

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Alexander POPE (Cork 1763 - London 1835)

Portrait of a Lady, possibly Sophia Raikes

Pencil, pen and black ink and watercolour, heightened with touches of white, with framing lines in pencil and within a fictive drawn mount.

Signed and dated *A. Pope / 1805* at the lower right.

280 x 206 mm. (11 x 8 1/8 in.) [image]

324 x 260 mm. (12 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.) [including drawn mount].

As the scholar R. R. M. See has noted of this fine portrait drawing by Alexander Pope, in an article published in 1919, in which it was reproduced as a full-page illustration, '*There is a wistful charm, as well as great vitality, in the...drawing reproduced in these pages, by permission of Messrs. Agnew, signed and dated 1805. The lady represented in the midst of the landscape is very possibly [Pope's] friend, Mrs. Raikes.*' The sitter has been tentatively identified as Mrs. Thomas Raikes, née Sophia Maria Bayly (1771-1822), the daughter of Jamaican plantation owner Nathaniel Bayly. In May 1802, three years before the date of this sheet, Sophia had married the merchant banker and diarist Thomas Raikes the Younger (1777-1848). Raikes is mostly remembered as a dandy and as one of the most prominent social figures of the time. (He was apparently known as 'Apollo' by his friends and fellow socialites, because he 'rose with the East and set with the West.') Raikes's journal, edited and published after his death, is an interesting account of London in those years, and a testimony to his famous friendships, including with the 2nd Duke of Wellington, Beau Brummell and the Duc de Talleyrand. Thomas and Sophia Raikes had four children before her death at the age of thirty-nine, at Berkeley Square in London, in April 1810.

The present sheet is very similar in pose and composition, with its depiction of a woman standing against a column, to a full-length watercolour portrait by Pope of Lady Frances Herbert Ducie, wife of the 1st Earl of Ducie. Another stylistically comparable watercolour of the same year is a *Portrait of a Mother and Child*, signed and dated 1805, which recently appeared at auction in London, while also similar in pose and setting is an 1806 portrait drawing of the businessman and corn merchant William Gillies, which was sold at auction in 2007. As See has pointed out, '*Alexander Pope's chief qualities lie in his delicacy of colour, his exact and pretty drawing, his elegant and refined composition. With his perfect understanding as to the handling or [sic] pencil and water-colour brush, he combined a keen perception of the surest method of pleasing his sitters and their friends, for it is obvious that he sets out not so much to convey an unflattering likeness as to give a pleasing picture, an end which he achieves to perfection...he undoubtedly occupies a very prominent position among the draughtsmen and portrait painters of his day.*'

Literature:

R. R. M. See, 'Alexander Pope', *The Connoisseur*, November 1919, p.136 and illustrated p.139.

Artist description:

Alexander Pope was born in Cork, into an Irish family of artists that included his father, uncle, and three older brothers. By 1776 he was enrolled at the Dublin Art School, and he exhibited portrait drawings and paintings at the Society of Artists in Dublin in 1777 and again in 1780. Thereafter he seems to have returned to his native Cork for several years, where he produced a number of pastel portraits of officers of the 67th Regiment. By his early 20's he had settled in London, where he spent much of his career, exhibited a total of 59 works at the Royal Academy between 1785 and 1821. Aside from being a talented portrait painter, draughtsman and miniaturist, Pope was also a professional actor, performing on the London stage from 1785 onwards. He appeared in tragic roles at Drury Lane and Haymarket theatres, as well as at Covent Garden, and was particularly known for his portrayals of Othello and Henry VIII. As one early 20th century writer noted of Pope, 'He was endowed with good looks and a graceful bearing, and had, moreover, a voice of fine quality...He continued his portrait work during this period, and many of his sitters were, naturally, his confrères of the stage...it may be said that his theatrical success in no way led him to abandon his career as a professional portraitist, but rather rendered more wide and varied the circle of acquaintances from whom he formed his clientele.' Among Pope's sitters were members of aristocratic families in England, professional men such as barristers and writers, and fellow actors like Charles Kemble and Sarah Siddons, as well as a number of prominent Irish political figures. Pope was married three times, twice to actresses, and was twice widowed. His third wife Clara Maria, the daughter of the painter Francis Wheatley, was also a skillful painter of figures and flowers.