Print - Captain C. Lempriere (died 1846), draughtsman to the Office of Ordnance

Object: Print

Place of origin: London (probably, engraved)

Date: 1745 (engraved)
1735 (painted)

Artist/Maker: Faber, John the younger (mezzotinter)
Frye, Thomas (painter)

Materials and Techniques: Mezzotint engraving print on paper

Credit Line: Given by the Public Library and Museum, Hove

Museum number: E.18-1965

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level D, case EM, shelf 21, box A

Public access description

This print was one of 13 objects investigated in 2019 as part of ‘Gendering Interpretations’: a collaborative project between the V&A, University of Plymouth, Vasa Museum (Stockholm), Lund University, Leiden University and the University of Western Australia.

As part of Captain Clement Lempriere’s role as a mapmaker, he contributed to the Map of the British Empire in North America published in 1733 by Henry Popple. The images on this map use gender presentation to represent Native Americans as exotic, uncivilised and sexualised: bare-breasted, scantily clad Native American women are contrasted with European men in eighteenth-century masculine dress. British colonial administrators used commercial maps such as Lempriere and Popple’s to understand the shape of their colonies, meaning that Lempriere’s work impacted on the colonial process that reshaped gender dynamics in indigenous societies and entailed the imposition of European gender roles, hierarchies and binaries. For examples of this, see objects 584-1854 (snuff box) and T.145&A-1931 (pair of gloves). The map-printing technologies that made Lempriere’s job possible were also used to create parody ‘maps’ of women’s bodies and male/female relationships.

An image of this portrait of Lempriere can be seen on the National Portrait Gallery website (reference NPG D5063). The portrait was later slightly altered and marketed as an image of Hannah Snell, who presented as male to serve in the army and navy between 1745 and 1750. Snell’s version can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery (reference NPG D4272). The two portraits are nearly identical despite the re-gendering: Snell wears identical clothing to Lempriere, sits in an identical pose, and the two have very similar hair and facial features.

Given that large numbers of people assigned female at birth presented as male in military contexts, it is important not to homogenise their individual motivations, which are likely to have included desire for independence and adventure, a need for money, desire to follow a male partner, desire to attract or access a female partner, and desire to live as male because this felt congruent with their gendered subjectivity. While Snell identified as female and went on to live as female for the rest of her life following her return from military service, other soldiers who were assigned female at birth did not. This represents an underacknowledged area of what would now be called transgender history.

Descriptive line

Mezzotint engraving by John Faber II (1684-1756) after a painting by T. Frye. Portrait of Captain C. Lempriere (died 1846), draughtsman to the Office of Ordnance. 1745.

Physical description

Mezzotint engraving portrait of Captain C. Lempriere (died 1846), draughtsman to the Office of Ordnance. Half-length, facing half right. Lettered with name of sitter etc. and T. Frye Pinxit 1735. I Faber Fecit  Sold by I Faber at the Golden Head in Bloomsbury Square and dated 1745.

Dimensions

Height: 32.9 cm, Width: 22.8 cm

Museum number

E.18-1965

Object history note

J.D.S.219.

Some time after 1750 this plate was used for a portrait of Mrs. Hannah Snell (1723-1792), the female soldier, the face and wig being altered and the inscription being erased and replaced (J.D.S.219, addenda).

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O697225/captain-c-lempriere-died-1846-print-faber-john-the/