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UNKNOWN BRITISH ARTIST

Woman with a Tambourine, in Neoclassical Costume

mid to late 1800s

Watercolor on ivory; oval, 15.3 x 13 cm (6 x 5 in.)

Signature: R. C. at lower right

Setting: gilt metal frame with blue glazed and hairwork reverse

Gift of J. H. Wade Jr., G. G. Wade, and Mrs. E. B. Greene, 1926.232

Provenance

1895
Purchased by J. H. Wade (1857–1926, Cleveland) in London for $150; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, June 9, 1926.

1926
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Exhibitions

None.

Bibliography

None.

THIS LARGE MINIATURE depicts a woman at full length, turned to the left, playing a tambourine held in her left hand. She wears a floor-length, white, Empire-waist gown with short sleeves and scarlet slippers. The Empire silhouette was fashionable in the years around 1800, when it was executed in fine, white cotton or muslin and meant to recall classical Greek or Roman dress. The woman's light brown hair falls below her waist in curls, and she wears a white turban. She stands on a pale green, closely cropped lawn in front of a low, green, wrought-iron fence with a wood railing. On the back the initials *JCSB* in gold are placed over plaited hair of at least two different colors (fig. 1). At over 15 centimeters high in its frame, this miniature's size is incongruous with its oval shape and elaborate glass and braided hair setting, which were typical of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century wearable miniatures a third or quarter of this size (fig. 2). The woman's face lacks specificity and is probably not a portrait of a particular individual but, rather, a fancy picture exploring themes of beauty and music. This assertion does, however, call into question the presence of the initials and hair on the back of the setting, which

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Figure 1. The initials *JCSB* in gold over plaited hair on reverse (detail).

Figure 2. Miniatures in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century frames in the Cleveland Museum of Art collection. Left: Christian Frederich Zincke's *Portrait of a Man* is 5.1 centimeters (2 inches) high; right: Richard Cosway's *Portrait of Catherine Clemens and Her Son, John Marcus Clemens* is 9 centimeters (3½ inches) high.

customarily indicate an intimate relationship between the owner and the sitter that presumably would be absent outside of portraiture.

When this work entered the collection in 1926, it was believed to date from the late eighteenth century, but its size, shape, and the full-length figure make such an early date extremely unlikely. The signature "R. C." may suggest Richard Cosway (1742–1821) (fig. 3), the highly sought-after eighteenth- and nineteenth-century miniaturist; however, this work does not resemble his style. J. H. Wade purchased this object in 1896 for $150—a substantial sum during that period for a miniature—indicating that he may have thought the work was indeed by Cosway.

This miniature does relate closely in style and subject matter to the work of the British artist Adam Buck (1759–1833), who was known for his classicizing, full-length watercolor portraits and fancy pictures, after which this work may be a copy.[1] Buck's miniatures on ivory are bust length and more strongly delineated than this work, which instead recalls the artist's watercolors. Hallmarks of Buck's drawings include a low horizon line, muted palette, full-length female figures depicted in profile, and a patchy blue, cloudy sky (fig. 4). A scrolled, wrought-iron fence similar to the one present in this miniature

Figure 3. The signature "R. C." falsely suggesting Richard Cosway (detail).

1 Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987; repr., 2000), pp. 231–33.

Figure 4. *A Lady and Gentleman,* 1801. Adam Buck (British, 1759–1833). Watercolor and charcoal on paper; 40.6 x 31.8 cm (16 x 12½ in.). From *The Paula Peyraud Collection: Samuel Johnson and Women Writers in Georgian Society* (New York: Bloomsbury Auctions, 6 May 2009), lot 15. Current location unknown.

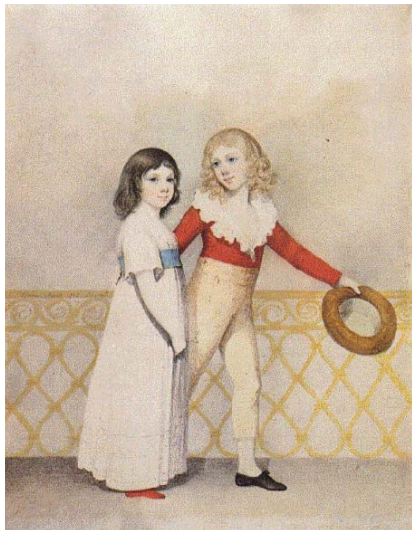

Figure 5. *Portrait of William Bellingham Budworth and His Sister Emma Mary,* 1795. Adam Buck (British, 1759–1833). Watercolor and chalk; 36.3 x 27.2 cm (14¼ x 10¾ in.). From *British Drawings and Watercolours* (London: Christie's, 7 April 1992), lot 58. Current location unknown.

appears in a drawing by Buck (fig. 5). In both cases the fence is used decoratively to break up the expanse of bare space created by the low horizon line and vacant sky. Buck's works often feature women listening to or playing an intrument, including the tambourine (fig. 6), but he is not known to have painted these full-length figures on ivory. The numerous incompatibilities—including style, subject, composition, medium, setting, size, and signature—together suggest that this object was painted in the second half of the nineteenth century specifically for the art market and to evoke an earlier period.

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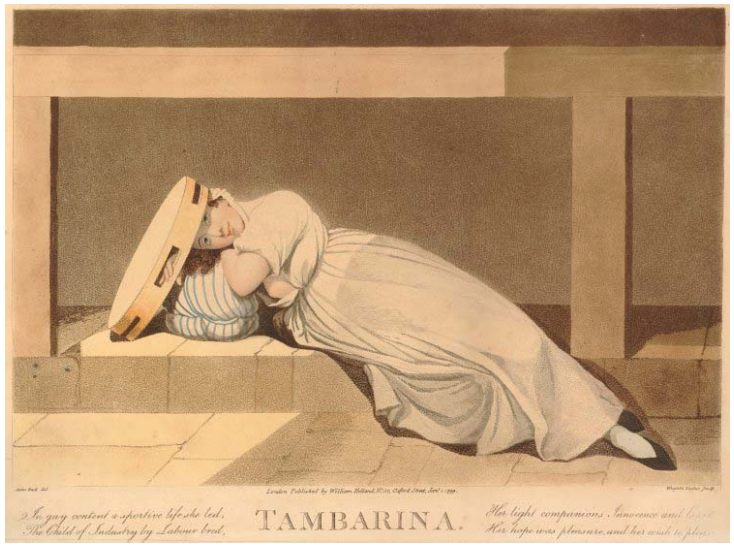

Figure 6. *Tambarina,* 1799. After Adam Buck (British, 1759–1833), published by William Holland. Print made by Thomas Wright and J. C. Ziegler. Hand-colored aquatint; 25.1 x 35.5 cm (9⅞ x 14 in.). British Museum, London.