THE LIMNER COMPANY



FLEMISH SCHOOL (16TH CENTURY -)

Portrait of a gentleman, called Leonhardus Baur (b.1529), aged twenty, resting on a table covered with red cloth, wearing a black doublet, sleeves slashed to reveal white, and a brown coat, sleeves slashed to reveal maroon, white shirt tied with black ribbon, and a black cap with gold and silver pins; a merchant's symbol and memento mori to the top left

Circa: 16th century

16th century

Watercolour on parchment, laid on card

Inscribed and dated, LEONHARDVS BaVR .:. Aetatis Suæ, XX/1549 (top)

Gilded-metal Seamer frame with spiral cresting, the reverse engraved with cipher for James Sotheby

Rectangular, 69 x 51 mm (2 $^{3}/_{4}$ x 2 inches)

James Sotheby (1655-1720) was a prolific collector, and recorded this miniature within his notebooks, as 'Leonhardus Bur, Ætatis Suæ, XX, 1549 on a square, by Holbein. Frame ditto'. Though there is no date attached to this entry, it is possible that the miniature was bought in an auction in 1717[1], as by Holbein. Sotheby was a collector of fine miniatures, by Oliver, Cooper, and Dixon amongst others. His monogram can be found engraved on the back of the frame, made by Seamer, known to produce frames for Sotheby at this time. The attribution was likely provoked by the distinctive blue background, however the style and non-circular shape of this miniature suggest that it was not originally painted by the Anglo-German master, and is more likely to be of the Flemish school of the 16th century. A close comparison can be made between this portrait and the self-portrait of Simon Bening, aged 75 in 1558. [2] Painted ten years later in Bruges, Bening's self-portrait also follows the rectangular format of a miniature page in a book of hours.

Between being sold in 1955 and 2005, an attribution to Bernard Lens was added, assuming that later additions had been commissioned from the artist by Sotheby. Lens was known for his copies of old masters, however there is nothing within Sotheby's notebook to suggest that he was commissioned to

work on this particular piece. However, the fact that the calligraphic inscription appears less definitive in an image of the miniature in Williamson's 1926 publication The Miniature Collector, suggest that this has been strengthened.

Leonhardus Baur (Burr or Bur) was most likely a merchant, signified by the merchant's mark in the top left hand side of the composition.[3] It is known that at this time merchants and members of the middle class were commissioning portrait miniatures and as they could not use heraldry or coats of arms within these images, merchant marks were used to identify themselves. Furthermore, the simple style of cap that he wears is typical of the fashion of the professional classes of the time, as can also be recognised in Holbein's group of portraits of steelyard workers from the mid-sixteenth century. Holbein's portraits of the Hanseatic League (a powerful German trading organisation) are an inspiration for the sitter's pose and composition, as these showed the seated members against an unadorned background, with their age noted.[4] Although the sitter here is yet to be identified, a printer called Daniel Baur lived in Innsbruck in 1603 who was possibly a descendent.

[1] Christie's, London, 11th October 1955, lot 52.

[2] V&A accession number P.159-1910.

[3] Surrounded by a shroud, and topped with a skull and sand timer, the merchant's mark in this portrait is combined with a memento mori (Latin for 'remember that you die.') serving as a reminder of the transience of human life.

[4] Holbein was commissioned to decorate the meeting hall and to produce individual portraits of the guild members. This group has now been disbanded, one example can be seen at Yale University Art Gallery, dated 1538 (1977.187).

Exhibitions

London, South Kensington Museum, Special Exhibition of Works of Art, 1862, no.2641;

London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, Portrait Miniatures, 1889, p.61, no.2 (as portrait of Leonard Burr);

Manchester, City Art Gallery, Old and Modern Miniatures, 1926, no. 243 (as by Holbein).

Literature:

G.C Williamson, The Miniature Collector, London, 1921, illustrated pl.I opp. p. 10 (as by Holbein).