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Pompeo Batoni
(Lucca 1708 – 1787 Rome)

Thomas Taylour, Viscount of Headfort, later 2nd Earl of Bective and 1st Marquess of Headfort (1757-1829) and Mary Taylour, Viscountess of Headfort, later Countess of Bective and Marchioness of Headfort (1776-1795)



both oil on canvas
each: 178.4 x 146.7 cm. (70.2 x 57.8 in.)
the former signed and dated on the
chair frame: *POMPEO DE BATTONI / P. ROMA. 1782.*

Provenance

By descent in the family of the sitters at Headfort House, Co. Meath;
By whom sold, London, Christie's, 29 November 1968, lot 46;
With William R. Drown, London, 1971;

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Anonymous sale, London, Christie's, 23 November 1979, lot 167, where bought by Colnaghi;

From whom acquired by the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.

Literature

House-list at Headfort, c. 1780s;

C. Hussey, 'Headfort-II, Co. Meath. The Seat of the Marquess of Headfort', *Country Life*, LXXIX, 28 March 1936, p. 327, fig. 3 (shown in situ in the Eating Room);

J. Steegman, 'Some English Portraits by Pompeo Batoni', *The Burlington Magazine*, LXXXVII, March 1946, p. 63, no. 82;

I. Belli Barsali, 'Pompeo Girolamo Batoni', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome 1965, VII, p. 201;

F. Russell, 'Portraits on the Grand Tour. Batoni's British Sitters', *Country Life*, CLIII, 14 June 1973, p. 1756, fig. 6;

Masterpieces of Italian Art from the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, exh. cat., Charleston 1982, pp. 22, 24, figs. 15 and 16;

A. M., Clark, *Pompeo Batoni. Complete Catalogue*, Oxford 1985, p. 41, cat. nos. 439 and 440, plates 392 and 393.

Exhibited

Charlston, South Carolina, *Masterpieces of Italian Art from the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation*, 19 May - 27 June 1982.

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The present works were painted by Pompeo Batoni in 1782 towards the end of his career. Depicting the then Viscount Headfort, Thomas Taylour, his wife Mary, and their first child, also Mary, these portraits were originally designed to fill plaster frames in the Eating Room at Headfort House, County Meath, Ireland (figs. 1 and 2), which had been newly decorated in 1771-75 to Robert Adam's design. With designs by Adam and portraits by Batoni, the couple seem to have been conscious to keep in with the fashions of the time.

Thomas Taylour was born Nov. 18, 1757, the eldest son of Thomas first Earl of Bective. It is believed he was educated at the University of Dublin. Here he is shown in a grey coat and buff breeches, seated before a writing desk and a terrestrial globe, and holding a folio volume on the Emperor Valerius, attesting to his high-brow interests. Behind him a landscape with the Temple of Vesta can be seen through the window. Two dogs are by his feet, likely much-loved pets, though also used in portraiture as symbols of fidelity.

Taylour married Mary Quin, the only daughter and heiress of George Quin, of Quinsborough in County Clare, on December 4th, 1778. The marriage does not appear to have been an entirely successful one, for in 1803 Taylour eloped with the wife of Reverend D.C. Massey. A case was brought against Taylour by the Reverend for 'criminal conversation with the plaintiff's wife', leading to Taylour having to pay the very substantial sum of £10,000 in damages. At this moment the aforementioned canine imagery might have rung hollow for the Viscountess.

In her portrait, the Viscountess is seated before a table with a vase of flowers and a sewing basket, alluding respectively to purity and what was considered to be a fitting womanly pursuit at the time. She wears a beige dress with a pink bodice and a blue mantle. The infant in her arms is thought to be a depiction of their first daughter Mary, who went on to become a Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess Augusta, daughter of King George III.

Thomas Taylour's obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, volume 99, notes that, although Taylour was a member of parliament for Kells, 'his lordship rarely delivered his sentiments within the walls of Parliament, and for several years had lived in

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comparative retirement on the continent.' It is presumably during one of these periods of so-called 'comparative retirement' that Pompeo Batoni painted this set of portraits. It is also known that Taylour's first cousin, Hercules Rowley, 2nd Viscount Langford, had a full-length portrait painted by Batoni in 1779, three years before the dating of the pair of portraits here. That portrait hung in Summerhill House, the ancestral home of the Viscounts Langford in County Meath, until being destroyed by fire in 1922.

Anthony M. Clark, in his catalogue raisonné, notes the importance of British patronage for Batoni. Of the artist's approximately 265 surviving portraits, 75 percent depict British and Irish sitters. Only about 30 of Batoni's portraits represent Italians. Only 20 of Batoni's portraits depicted British and Irish women, making the depiction of Mary Taylour in a set of portraits especially rare.

Additionally, at the time of Clark's *Catalogue*, the portrait of Mary Taylour was the only known surviving Batoni portrait to feature a mother and child, with the Viscountess being presented as a Marian figure, playing off her Christian name. Women in Batoni portraits are often depicted with dogs and other allegorical symbols, so to see a woman with a child is quite rare and was thought to be unique in surviving Batoni portraits until the recent rediscovery of the half-length portrait of Maria, Duchess of Gloucester, with the Infant William Frederick, painted a few years earlier in 1776 (fig. 3). Nonetheless, this remains the only known Batoni work featuring a full-length portrait of a woman and a child. Furthermore, Clark writes that the Viscountess is depicted in a 'Raphaelesque manner', with Raphael being an artistic point of reference for most 18th-century Grand Tourists and artists. Batoni himself was known to have studied and admired the High Renaissance painter.

In all, the works may be considered typical, yet important, examples of Batoni's portraiture, representing as they do fashionable British Grand Tourists, whose proclivities and idiosyncratic lives are entirely in keeping with the times.

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Figure 1. Headfort House, County Meath, Ireland



Figure 2. Reproductions of the present works in their original locations in Headfort House, in the Eating Room

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Figure 3. Pompeo Batoni, *Portrait of Maria, Duchess of Gloucester, with her son William Frederick*, oil on canvas, 74 x 61.5 cm., Private collection