

SEARCH THE COLLECTION

ANNE MEE (1770-1851)

Mary, Duchess of Rutland (1756-1831) Inscribed and dated 1813

Watercolour on ivory | 23.9 x 17.3 cm (sight) (sight) | RCIN 420851



Description

Mary Isabella (1756-1831) was the youngest daughter of Charles, 4th Duke of Beaufort. In 1775, she married Charles, 4th Duke of Rutland and they made a glamorous political couple. In 1780, the first general election after her marriage, despite being eight months pregnant, she campaigned actively, canvassing votes in person and by letter. Her contemporary, Charles Piggot, described her as 'a woman modelled as it were by the graces, with a delicacy and cultivation of mind rarely to be found', and Nathaniel Wraxall called her 'the most beautiful woman in England'. Sir Joshua Reynolds painted her four times.

This miniature is an enlarged version of an earlier portrait by the same artist, Anne Mee (1780/5-1851), which is known from a mezzotint engraving by Charles Turner and published in 1804. It is one of the series of paintings in the 'Gallery of Beauties' commissioned by George IV when Prince Regent. These were portraits of fashionable ladies, one list of whom is in the Royal Archives and another printed in the Ladies Monthly Museum XVI (January 1814). A contemporary account records that the prince was 'forming a superb boudoir for their reception'. Opulent frames for the paintings were ordered from Rundell, Bridge and Rundell in 1814. The series may have been conceived as a nineteenth-century version of the 'Windsor Beauties' painted by Sir Peter Lely for Anne Hyde, Duchess of York in 1662-5, and Sir Godfrey Kneller's 'Hampton Court Beauties' painted for Queen Mary around 1691.

Anne Mee was the daughter of the artist John Foldstone. She was educated in London and was a protégée and pupil of the portrait painter George Romney. Lady Courtown introduced her to Queen Charlotte, and Charlotte Papendiek, journalist and assistant keeper of the wardrobe to Queen Charlotte, described Anne Mee drawing the queen and princesses at Windsor in 1790. Mee visited frequently after that date. Her portraits are often characterised by large eyes, and by 1804 she was able to ask as much as 40 guineas for a miniature.

The miniature is inscribed on the backing paper in ink: No 4 / Mary Isabella / Duchess of Rutland / painted by Anne Mee / 1813.

Provenance

Painted for George IV, when Prince Regent, 1814