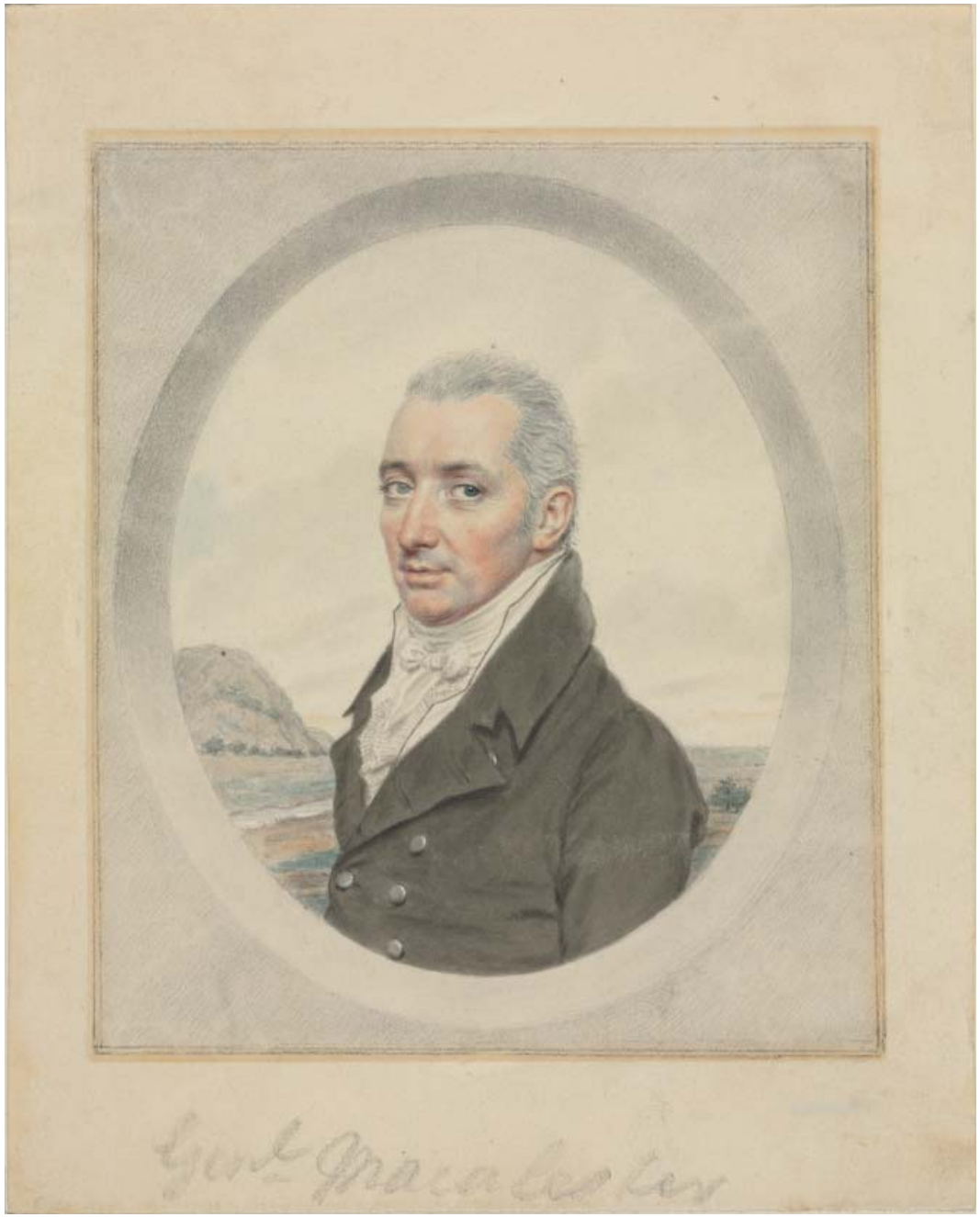
