

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Blue jasper cameo of Sir Joseph Banks

Date

1775-1780

Primary Maker

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd

Medium

jasper wood

Dimensions

Overall (In frame): 215 × 185 × 45 mm, 537 g Overall (Cameo only): 120 × 100 × 13 mm

Name

Cameo

History

When Josiah Wedgwood invented the iconic jasper ware in 1774 it opened new opportunities for the company in terms of its product range and was seen as an 'artistic triumph'. Visually beautiful, the new ware was more robust and relatively cheap to produce. Its particular value was seen by Wedgwood in the use as a medium for modelling in the Classical style he particularly favoured. Commercially jasper ware was a huge success especially when it was applied to cameos that are still immediately identifiable as Wedgwood 245 years later. The late 18th century was a time when portraiture, especially cheaply produced paper cut silhouettes was hugely popular. Wedgwood tapped into this market with his newly invented jasper ware and in the 1774 catalogue he launched a new portrait series titled 'Heads of Illustrious Moderns from Chaucer to the Present Time'. By 1779 the series featured 177 famous men and women and by 1787 this had risen to 228. These portraits, referred to as portrait medallions, were modelled by a series of exceptional artists including Joshua Reynolds and John Flaxman, who modelled Sir Joseph and Lady Banks. Part of the 'Heads of Illustrious Moderns' series included the Fellows of the Royal Society such as Sir Joseph Banks and Josiah Wedgwood himself. Wedgwood had been admitted in January 1783 for his work on the development of a pyrometer, a device to measure the extremely high temperatures that are found in kilns during the firing of pottery. His paper was read to the Royal Society by Joseph Banks himself. Naturalist Sir Joseph Banks accompanied Captain James Cook on his journey to the east coast of Australia. Banks had a staff of eight with him including Daniel Solander and Sydney Parkinson. Self-funded and passionate, Banks returned to England with an extensive collection of

specimens and drawings and continued throughout his life to devote himself to the pursuit of natural sciences, exploration and the colonisation of Australia. He became president of the Royal Society and advisor to parliament and King George.