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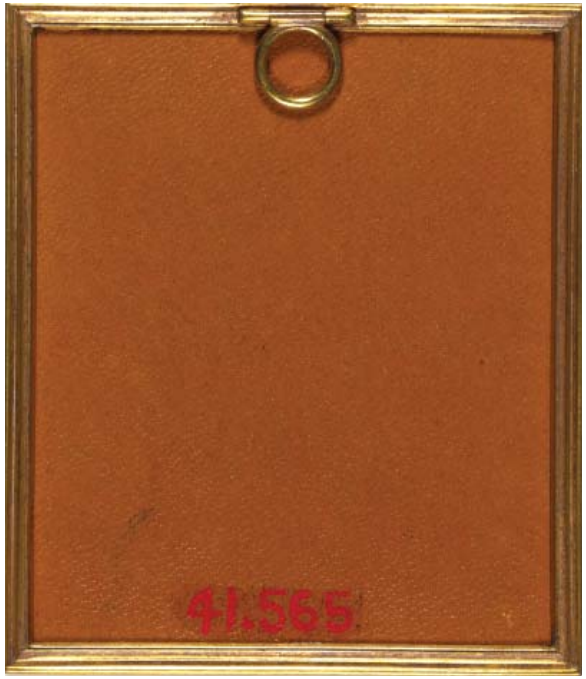
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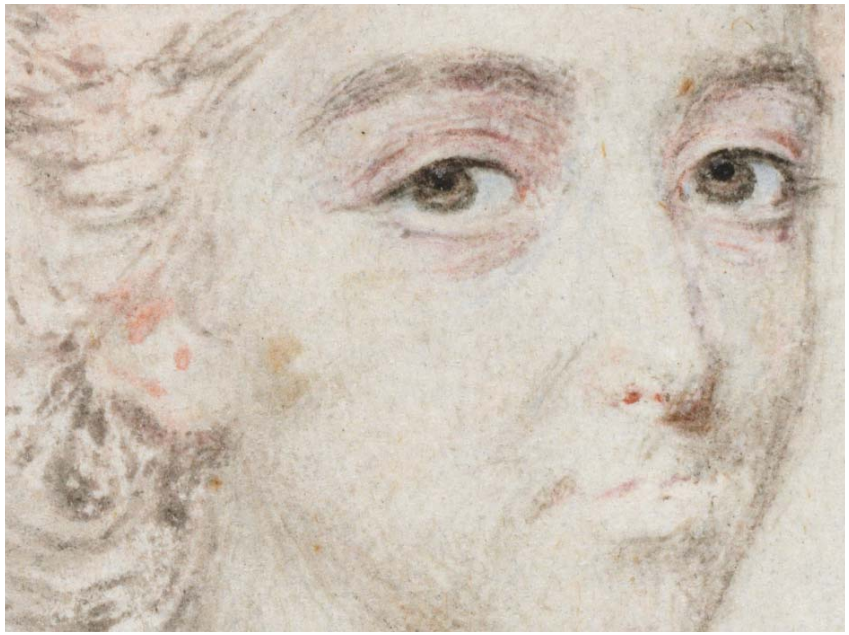

JOHN SMART (British, 1741–1811)

Portrait of a Woman

c. 1776

Graphite and wash on laid paper; rectangular, 8.8 x 7.6 cm (3½ x 3 in.)

Signature: none; inscribed on front of paper at upper right corner: 119 (or 115?); inscribed on paper backing in graphite upside down at lower left: 10

Setting: 1929 square metal frame with narrow border of white enamel around outer edge

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1941.565

Provenance

Until 1811
John Smart (1741–1811); by inheritance to Sarah Smart (1781–1853), daughter of the artist by Sarah Midgeley.[1]

1811–c. 1853
Sarah Smart.

c. 1853
Gift to Mary Smirke (d. 1853, Slough); by inheritance to her brother, Sydney Smirke (1798–1877).

1853–77
Sydney Smirke; by inheritance to his daughter Mrs. Lange (née Smirke, d. 1928).

1877–1928
Mrs. Lange; by inheritance to her brother, Sir Edward Smirke.

1928
Sir Edward Smirke.

1928
Purchased by Leo Schidlof (1886–1966, Paris) at Christie's (London) sale, December 10 (lot 2).[2]

1929
Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for £50 ($250.00) around July; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 5, 1941.

1941
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

1 Following his first marriage, John Smart had two children out of wedlock with Sarah Midgeley: John (1776–1809) and Sarah (1781–1853).

2 Called "Portrait of Henrietta Maria" and mounted with a "Portrait of Duchess Christina."

Exhibitions

1904
Moncorvo House, London, *Royal Amateur Art Society Exhibition of Miniatures,* March 5–8 (possibly).

Bibliography

Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection,* p. 31, no. 43, pl. XII (repr.). Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to say whether or not it was always part of the artist's process to execute a preparatory sketch prior to painting each miniature, we do know that John Smart retained many hundreds of these sketches. A group of preparatory sketches—of which this portrait is one—descended through the Smirke family after Smart's daughter Sarah gave a sketchbook containing preparatory portrait studies to her friend Mary Smirke, sister of the celebrated Victorian architect Sydney Smirke. This book was probably broken up around 1877 when its contents was divided between Sydney's daughters Mary Jemmett and Mrs. Lange, whose portions were both sold at auction in 1928.

Compared to his contemporaries George Engleheart (1752–1829) and Andrew Plimer (1763–1837), whose female sitters were often painted in similar simple white gowns, Smart often lavished more attention on the costumes in his portraits of women, whose dresses incorporated colored silks, printed fabrics, and luxury trimmings like lace and fur. The sitter's head and shoulders face left. She has what was probably once blonde hair—now faded to pink—dressed high on her head, with curls down the back of her neck, over which a veil descends. Her eyes are hazel, and the color of her lips has almost completely faded. Positioned in an oval, and revealing much of her left breast, she wears a low-necked dress with faint traces of pink pigment, trimmed with a string of pearls. The background is unpainted. To this date, the finished ivory for which this preparatory sketch was presumably undertaken has not been discovered.

The portrait was assigned the historically colorful but fictitious title of "Henrietta Maria" at some point after memory of its true identity had been lost.[3] Giving illustrious titles to portraits of unknown sitters was a popular strategy adopted by dealers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often applied to miniature portraits and, in particular, to Smart's sketches of women. In 1948 Arthur Jaffé wrote to the Cleveland Museum of Art that a "Mrs. Samuelson of Exeter recently brought me two frames, with six sketches mounted in each, of ladies, mostly with fancy names. I think there is no doubt that they were part of Mrs. Lange's share of the Smirke sketches, though unlike yours they did not pass through Christie's auction in Dec. 1928. I persuaded Mrs. Samuelson to let me remove them from their frames and to rub the paper backing from the card on which the sketches are painted. The result was as follows. Included was a No. 115 called, Margaret, Archduchess of Austria, which is the same number given to our Henrietta Maria" (fig. 1).[4] Elsewhere Jaffé notes that the number on the front of this sketch was probably a 119 instead of a 115. CORY KORKOW

Figure 1. Conservation photograph showing the verso of the drawing following Arthur Jaffé's removal of the backing.

3 The date at which this new title was adopted is unknown, but it had been applied by 1928 when it was so catalogued in the Christie's sale.

4 See transcription of correspondence from Arthur Jaffé dated 30 April 1948, as documented in the CMA curatorial file.