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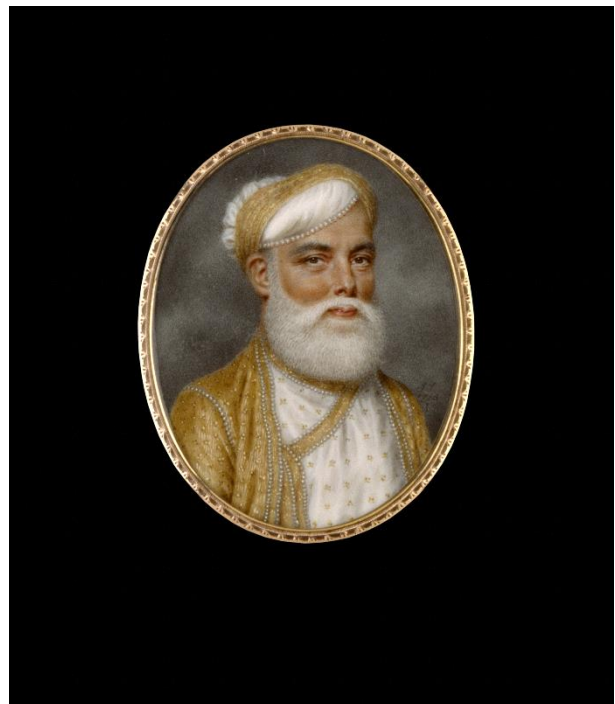
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

John Smart Portrait Miniatures Showcased at Nelson-Atkins

Exhibition Includes Rare Self-Portrait of the Artist

Kansas City, MO. Dec. 5, 2024— A stunning array of jewel-like portrait miniatures by English artist John Smart (1741—1811), including signed and dated examples from nearly every year of his career, will be featured at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City in the exhibition *John Smart: Virtuoso in Miniature* from Dec. 21, 2024, to Jan. 4, 2026. Included is a rare self-portrait of the artist, one of only nine known examples. It was made in 1793 while the artist was living in India. Timed to coincide with the final launch in spring 2025 of the digital *Starr Catalogue of Portrait Miniatures*—a groundbreaking resource dedicated to John Smart that reveals fresh discoveries across his career—this exhibition presents his work chronologically, showcasing new additions to the collection for the first time in nearly six decades. Presented to the Nelson-Atkins by Mr. and Mrs. John W. Starr in two major gifts in 1958 and 1965, and numerous additional gifts throughout the years, the *Starr Collection of Portrait Miniatures* illustrates the history of European miniatures across more than 250 objects.

“Visitors will be able to see Smart’s progression of style and technique and also explore themes of self-presentation,” said Julián Zugazagoitia, Director & CEO of the Nelson-Atkins. “The Starr family’s dedication to collecting the work of John Smart reflects their commitment to preserving the legacy of one of the most skilled portrait miniaturists of the eighteenth-century.”



Martha Jane Phillips and John W. “Twink” Starr assembled one of the most comprehensive collections of works by English artist John Smart, including signed and dated examples from nearly every year of the artist’s career. Despite their persistent efforts, acquiring a self-portrait remained elusive. In 1954, they learned of the potential availability of a self-portrait in private hands, but they were too late; it was sold to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Relentless in their pursuit, they appealed to successive Boston museum directors to sell or trade for the work, but they were



unsuccessful. They ultimately acquired an oil painting of Smart by his near-contemporary Richard Brompton (English, 1734–1783), which they later donated to the Philbrook Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Starrs’ quest for a self-portrait, initiated on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, remained unrealized in their lifetime due to the rarity of such works.

“None of John Smart’s contemporaries painted as many self-portraits, which suggests Smart’s conscious understanding of what the vehicle of portraiture played in self-promotion,” said Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Louis L. and Adelaide C. Ward Senior Curator, European Arts, and co-curator of this exhibition, along with

Starr researchers Blythe Sobol and Maggie Keenan. “Smart was incredibly ambitious and self-confident, and this is the largest known self-portrait that he made. We are unbelievably thrilled to have been able to make this strategic acquisition.”

This self-portrait was acquired by a private London collector, who kept it until fall 2023, when it was consigned to a London dealer. With support from Starr family descendants, the Nelson-Atkins purchased this remarkable work in the year marking John and Martha Jane Starr’s 95th wedding anniversary—a fitting tribute to their enduring legacy.

John Smart: Virtuoso in Miniature facilitates a greater understanding of the artist’s stylistic evolution, working methods, and impact across two continents, while exploring the impact of British colonialism and the changing fashions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The following programs are presented in conjunction with this exhibition:

Mapping Histories in Miniature: The Life & Work of John Smart

Presented by European Arts Senior Curator Aimee Marcereau DeGalan and

Research Assistants Maggie Keenan and Blythe Sobol

January 23, 2025, 6-7 pm

Atkins Auditorium

\$10 public | \$8 members

Night/Shift: Star-crossed

February 13, 2025, 5-9 pm

FREE | registration required

Tiny Treasures

April 11, 2025, 6-8 PM

Come on your own or bring friends and family to get creative at the museum. Search the featured Starr Miniature exhibition for inspiration, then create and decorate your own mini portraits in our studio classrooms.

For the latest program and event information, visit nelson-atkins.org.

Image credits: John Smart (English, 1741–1811), Portrait of Muhammad Ali Khan Wallajah, Nawab of Arcot and the Carnatic, 1788, watercolor on ivory, sight: 2 x 1 5/8 in. (5.08 x 4.13 cm), framed: 2 1/8 x 1 3/4 in. (5.4 x 4.45 cm), Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Starr, F71-32

John Smart (English, 1741–1811), Self-Portrait, 1793, pencil on laid paper, Image (oval): 7 13/16 x 6 7/8 inches (19.84 x 17.46 cm). Mat: 11 7/8 x 13 inches (30.16 x 33.02 cm). Sight: 6 3/4 x 6 1/8 inches (17.15 x 15.56 cm). Framed: 15 7/8 x 14 3/4 x 1 3/4 inches (40.32 x 37.47 x 4.45 cm), Purchase: acquired through the generosity of The Martha Jane Phillips Starr Field of Interest Fund at the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, exchange of the gifts of Laura Nelson Kirkwood Residuary Trust, and the Beckett Art Purchases Fund in memory of Samuel and Ethel Beckett, 2024.10

Organized by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Generous support provided by the Martha Jane Phillips Starr Field of Interest Fund.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins in Kansas City is recognized nationally and internationally as one of America's finest art museums. The museum opens its doors free of charge to people of all backgrounds.

The Nelson-Atkins serves the community by providing access to its renowned collection of more than 42,000 art objects and is best known for its Asian art, European and American paintings, photography, modern sculpture, and Native American and Egyptian galleries. Housing a major art research library and the Ford Learning Center, the museum is a key educational resource for the region.

The Nelson-Atkins is located at 45th and Oak Street, Kansas City, MO. Hours are 10 am–5 pm Saturday, Sunday and Monday, 10 am–9 pm Thursday and Friday, closed Tuesday and Wednesday. For museum information, phone 816.751.1ART (1278) or visit nelson-atkins.org.

For media interested in receiving further information, please contact:

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