1948, London).

1981
Julia Ann Llewellyn; purchased by the Cleveland Museum of Art at Bonhams (Knightsbridge) on November 24, 2010 (lot 189).

2010
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Exhibitions

None.

Bibliography

None.

JOHN LINNELL WAS BORN and lived much of his young adulthood in Bloomsbury, where his father, James, made picture frames and restored paintings. As a boy the artist trained briefly with Benjamin West (1738–1820) and John Varley (1778–1842) before becoming a student at the Royal Academy from 1805 to 1812. Though primarily known for his landscapes, Linnell was also a prolific portraitist and executed miniatures during the first two decades of his career, learning the medium from his neighbor James Holmes (1770–1860). According to an early biographer, Linnell began painting miniatures around 1818 with a portrait of his wife.[1] Later in life Linnell reflected in his "Autobiographical Notes" that

> [m]iniature portraits at that time had in general nothing in them beyond the locket and brooch style—jewellers work,

1 Alfred Thomas Story, *The Life of John Linnell* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1892), 1: pp. 117–18. Evidence for the date at which Linnell began painting miniatures is contradictory. Linnell wrote that his first miniature portrait was that of his wife executed in 1818, but elsewhere he stated the date as 1819. Furthermore, two references are made to miniatures painted on ivory in 1816 in the artist's "Portrait Sketchbook." See also Katharine Crouan, *John Linnell: A Centennial Exhibition,* exh. cat. from the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 27–28.

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> with no pretention [sic] to fine art. It never seemed to have occurred to any painter of such things that all which Reynolds had done on a large scale in oil could be done on a small one in any material. When I tried upon ivory to paint a small head of my wife in 1819, I found without knowing how different it was from miniature painting in general that it surprised many.[2]

This surprising passage demonstrates Linnell's low regard for even the masterworks of late-eighteenth-century British miniature painting and his self-perception as an innovator in the medium. By 1823 he had executed a number of miniature commissions from aristocratic patrons, including Princess Sophia, facilitated by the praise of the society maven Lady Stafford.[3]

Though Linnell continued to render many portraits in watercolor, chalk, and oil through the 1840s, he painted his last known miniature on ivory in 1832.[4] During the approximately fifteen years that the artist painted miniatures, he consistently charged between 10 and 50 guineas for a portrait.[5] These fees corresponded less to the size of the ivory than to the degree of finish and elaboration of the composition. Linnell's brilliant palette, detailed technique, and insistence on painting from life while striving for naturalism—even at the expense of conventional beauty—made the artist a role model for the young Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (particularly John Everett Millais [1829–1896] and William Holman Hunt [1827–1910]), for whom Linnell was also an advocate and friend.[6]

Throughout his career Linnell made copies of old master paintings as commissions from print sellers and private patrons, but primarily he created these works for his own enjoyment and enrichment. Although he was devoted to the study of early Flemish, German, and Italian painting, Linnell never traveled farther from England than Scotland.

In this portrait Anne Law (née Towry), 1st Lady Ellenborough (c. 1769–1843), is depicted half length. She wears a high-waisted white dress of translucent fabric through which a hint of blue appears and around which she wears a black belt. A *devant de corsage* (stomacher, or bodice brooch) is worn at her décolletage, extending to the belt. Its gold framework contains at least twelve semiprecious stones colored blue, red, aquamarine, pink, and brown. A gold brooch with a large blue stone is pinned to the cloak at her right shoulder. She also wears a twisted multistrand pearl necklace, matching pearl pendant earrings, and two gold rings on her left ring finger. A dark gray-green shawl with red reverse, gold border, and red fringe is draped over her shoulders and arms. She holds a closed fan in her left hand and stands against a brown background featuring a green and auburn striped curtain in the upper left corner. The sitter's fair hair is dressed in ringlets that fall at her neck. The miniature is housed in a standing gilt metal and red velvet frame that dates from the same period.

Law was a colorful character and renowned beauty. She married the distinguished English judge Edward Law, 1st Baron Ellenborough (1750–1818), in 1789. Together they had seven sons and six daughters, ten of whom survived infancy.[7] Lady Ellenborough was described as "so exceedingly lovely, that passengers would linger to watch her watering the flowers—such was the fashion of the day—on the balcony of their house in Bloomsbury Square."[8] Anne's husband died in December 1818. At the time Linnell had only begun to paint miniatures of family and friends and to build a client base. As a widow

2 John Linnell, "Autobiographical Notes" (unpublished manuscript, 1863). Quoted in Crouan, *John Linnell,* p. 28.
3 David Linnell, *Blake, Palmer, Linnell and Co. The Life of John Linnell* (Sussex: The Book Guild, Ltd., 1994), p. 67.
4 *A Portrait of a Man,* signed and dated 1832, measuring 12.8 by 9.7 centimeters (5 by 3⅞ inches). From *A Loan Exhibition of Drawings, Watercolors, and Paintings by John Linnell and His Circle* (London: P. D. Colnaghi, 1973), no. 101a.
5 David Linnell, *Blake, Palmer, Linnell,* pp. 383–86.
6 Dante Gabriel Rossetti's first (and posthumous) exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1883 was shared with Linnell, with portrait miniatures represented among his more widely celebrated landscapes.

