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Sir William Beechey, 1753-1839, Portrait of Frances Elizabeth Addington

£30,000

shown seated half length in a white gown against a red cushion with a landscape in the distance.

Oil on canvas. Presented in a period carved gilt-wood frame.

SKU: N/A

Height: 92 cm 36 inches

Width: 71 cm 28 inches

Year: 1815



In the dazzling clarity of this portrait of Frances Elizabeth Addington Beechey reveals himself as equal to Sir Thomas Lawrence in producing images that epitomise early Regency glamour.

The rivalry of the two artists - fuelled by reports in the press - was played out to the public at the annual Royal Academy exhibitions and Beechey's response to Lawrence is evident in the bravura and vivacity of the palette and brushwork. This masterful handling of paint, enhanced by areas of thick impasto and prominent pentimenti, combine with the highly distinctive sense of charactersiation to give the picture a highly striking sense of drama and poise.

Frances and her husband, a distinguished professional naval officer, were painted c.1805 at around the time of their marriage. (1) Beechey was a particular favourite with naval patrons, painting portraits of a large number of naval officers including Sir Samuel Hood, Earl St Vincent and Lord Nelson. The sitter was wife of Captain William Silvester Addington RN (1783-1863) of Goldington, near Bedford, whose family owned extensive land in the area during the second half of the 18th Century. William's father, Silvester Addington, married Ann, the daughter of Bartholomew Best of Goldington, a grazier and a gentleman, in 1782 and their eldest son, William Silvester, was born the following year.

At the age of 16, William entered the Royal Navy on board the Penelope under the command of Captain Hon. Charles Paget (2). In 1807 he was promoted to Lieutenant and in October 1810 he sailed in command of the Orion transport with combustibles intended for the destruction of the Toulon fleet. From April to September 1811 he next had charge of the Delphine fire-brig in the Adriatic. In August 1827 he was appointed to the Prince Regent in which ship he continued prior to his advancement to the rank of Commander on the 22nd July 1830.

After Silvester Addington's death in 1811, the family's fortunes went into decline. In 1817 their residence Goldington House and its estate were put up for auction where it was described:

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The Mansion House is modern, substantially built, and well adapted for the Residence of a respectable Family, standing in a delightful situation, a short distance from the Turnpike Road....near and adjoining the mansion, are suitable and attached offices, and a complete farm homestead. The Grounds surrounding the Mansion-House, are judiciously planted, and much valuable Timber is growing thereon.

(3)

William and his wife, Frances Elizabeth moved into Goldington Lodge and a son, Henry was born on 20th July 1820. Frances pre-deceased her husband and was buried at Goldington on 13th June 1828.

(1) The portrait of her husband was with Agnews in 1934 and was later in the collection of Percy R Pyne.

(2) William R O'Byrne, A Naval Biographical Dictionary, 1849 p.5.

(3) Bedfordshire Records Office, CRT 130/1. p.3.

Provenance:

The sitter''s son, the Rev. Henry Addington (1820-83) of Henlow Grange, Bedfordshire. His eldest daughter, Frances Eliza Raynsford who married in 1882, Albert Cameron MacPherson of Cluny Castle, Kingussie, Inverness. With Reinhardt, New York, 1928 Collection of Mr and Mrs van Horn Ely. Collection of Mr and Mrs Alfred Zantzing; by whom given to the Phoenix Art Museum. Private Collection, USA.

Anon. sale; Sotheby's, London 12 November 1997, lot 86

with Philip Mould Ltd. London

Frances Elizabeth Addington was baptised on 8 November 1787 at St. Martins in the Fields, London, England. She was the daughter of Joseph Addington. She married Captain William Silvester Addington, son of Silvester Addington and Ann Best, on 6 December 1809 at St. Martins in the Fields, London, England. She died circa 10 June 1828 and was buried on 13 June 1828 at Goldington, Bedfordshire, England.

Sir William Beechey was born at Burford, Oxfordshire, on 12 December 1753, the son of William Beechey, a solicitor, and his wife Hannah Read. Both parents died when he was still quite young, and he and his siblings were brought up by his uncle Samuel, a solicitor who lived in nearby Chipping Norton. The uncle was determined that the young Beechey should likewise follow a career in the law, and at an appropriate age he was entered as a clerk with a conveyancer near Stow-on-the-Wold. But as The Monthly Mirror later recorded in July 1798, he was: "Early foredoomed his [uncle's] soul to cross/ And paint a picture where he should engross."

Beechey was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools in 1772, where he is thought to have studied under Johan Zoffany. He first exhibited at the Academy in 1776. His earliest surviving portraits are small-scale full-length and conversation pieces which are reminiscent of Zoffany. In 1782, he moved to Norwich, where he gained several commissions, including a portrait of Sir John Wodehouse and a series of civic portraits for St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich. By 1787, he had returned to London, and in 1789, he exhibited a celebrated portrait of John Douglas, Bishop of Carlisle (now in Lambeth Palace). Beechey's career during this period is marked by a succession of adept and restrained portraits in the tradition of Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Beechey's style perfectly suited the conventional taste of the royal family, and in 1793, he was commissioned to paint a full-length portrait of Queen Charlotte and subsequently named as her official portrait painter. That same year, he was elected as an associate member of the Royal Academy.

Following his royal appointment, the number of royal commissions he undertook increased markedly, and in 1797 he exhibited six royal portraits. In 1798, he was elected a full member of the Royal Academy and painted George III and the Prince of Wales Reviewing

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Troops for that year's academy's exhibition. This enormous composition depicts King George III, the Prince of Wales and staff officers on horseback at an imagined cavalry review in Hyde Park. The king was reported to be delighted with the painting and rewarded Beechey with a knighthood. Joseph Farington's Diaries give many accounts of Beechey's relations with the royal family during this period, including his temporary fall from favour in 1804, which Farington attributes to the vagaries of George III's mental condition.

Beechey's portraits of the turn of the century are considered to be his most colourful and lively. They are closer to the flamboyant and free techniques employed by his younger rivals, John Hoppner and Sir Thomas Lawrence.

Royal patronage resumed in around 1813, when Beechey was appointed portrait painter to Prince William Frederick, Duke of Gloucester, and culminated with his appointment in 1830 as principal portrait painter to King William IV. In 1836, Beechey retired to Hampstead and on 9–11 June that year, the contents of his studio along with his collection were sold at Christie's.

Although capable of impetuousness and irascibility, Beechey was known for his generosity to students. In particular, he took a close interest in the career of the young John Constable.