

Lornette Pemberton

From: Jacob Simon
Sent: 17 March 2017 21:00
To: Lucy Peltz; Neil Evans
Subject: Rice portrait

Lucy, Neil

I'm not very pleased that this request from the FT freelance arrives on Friday evening but it's worth trying to work with her because there is a good chance she will do something well informed and helpful on the Rice portrait.

As you will see below I have answered her uncontroversial questions immediately but not others. The ones that I have not answered directly concern the Rice portrait. My sense is that I am so heavily involved that it would be appropriate for me to respond but carefully. The alternative is not to respond.

If you have advice over the weekend, well and good. But no pressure. Instead, I will draft responses to the unanswered questions below and a decision can be made on Monday morning whether to send them.

A further annoyance is that at one stage she was pushing me to delay the launch of the online resource on British artists' suppliers canvas stamps and panel labels and now she's pushing me to bring it forward. Fortunately I'm almost ready and I will consult David on Monday.

Jacob

From: Jacob Simon
Sent: 17 March 2017 20:51
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: article

Dear Anjana

Help! Monday to go live! This will certainly be tricky but let me ponder and consult on Monday first thing. I'm far from sure.

Johnnie Nettlefold: I've not had contact but the NPG certainly has.

Your questions: I'll answer in two stages. Some now, see below, some later.

Very best wishes for your text

Jacob

From: anjana ahuja [REDACTED]
Sent: 17 March 2017 18:50
To: Jacob Simon
Subject: article

Dear Jacob,

I am horribly behind on my work schedule, so apologies for contacting you so late on a Friday.

I wanted to ask: do you think it is possible to put the canvas stamps resource up online on Monday? That way, I can contact the Rice portrait people and ask them to access the image of our Legg stamp through the NPG website. However, my article still won't be published until 1 April.

If this isn't possible, then I may have to send them an image on Monday, stating that it is for their private perusal and not for publication. That gives them a day to respond. I gather the current owner is John Nettlefold (Anne Rice's son??) - have you had any contact with him?

In the meantime, here are my questions to you. I would be very grateful if you were able to respond on Monday. I would like to hear your factual perspective, but also your personal perspective and feelings about this development. This has, after all, occupied a great deal of your time, and the publicity has not always been pleasant. I would like the piece - which is written with a focus on Mrs Smith as a new entrant to this drama - to capture a little of what this development means to you personally.

It is our son's birthday this weekend and we have a few engagements, but if you would like to talk by phone then tomorrow lunchtime is probably best. Otherwise we could speak first thing on Monday.

All best,

Anjana



Questions

1. What is the significance of the stamp on Mrs Smith?

RESPONSE: William Legg's stamp on the portrait of Mrs Smith is the first really clear example that I've seen. Legg worked as an artists' supplier for only a few years before becoming a coach maker, meaning that his stamps on artists' canvas are particularly rare. To the best of my knowledge there are no examples on works in public collections. The discovery of the stamp on the portrait of Mrs Smith establishes exactly what Legg's mark looks like and enables some interesting comparisons to be made.

2. Have you been looking for similar stamps?

RESPONSE: I'm always on the lookout for good examples of canvas stamps because they may help answer questions about the dating of pictures. They also tell us about the suppliers that artists used. It was wonderful to be told about this stamp, all more so since it occurs on a portrait by James Northcote, Joshua Reynolds' pupil. I did a catalogue of Northcote's work so to find the stamp of William Legg on a portrait by this artist was a double bonus.

3. Briefly, what do you know about "Wm Legg"?

RESPONSE: This is on the NPG website already! Legg came from Reading, moved to London at the age of forty in 1801 and worked for five years as an artists' supplier, then known as a colourman, selling colours, brushes and canvas to artists. He changed direction to become a coach maker where there was probably much more money to be made in Regency London. But he eventually committed suicide in 1823 in the face of personal difficulties.

4. In what way does Mrs Smith's stamp contribute to our understanding of the Rice portrait?

RESPONSE: Mrs Smith's stamp provides a yardstick for our understanding of any portrait with the same stamp. Given that William Legg was active as a colourman supplying artists' canvas in High Holborn for just five years, from about 1801 until 1806, a portrait with his stamp is likely to date to these years or even a few years later if the canvas was not used immediately.

5. Does it 'prove' what you have suspected all along?

RESPONSE:

6. Briefly, why are you convinced that the Rice portrait does not depict Austen?

RESPONSE:

7. Has the Rice portrait been the most time-consuming matter you have dealt with in your distinguished career? And what does it feel like to be in the middle of a very high-profile controversy like that?

RESPONSE:

8. Why do you think the controversy over the Rice portrait still hasn't gone away? Is it wishful thinking?

RESPONSE:

9. Do you finally feel vindicated?

RESPONSE:

10. Do you think other Wm Legg stamps might be out there?

RESPONSE: There are bound to be other William Legg stamps out there. The publication of the National Portrait Gallery's new resource illustrating canvas stamps on the Gallery's website will bring out other examples. It may take a few years but it will happen.

11. Finally, who is your favourite portrait painter?

RESPONSE:

Sent from Outlook

