

**Alexander Munro (1825-1871)**

**CONSTANCE, COUNTESS GROSVENOR, LATER DUCHESS OF WESTMINSTER, c.1852**

Partly gilded plaster 53.2 x 40.6 cm

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## **The Sitter**

Lady Constance Leveson-Gower (1834-80) was the daughter of the 2nd Duke of Sutherland. In 1852 she married as his first wife her cousin Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, Earl Grosvenor (1825-99), son of the 2nd Marquess of Westminster. They had eleven children between 1853 and 1874, of whom eight survived infancy. Shortly after their marriage they leased Calveley Hall in Cheshire, from where they both hunted with the Cheshire hounds. They also had houses in London and Sutherlandshire, and led a full and fashionable social life in the wealthiest circles of the Victorian aristocracy. Hugh Lupus succeeded his father as 3rd Marquess of Westminster in 1869, inheriting the Grosvenor estates, valued at £4 million, in London, Cheshire and Flintshire. Thus, in addition to Cliveden (inherited in 1868), Constance became the mistress of Grosvenor House, Eaton Hall and Halkyn Castle. Eaton Hall near Chester, the Grosvenor family seat, was rebuilt by Alfred Waterhouse between 1874 and 1883. Hugh Lupus had been the Whig MP for Chester from 1847 to 1869, and in 1874, on Gladstone's recommendation, was created first Duke of Westminster. Constance's health began to decline in 1879 and, 'loved locally for her kindness and beauty', she died in 1880 and was buried in the family churchyard at Eccleston.

## **The Artist**

Alexander Munro was one of the two most important Pre-Raphaelite sculptors, alongside Thomas Woolner. He was born in Inverness, where his headmaster discovered his talent for sculpture. One of his first patrons was Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, for whom Charles Barry was rebuilding Dunrobin Castle. Munro went to London in 1844 and worked under John Thomas on Barry's new Houses of Parliament. E.H. Bailey took him into his studio in 1846. He entered the Royal Academy Schools in 1847, where he met Rossetti and other members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. From 1852-58 he shared a studio with the Pre-Raphaelite painter Arthur Hughes, and he taught sculpture at the Working Men's College with Thomas Woolner. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1849 until his death. His work was deeply influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites. His main field was private portraiture, in which he developed his own decorative style. He produced busts, groups of children, and circular and oval high and low relief medallion portraits. William Bell Scott said that Munro's portrait reliefs had 'an elegance and sweetness, united with high breeding, that made them much prized'. He also made six statues of historical scientists for the Oxford University Museum, together with other public statues, imaginative works inspired by poetic subjects, and two fountains.

From 1865 he worked mainly on portraits, wintering in Cannes, where he died.

Alexander Munro exhibited a marble version of this relief at the Royal Academy in 1853. It therefore seems probably that Countess Grosvenor sat for Munro at the time of her marriage in 1852. The marble relief was probably commissioned by her parents, the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. This plaster relief was undoubtedly cast at the same time.