

THE LIMNER COMPANY



BERNARD LENS III (1682 - 1740)

Portrait miniature of a Lady called Mary Queen of Scots, wearing a black coat with white fur trim

Circa: Circa 1720

Circa 1720

5.7 cm (2 1/4 inches)

Watercolour on ivory

Inscribed in gold 'Maria Regina Scotorum'

Bernard Lens III (1682-1740) was a draftsman, miniaturist and copyist, who found success not only for his original paintings, but also through a thriving business where he produced miniature copies of paintings known as 'cabinet miniatures', as well as replicating miniature portraits of historic figures, as with the above work. Whereas Lens' famed cabinet miniatures were often commissioned privately by aristocratic figures, the above portrait was more likely painted for a public market, as part of a series of copies that Lens produced of historic figures of England.

One of Lens' series [\[Fig.1\]](#), speculated as a business venture and produced throughout the 1730s, included a set of portraits copied on vellum of kings and queens of England and the Lord Protector. This series, which was unlikely commissioned, responded to a developing antiquarianism in England in the early 18th century and an ensuing popularity of engraved historic miniatures known as 'heads'. The contemporary print industry was rapidly growing, permitting a democratisation of access to collecting printed portraits of historic figures. Lens' painted series may have therefore appealed to collectors who were looking to find painted versions of these engraved 'heads' which were of greater value. The popularity of this type of collection was typified by Horace Walpole (1717-1797) an amateur pupil of Lens' father, Bernard Lens (II), who amassed an extensive collection.

Alongside the examples of kings painted on vellum, Lens is known to have produced various 'heads' of Mary Queen of Scots, including this above example on ivory. The portraits feature a solid blue background that is reminiscent of early Stuart miniatures, lending the paintings the historical character which was contemporaneously popular. In fact, a similar rendition to the above portrait can also be found in the V&A collection [Fig. 2]. Generally, Lens' and others' copies of Mary are inspired by a damaged portrait miniature of the queen owned by the Duke of Hamilton, which is now generally accepted as not bearing much resemblance to other established portraits of the queen. Interestingly, another of Lens' pupils, Catherine de Costa (1679-1756), also produced a similar portrait miniature of Mary [Fig. 3], likely inspired by Len's copies, which has striking stylistic similarities and features Mary dressed in the same black coat with fur trim.

Bernard Lens III

Bernard Lens III (1682-1740), son of Bernard Lens II (1659/60-1725) was a miniature painter, copyist and drawing master, including to three children of King George II (William Augustus, Mary and Louisa) as well as the aforementioned Henry Walpole and Catherine de Costa. Lens was diversely interested in miniatures, also providing services relating to the restoration and reframing of miniatures, popularising a frame style known as the 'Lens frame', a simple molded frame of pear wood stained back. However, Lens is most famous as a miniaturist and his earliest miniature (Portrait of Dr Harris, 1707) is widely credited with being the first miniature in Britain to be painted on ivory rather than vellum. In 1720, he was appointed "Painter in Enamell [sic] in Ordinary" to King George I and after the king's death in 1727 Lens also served George II in the same capacity.

¹ Ombersley Court in Worcestershire is the historic seat of the Sandys family, who acquired the land in the late 16th century and remained living there until the house's sale in 2017. The 1st Lord Sandy commissioned prominent architect Francis Smith of Warwick to design the house, which was then constructed in the 1730s. Over five centuries, the Sandys amassed an extensive collection of paintings, furniture and other artworks at Ombersley. An insight into this historic collection and family can be found as a result of the 2023 Christie's sale of over 200 items from the house in aid of the Sandys Trust:

'Ombersley Court: The Collection of Lord and Lady Sandys', Christie's, <
<https://www.christies.com/en/auction/omersley-court-the-collection-of-lord-and-lady-sandys-29673/overview>>, 29 November 2023, accessed 17.02.2025.

² Six portrait miniatures in this series by Lens are held by the V&A and can be found here: Bernard (III) Lens, The Victoria and Albert Museum, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?id_person=A8611&page=1&page_size=15>, accessed 17.01.2025.

³ Katherine Coombs, 'Lens [Laus] Family (per.c.1650-1779)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-66537?rskey=tTzOvR&result=1>>, posted 03.01.2008, accessed 17.02.2025.

⁴ Coombs

⁵ 'Portrait of Henry V', The Victoria and Albert Museum, <<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O82148/portrait-of-henry-v-portrait-miniature-lens-bernard-iii/>>, accessed 17.02.2025.

⁶ This biographical information is taken from Wieseman's article, referenced above.