7 Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 32: p. 221.
8 William Charles Townsend, *The Lives of Twelve Eminent Judges of the Last and of the Present Century* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846), 1: p. 307.

who would have been in mourning for at least two years, Law would not have commissioned a portrait of herself in an evening dress and jewels, strictly forbidden during the period after her husband's death. Therefore, this work was likely commissioned during the early 1820s, when Linnell's portrait miniature practice was thriving.[9]

This portrait is not the traditional, locket-sized, intimate, and informal miniature tucked away and treasured by a lover. Instead, Lady Ellenborough wears an elegant evening dress and drips with jewels. The amethyst, topaz, peridot, and aquamarine that may comprise her devant de corsage became popular for jewelry during the Regency, but the size and configuration seen here is unusual (fig. 1). A devant de corsage was a jeweled ornament attached to the front of a woman's dress and ranged in size from that of a brooch to an element that might cover much of the torso. Law wears an Empire-waist gown that by definition lacks the flat, triangular bodice found on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gowns to which jewels would have been affixed, and it seems a flimsy support for the heavy object. This type of ornament regained popularity as evening jewelry during the nineteenth century and was worn affixed with belt and pin fittings on a variety of styles of dress. As seems to be the case here, a devant de corsage could be composed of several parts, enabling ease of movement and allowing sections to be worn in different configurations. This example differs from the traditional style, however, in that it is wider at the base than the top and it is mounted with extremely large stones rather than numerous smaller ones. In spite of the fact that its visual appeal seems to eclipse its functionality, Linnell's rigorous practice of painting from life suggests that this object was not an ornament invented for the portrait; it actually belonged to the sitter.

This early-nineteenth-century work communicates a new

Figure 1. Jeweled *devant de corsage* (detail).

9 Among the lists of pictures left by Linnell are two portraits of "Mrs Law" painted by Linnell in 1818. David Linnell categorizes these under oil portraits rather than miniatures painted on ivory; see David Linnell, *Blake, Palmer, Linnell,* p. 374. In addition to the date's implausibility, by 1818 Anne Law had been a baroness for sixteen years, and the artist would have referred to her as Lady Ellenborough in his records, so we can assume that these portraits are unrelated to the miniature in question.

ambition for miniature painting as it attempted to compete in public exhibitions with oil painting and later, in the mid-nineteenth century, with photography. Linnell mastered a number of techniques in this miniature, including fine stippling in the face coupled with a reductive scraping away of the paint layer (fig. 2). In passages such as the nose, highlights emerged by leaving the ivory ground bare, while the pearls and jewels are accentuated with opaque gouache. The portrait's jewel tones, visionary technique, and larger, rectangular format—intended to be ornately framed rather than worn as jewelry—illustrate a fresh vision for miniature painting while still signaling allegiance to the Grand Manner portraiture of Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792).

Lady Ellenborough's portrait exhibits the friction inherent in invoking the past in the language of the future. It unites Linnell's innovative technique with his early examination of old masters—in this case Italian Renaissance painting, which he was diligently studying during this period. In particular, in 1822 Linnell was copying on ivory—and seemingly for himself—Lord Cowper's famous Madonna and Child by Raphael (1483–1520) (fig. 3).[10] Lady Ellenborough's heavily lidded eyes echo those of the Madonna and are among the more peculiar features of her portrait, in which the gentle timelessness of her countenance is almost at odds with the ostentatious nature of her dress. Linnell's insistence on simultaneously being true to what he observed while pronouncing his debt to the old masters is apparent here. He regarded study of the human figure to be the foundation of all painting, including landscape, and in his portraits he aimed to discover and capture a characteristic expression that would articulate the beauty of the sitter.

Like many beautiful women, Law seems to have been fond of having her portrait painted: Reynolds rendered her in oil,[11] and Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830) painted her twice, including a portrait

Figure 2. Linnell's miniature painting techniques included delicate stippling, scraping, building up the paint layer with opaque highlights, and leaving the ivory ground bare (detail).

Figure 3. *The Cowper Madonna,* 1822. John Linnell, after Raphael (Italian, 1483–1520). Watercolor on ivory; 17.6 x 13.6 cm (7 x 5½ in.). Private collection.

10 Crouan, *John Linnell,* p. 31.
11 This 1789 portrait was lost at sea while en route to Russia.

exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1813 (no. 158) (fig. 4).[12] Lady Ellenborough's working relationship with Lawrence was acrimonious and engendered a heated exchange of letters demonstrating that she was an exacting patron.[13] Lawrence's portrait came several years before Linnell's but closely relates in style and composition and has similar elements, including hair dressed in ringlets, the white Empire-waist evening gown, and the twisted, multistrand pearl necklace (worn with the clasp in the front in the Lawrence portrait). Law also had her portrait painted in miniature by George Hayter (1792–1871) in the 1810s (fig. 5) with the same disposition of head and left arm seen in Linnell's portrait.[14] CORY KORKOW

Figure 4. *Portrait of Anne, Lady Ellenborough,* 1813. Thomas Lawrence (English, 1769–1830). Oil on canvas; 76.5 x 76.8 cm (30⅛ x 30¼ in.). From *Important Paintings by Old Masters* (New York: Christie's, 5 June 1980), lot 132.

Figure 5. *Portrait of Lady Ellenborough,* c. 1810s. George Hayter (British, 1792–1871). Pencil on paper; 10.2 x 7.2 cm (4 x 2¾ in.). National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 883(9).

12 Kenneth Garlick, *Sir Thomas Lawrence: a complete catalogue of the oil paintings* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989), p. 183, nos. 269 and 270. Current location of both is unknown.
13 Thomas Lawrence, *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, ed. George Somes Layard (London: G. Allen, 1906), pp. 74–83.
14 Hayter's pencil sketch was a study for a miniature, the location of which is currently unknown.