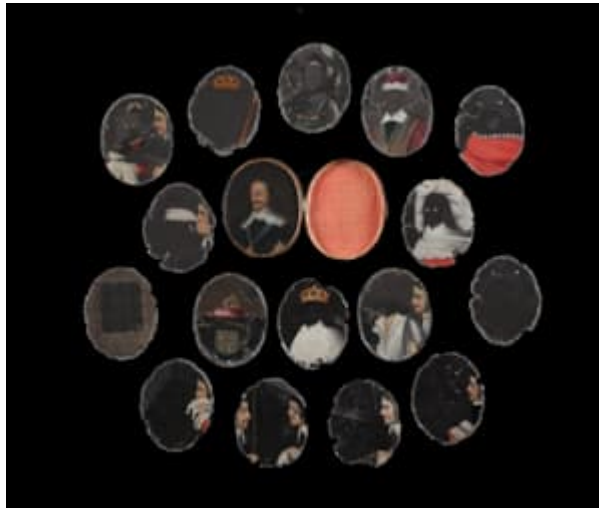


THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL (17TH CENTURY)

An oil portrait of Charles I (1600-1649) with 16 costume 'mica' talcs

Circa: Circa 1650

Circa 1650

Ovals, the oil portrait 8 cm (3 1/8 inches) high, the talcs 77mm high

The portrait oil on copper, the costume overlays paint on 'mica' talcs; the whole with original leather box with clasp

This set of 'mica' talcs, paired with a portrait of Charles I, survives as one of only a handful of examples of such miniatures that exist today. The large number of surviving talc overlays is extremely rare, given the delicate nature of the costume 'mica' talcs, and the fact that these are intended to be handled. The original purpose of this combination of oil portrait and talc overlays, all set into the original leather box, was so that Charles can be dressed up in the different 'costumes' provided. Although this may seem akin to modern 'paper dolls', these sets had a political narrative that was dangerous to expose during the Commonwealth era, hence perhaps the miniature nature of them and the fact that they can be hidden in a case and carried by the owner.

The medium upon which these costumes are painted is in fact a mineral, known as 'talc', that is able to be sliced in to fine, transparent sheets. The result is an opportunity to create overlays which are most commonly used to place costumes upon miniatures of known or unknown sitters. Aside from those depicting Charles I, which will be discussed here, there are other examples of these within public collections, including a Dutch portrait of an unknown woman at the Victoria and Albert Museum[1].

King Charles I was executed on Tuesday 30 January 1649, under the order of Oliver Cromwell, who would become Lord Protector in 1653. England had been in the state of civil war since 1642, which had culminated in Pride's Purge in the December of 1648. During this significant event of the second civil war, Colonel Thomas Pride forcibly removed over 200 members of parliament who were likely to vote against the execution of the King. To Cromwell's supporters, this was the only measure that could be taken to end the civil war and to install a republic in England. Soon after, the King was taken to trial, and found guilty. A death warrant was pushed through, and a date for his execution arranged.

The story of the end of the King's life is told through this set of 16 'mica' talcs. Though each known set of these differs in the 'costumes' provided to be held over the oil miniature, there some designs commonly overlap, allowing us to identify what these represent. In this case, the following story is told (see number picture above for a key):

1. Charles I as King, holding a sceptre and wearing a crown.
2. As King again, wearing a crown and ermine collar.
3. Wearing a Cardinal's costume.
4. Wearing a broad-brimmed black hat, and a red cloak lined with white bobbles.
5. Wearing a broad-brimmed black hat.
6. Wearing a suit of armour, a helmet with visor up, and a white plume. There is an indistinguishable green and gold object at the bottom, which could possibly be a sash.
7. In a prison, behind a barred window in a wall.
8. Asleep the night before his execution.
9. On the day of his execution, stood next to a man holding a bible. It has been assumed that this man is Bishop Juxon, who spent time with the King in his last few hours.
10. Stood next to two gaolers, one holding an indictment, the other a budding rod.
11. Next to a man holding an indistinguishable object.
12. A gentleman, possibly Bishop Juxon or the executioner, offering Charles a blindfold.
13. The same gentleman holding the blindfold in front of Charles' eyes.
14. Stood next to the executioner, holding the axe.
15. The executioner holding the severed head of Charles.
16. The crown, the sceptre, and the coats of arms of the King sat upon a surface, possibly his coffin.

Though to the modern eye this may appear to be a satirical or humiliating piece of art, depictions of the King like these have been suggested to have been used to represent him as a martyr. Unlike in the case of deaths of other monarchs, the public were not given the chance to mourn the death of their King following Charles' execution. There was no real threat to displaying something like his portrait, or to owning his autobiography, *Eikon Basilike*[2], however, Lois Potter has commented on the secretive nature of many of the objects of memorial that people owned[3]. This set would not be an exception to this rule, and would have provided a private, and visual, way of remembering and re-telling the story of how Charles, the king with divine right to rule, was martyred by Cromwell and his men.

There are many other 'relics' related to Charles' martyrdom, including a bible at Chastleton house[4] that is said to have been owned by the King, and a shirt in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle. For those who were not lucky enough to have an item physically related to the King, however,

talc sets like these, or even a copy of his autobiography, would suffice. There is also something to be said about the theatre of an item such as this, which, as mentioned, would allow people to replay the story of their past monarch, and pass this on to generations to come.

Other sets of costume talcs like these can be found in both public and private collections, including two in the Royal Collection[5], one in the National Portrait Gallery[6], and the Djanogly Collection[7]. None have an artist related to them, though most take composition for the base portrait of Charles, as in this case, from Van Dyck's portrait of the King, now in Ham House[8]. The present example has an impressive number of talc still in-tact, which rivals many of the sets that are in these public collections today.

[1] Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession number P.10 to U-1978.

[2] M. Purcell, 'A Relic of King Charles the Martyr?', *Apollo*, April 2000, p.30.

[3] L. Potter, 'The royal martyr in the Restoration', in T. Corns ed., *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, Cambridge, 1999, p.241.

[4] M. Purcell, 'A Relic of King Charles the Martyr?', *Apollo*, April 2000, p.31.

[5] Royal Collection Trust, collection numbers RCIN 422098 and RCIN 422099.

[6] National Portrait Gallery, London, collection number NPG 6357.

[7] Displayed at Compton Verney's *Reflected Self* exhibition, September 2024 - February 2025.

[8] Anthony Van Dyck, *King Charles I*, c.1635-37, Ham House, Surrey, collection number NT 1139944..