THE LIMNER COMPANY



DUTCH SCHOOL

A pair of oil portraits, presumably Husband and Wife; he wearing armour, lawn collar and a red sash around his arm; she wearing lace-trimmed blue dress with diamond and pearl brooch, pearls and pearl-drop earrings

Circa: Circa 1650

Circa 1650

Oil on silver

Set into silver gilt boxes, the lids with repoussé flower garlands of tulips, the central panels engraved with Coats of Arms [1]

76 mm (3 inches) high (2)

This pair of seventeenth-century portraits is extremely rare in retaining the lidded silver boxes which originally housed them. Engraved with the family coats of arms, these represent a singular type of portraiture very little of which has survived. While silver-gilt frames were popular as casing for miniatures of this period, this arrangement with a lid combines the popular use of silver boxes as repositories for snuff and tobacco with portraits painted on metal.[2] The closest example of such portraits is to be found in the tradition of Thaler portraits, where a silver coin would be cleaved in half and the interior painted with a portrait.[3]

Likely painted by a Dutch artist, the man wears full armour and has a red sash tied loosely around his left arm, which identifies him as a high-ranking military officer. Given the provenance and research into the coats of arms, the couple have been identified as likely pertaining to the family of Hall (husband) and Meade (wife). Talbot (a type of heraldic dog/hound) heads are a common charge found in the arms of families by the name of Hall.

Dutch artists were extremely popular in England in the mid seventeenth century, with those such as Utrecht-born Gerrit van Honthorst (1592-1656) portraying English nobility and royalty. English-born

Cornelius Johnson (bap. 1593, d. 1661) is the most obvious comparison for reduced size portraits in oil. Part of Johnson's training was in the Netherlands, but he spent much of his career in England. Working for his patrons in both sizes, Johnson is recorded as painting 'in small, in oil'.[4] Johnson left England for the Netherlands in 1643, but his legacy of working in small oils for the English appears to have remained. Few portraits can be said to be of this quality, however, and it is possible that this was a rare request from the Hall/ Meade family to an artist used to producing full-size oil portraits. There are some stylistic differences between the portraits - while the male figure is based more on full-size oils, the female sitter is modelled on portrait miniatures in watercolour by the leading miniaturist of the day, Samuel Cooper (1607/08-1672). This is most evident in her pose and the detail of her dress and jewels.

[1] This is thanks to the research of John J. Tunesi (November 2023), who has identified the Arms as: 1. Male sitter; (.....?) three talbots' heads erased2 (.....?) (for Hall) 2. Female sitter; Quarterly 1st and 4th (.....?) a chevron ermine between three roses (.....?) (for Meade) 2nd and 3rd (.....?) a griffin segreant (.....?) (for .....?)

[2] For more information on this type of box see John Culme, British Silver Boxes 1640-1840, ACC Art Books, 2014.

[3] See, for examples, the two portraits on the interiors of silver coins, signed and dated by Gerrit Lundens (1622 -1686), 1650, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-4338 and SK-A-4337.

[4] Horace Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting in England, 1762.