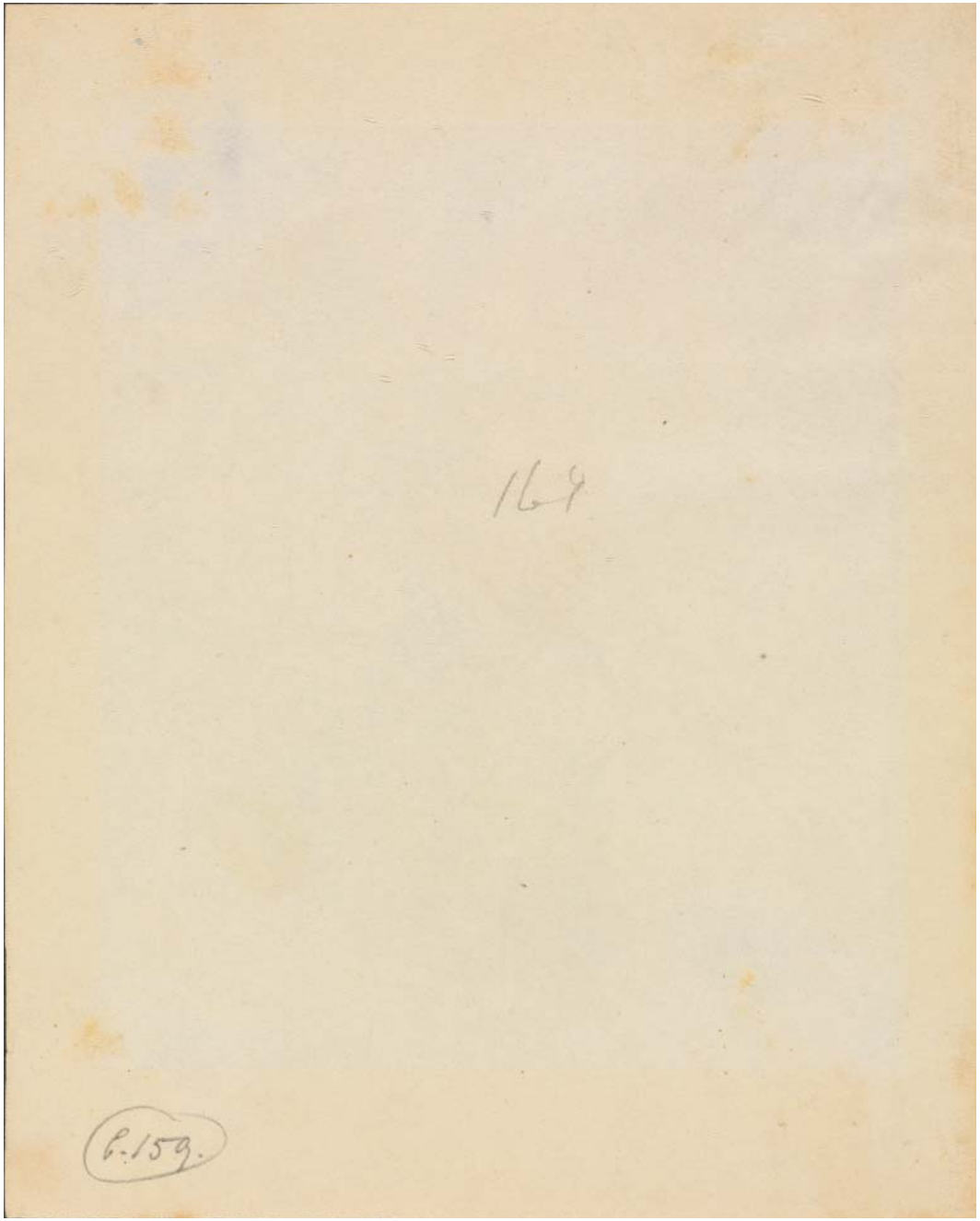

