Portrait of a Boy

James Sharples



REF: 2993

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Description

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James Sharples (1752-1811)
Portrait of a Boy

Half-length wearing a blue coat
Signed and inscribed on backboard: JSharples/Lansdown place/Bath
Pastel
Oval 21 by 17.8 cm., 8 ¼ by 7 in.

Born in Lancashire, Sharples exhibited initially at the Liverpool Society of Artists in 1774 before sending work to the Royal Academy in London from 1779 to 1785, where he is variously listed as living in Cambridge, London and Bath.

Sharples lived in Bath periodically from 1782 until he left England permanently for America in 1808. He lived there first from 1782 until the death of his second wife in about 1786. He then returned to Bath towards the end of the century, with his third wife, Ellen Wallas (1769-1849), whom he had married in 1787. Ellen became a talented small-scale portrait painter in her own right, but spent much of her time copying her husband's work. Following his death, she founded the Bristol Academy for the Promotion of Fine Arts (subsequently the Royal West of England Academy).

This inscription on the backboard indicates that this portrait must date from between December 1790 and late 1792 when Sharples was based in Lansdown Place, Bath. He advertised in late 1790 in the Bath Chronicle that his work could be viewed either at his home in Lansdown Place or his apartment at Mr Vasey's adjoining the Pump Room. Two years later, in December 1792, he advertised his removal from Lansdowne Place to 16 Queen's Square.

In mid 1794, the family went to the United States for the first time, where they remained until 1801, based mainly in New York but spending long periods in Philadelphia, the seat of the US Government. There were few pastellists in America at this time and Sharples found a ready market for his work. He established his reputation by portraying local and national figures including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams amongst others. The success of this extended stay encouraged the family to decide to settle in America.

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