Portrait of Harriet Mathew, wearing a lace Cap

John Flaxman

Sold



REF: 3152

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Description

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John Flaxman, R.A. (1755-1826)
Portrait of Harriet Mathew, wearing a lace cap

Inscribed lower centre: Harriet Mathew and with inscription lower right, J. Flaxman, with unidentified collector's mark F upper left
Pencil
19 by 15.5 cm., 7 ½ by 6 in.

Provenance:
Probably from an album, or a collection, of perhaps some fifty drawings by Flaxman and others, assembled and originally mounted in a similar way with gilt borders in or shortly after 1864 (the date of the watermark on one of the drawings' mounts)
Edward Croft-Murray C.B.E. (1907-1980) and by descent;
Anonymous sale, Christie's London, 9th July 1996, lot 19;
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's London, 25th November 1999, lot 30

Literature:
Iolo A. Williams, 'An Identification of some Early Drawings by John Flaxman', Burlington Magazine, CII, June 1960, pp.246-9, illustrated, fig.27.;
G.E. Bentley, Jun., Blake Records, 1969, pl.V.

Harriet Maria Mathew (1765-1798) was the daughter of the Rev. Anthony Stephen Mathew (1733-1824) and his wife, also Harriet. They were known as patrons of artists, especially of Flaxman and through him, William Blake (1757-1827). According to the engraver and biographer, John Thomas Smith (1766-1833) the Mathews first encountered the young artist in his father's plaster-cast workshop reading Latin, and Harriet senior is credited with introducing Flaxman to the world of classical antiquity through the works of Homer and Virgil (John Thomas Smith, Nollekens and his Times, Vol. 2 - 1828). The Mathews held regular literary salons at their home, 27 Rathbone Place and Blake is known to have recited his poetry at these. J. T. Smith who regularly attended these gatherings, praised the 'most agreeable conversaziones' and described his hostess 'as not only a great encourager of musical composers…but truly kind to young artists'.

Sometime in about 1797, the sitter in the present drawing married Baron Silfverhjehm, Secretary to the Swedish Ambassador. According to Joseph Farington's diary entry for 6 August 1798 'Miss Mathew daughr. of Revd. Mr. Mathews, was it sees privately married abt. a year before Her death to Baron Silverghem who was Secretary to Baron Noleken'. Her obituary in Gentleman's Magazine, noted that on March 28 1798 Harriet had died age 32. Apparently that she was 'a young lady of the most uncommon and brilliant talents and accomplishments…Her elegant and various acquirements were rendered doubly attractive by the unaffected modesty and innumerable graces of her manners, the exquisite refinement and sensibility of her mind, the universal benevolence of her heart'.

There are several known portraits of members of the Mathew family by Flaxman: two of the Reverend Mathew, aged about 45, one in pencil the other in red chalk, which probably date to circa 1780 and were formerly in the collection of the Flaxman scholar, Iolo Williams. A further portrait of his wife, Harriet Mathew senior, which has been dated to slightly earlier, between 1773-5, once belonged to the sculptor John Henry Foley (1818-1874) and is now in the British Museum, London. A portrait of Henry William Mathew (brother of the present sitter) is with Mark Brady, New York...

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