Genl Macalester


169
6.159.

JOHN SMART (British, 1741–1811)

Portrait of General Keith MacAlister

c. 1800–1810

Watercolor and graphite, heightened with traces of white gouache, on paper; unframed: 17.4 x 14 cm (6⅞ x 5½ in.)

Signature: none; inscribed on front of paper in graphite across bottom: Genl Macalester; inscribed on back of paper in graphite at center: 169; in graphite at lower left: I. 159 [circled]

Setting: unframed

Bequest of Mrs. A. Dean Perry, 1997.77

Provenance

Until 1811
John Smart (1741–1811); by inheritance to his son John James Smart (1805–1870).

1811–70
John James Smart; by inheritance to his daughter Mary Ann Bose (née Smart, 1856–1934).

1870–1934
Mary Ann Bose; by inheritance to her daughter Lilian Mary Dyer (née Bose, 1876–1955), great-granddaughter of the artist.

1934–37
Lilian Mary Dyer.

1937
Sold Christie's (London), November 26 (lot 54).[1]

After 1937
Colnaghi, London.

Before 1957
Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland); by inheritance to his daughter Helen Perry (née Greene, 1911–1996, Cleveland).

c. 1957–96
Helen Perry.

1996
Upon Helen Perry's death, held in trust by the estate.

1996–97
Estate of Helen Perry; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, 1997.

1997
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

1 Called "Portrait of General MacAlister."

Exhibitions

None.

Bibliography

Foskett, Daphne. *John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures,* pp. 70, 89. London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1964.

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 great number were inherited by his son John James Smart, who in turn left them to his daughter Mary Ann Bose. Upon her death in 1934, they were divided between three of her children: William Henry Bose, Lilian Dyer, and Mabel Annie Busteed. It was from these three collections that they were sold at auction through Christie's, London, in February 1937, November 1937, and December 1936, respectively.[2]

Helen Perry (née Greene) left six drawings by Smart to the Cleveland Museum of Art when she died in 1996. Perry was the granddaughter of one of the museum's founding members, Jeptha Homer Wade II, and the daughter of Edward B. Greene, who gave his renowned collection of portrait miniatures to the museum

2 The catalogues for these three sales are reproduced in Daphne Foskett, *John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures* (London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1964), pp. 78–90. It is not known which, if any, drawings were retained by the family members.

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primarily during the 1940s. Several CMA curators were asked to visit Perry's collection in 1988 as she updated her will and wished to know which works might be donated to the museum. After his visit, Michael Miller, assistant curator of prints and drawings, wrote the director Evan Turner that the "miniature portraits by John Smart of General McAllister [sic] and Mary Tadman are quite fine, but our drawings collection has never included material of the sort. I'd leave them to your judgment." Miller evidently was unaware of the ten Smart sketches that had been left to the museum during the 1940s by Edward Greene. Turner included the sketches of MacAlister and Tadman on the wish list he gave to Perry in 1989. There is no record indicating why they had not been previously bequeathed to the museum with the Greene collection, as Perry did not collect miniatures or small portrait drawings. It is likely that they were overlooked rather than specially retained for her by her father. Greene's love of miniatures had previously influenced his daughter's support for the museum; in 1960 she gave $9,600 for the purchase of a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard in memory of her father.[3] Among the works by Smart in Cleveland's collection, the group bequeathed by Perry has benefited considerably from recent research that has revealed sitters' identities and reunited drawings with their miniature counterparts on ivory.

General MacAlister is represented in three-quarter view, bust length, and facing the right. His eyes are blue, but the right eye is clouded and lighter in color than the left (fig. 1).[4] There is no sign of isolated damage or fading, confirming that this color difference was among MacAlister's physical attributes. He wears a brown coat; white, frilled vest edged in black; tall collar; and a white cravat tied

Figure 1. MacAlister's differently colored eyes (detail).

