THE LIMNER COMPANY



DUTCH or ENGLISH SCHOOOL

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, wearing black velvet suit with embroidered borders and red-lined cloak; white lace collar, embroidered sword belt and silver sword

Oil on copper

Associated silver frame (hallmarked)

Oval, 83 mm (3 $^{1}/_{4}$ inches) high

Small portraits painted in oil on copper were popular in Europe during the 17th century. Compared to other forms of portrait painted in this century, they show vast variations in quality. Established artists, including Cornelius Johnson (1593-1661), produced small versions of larger oil portraits to give their patrons a portable image. On the other hand, itinerant Dutch artists escaping religious persecution in the more tolerant climate of England offered to produce oils on copper as a less expensive alternative, encouraging patronage from the merchant classes who were perhaps already familiar with Netherlandish portraiture. The current portrait is clearly by a superior hand, but as with so many portraits of this type, both artist and sitter remain elusive.

One suggestion as to the artist of this portrait is the little-known Alexander Colison, who was apparently responsible for a painting an oil on copper portrait, signed and dated 1630, in the Beauchamp Collection. The sitter is described as ‘unknown’, but this may be a self-portrait. The sitter’s hand clasps at the tassels hanging from his lace-edged collar and appears to have been painted in a similar way to the hand in the present work. The shadow across the brows and bridge of the nose is also painted to the same subtle effect. The fact that the present work was in an English collection, perhaps suggests that Colison was an English artist trained in Holland. The constant cultural and social exchange between the two countries at this date can make render artist and sitter nationally indistinguishable.

The style and pose of the sitter in this superb oil on copper also appear to relate to the work of Gerrit Van Honthorst (1592-1656). Painted in the late 1630s, the portrait is similar to a series of portraits of military men in armour painted by Honthorst, although the fine lace collar and red-lined black velvet suit

of the sitter here demonstrates his wealth and not his military status. The sky background is very unusual for portraits on copper, exhibiting the painter's abilities in oil.

Born in Utrecht, Honthorst came from an artistic family. Gerard, also known as Gerrit, was its most successful member. In the 1630s, Van Honthorst acquired a name in court circles as a portrait painter, which led him to move to The Hague in 1637, around the time of the current portrait's conception.