3 *Portrait of Baron Howard of Effingham,* 1576. Nicholas Hilliard (British, c. 1547–1619). Watercolor on vellum; 4.9 x 4.4 cm (1⅞ x 1¾ in.). The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. A. Dean Perry in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Belden Greene 1960.39. The miniature was purchased from Agnew & Sons as "An Elizabethan Gallant."

4 Because cataracts are usually present on both eyes, the sitter's eyes were probably two different colors.

in a bow. His closely cropped hair is powdered, and an unidentified rocky landscape through which a small river runs is painted in the background; it probably represents a place of personal significance in Scotland or India, possibly even Seringapatam and the Cauvery River (fig. 2). Smart depicted MacAlister inside of a penciled oval tromp l'oeil frame. The drawing is replete with physically informative details and is larger and more finished than drawings intended to function exclusively as preparatory sketches, though it may also have served this purpose. Beneath the elaborate penciled border is written in large graphite script "Genl Macalester" (fig. 3). This inscription is not in the artist's hand and almost certainly a later addition. A Colnaghi label was removed from the verso after the work entered the museum's collection.

The sitter is likely Major-General Keith MacAlister (1746–1820) of the Madras Cavalry. He was the eldest of three soldier brothers who served with distinction in India. MacAlister was born at Skerrinish in the Isle of Skye and ascended through the ranks rapidly following his appointment as cadet in 1777. He became captain in 1796; lieutenant-colonel in 1799; colonel in 1809; and major-general in 1812. He is celebrated particularly for his role in the 1799 storming and capture of Seringapatam, a decisive battleground in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War, and for rescuing his brother Matthew from a long imprisonment in the same city. MacAlister was also instrumental in organizing the Madras Light Cavalry.[5] Smart's portrait of MacAlister would have been painted between 1800 and 1810, when the sitter was an older man and had returned to England before settling in Scotland.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art owns a Smart portrait on ivory called *Keith Michael Alexander*, dated 1810 (fig. 4).[6] Although he wears a military uniform rather than civilian clothes, the sitter is identical to the one in the Cleveland drawing—note in particular the differently colored eyes and the blue veins at the left temple. Although

Figure 2. *A View of the Island Ford of Seringapatam,* 1792. Daniel Orme (English, c. 1766–c. 1832). Etching; dimensions unknown. British Library.

Figure 3. Graphite inscription reading "Genl Macalester" (detail).

5 John MacInnes, *The Braves Sons of Skye* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1899), p. 68.
6 Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987), p. 369, pl. 105.

it was painted in 1810, possibly some years after the Cleveland sketch, the sitter's hair loss is more pronounced in the earlier drawing. This inconsistency can be explained by the fact that Regency fashion called for men to comb their hair forward, thereby obscuring baldness, as seen here. Otherwise, the portraits are so similar that it is likely that Smart was consulting the earlier finished drawing when executing the 1810 miniature in ivory.

Both "General Macalister" and "Colonel Keith Michael Alexander" are listed by Daphne Foskett among Smart's sitters, but she reproduces images only of the latter Nelson-Atkins miniature.[7] No additional portraits of the period depicting gentlemen of either name have been discovered at this time. The Nelson-Atkins ivory has been called Keith Michael Alexander by tradition at least since it was in the Mr. and Mrs. John W. Starr collection before entering the museum in 1958. However, the miniature has not been removed from the frame since its acquisition, and there is no evidence of an inscription. It is likely that Keith Michael Alexander is a mistaken interpretation of the name Keith MacAlister, particularly because no record of a soldier by the name of Keith Michael Alexander has been discovered. CORY KORKOW

Figure 4. *Portrait of Colonel Keith Michael Alexander,* 1810. John Smart. Watercolor on ivory in copper mount; 8.6 x 6.9 cm (3⅜ x 2¾ in.). Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Gift of the Starr Foundation, Inc., F65-41/51.

7 Daphne Foskett, *John Smart: The Man and His Miniatures* (London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1964), pp. 61, 70, no. 101, pl. XXVIII (repr.).