THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to LEVINIA TEERLINC (1510 - 1576)

King Edward VI (1537-1553)

Circa: Circa 1550

Watercolour on vellum, laid down on card

Set into a turned ivory box

Circular, 1 3/4 in (43 mm) high

The present portrait would appear to be one of only two portrait miniatures painted during Edward's short reign. The other, a smaller version of the present work, appeared at a Christie's auction 26 May 1879 and is recorded in the Heinz archive at the National Portrait Gallery in a colour photograph. Both images of Edward are almost certainly by the same hand, and belong to a small but cohesive group currently attributable to Levina Teerlinc, who was working at the English Court from 1545.

As the daughter of the celebrated Bruges manuscript illuminator, Simon Benninck or Bening, Teerlinc seems to have been highly praised for her artistic skills. Georgio Vasari (1511-1574) stated that she was '…held in estimation by Queen Mary, even as she is now by Queen Elizabeth'.[1] The master of illumination Giulio Clovio (1498-1578) seems to have owned a portrait of Elizabeth I by Teerlinc. The present portrait, along with the other reduced version, would, perhaps unsurprisingly, firmly link Teerlinc to the court of Edward VI.

At Edward's accession, Teerlinc may have been the only viable option as an artist to paint his portrait in miniature. Hans Holbein the Younger had died in 1543, Gerard Horenbout in 1541, and his son Lucas in 1544. Teerlinc may also have been the teacher of Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619), although there is no firm evidence for her involvement in his training as a limner. [2] Teerlinc's £40 annuity from the crown for limning, which began in the reign of Henry VIII, continued until her death in 1576. It is notable that this was the same amount given to Gerard Horenbout and is evidence of both her status as an artist and her output as a limner.

The scarcity of portraits of Edward are testament to both his short reign and the fact that many would have been given away as gifts, likely to foreign rulers. The rarity of his image 'in little' can also be explained by the religious turmoil which followed his reign, spearheaded by his Catholic half-sister Mary I. Portraits of Edward would have been destroyed or hidden away during this time, with his portraiture in demand again when his half-sister, the Protestant Elizabeth, became Queen.

The present portrait was likely painted between 1550 and 1553 when Edward died. The young King was often presented as being more mature than his actual age, adding a sense of security and strength, and a natural line from the only legitimate son of the powerful Henry VIII. As was the established practice with portrait miniatures, even from their inception, the sitter was expected to be present for the sitting. It is therefore no surprise that this portrait shows Edward in costume unique to the two portrait miniatures, with a heavily gold-embroidered hat and tunic.

Later copies of this portrait, including one by Bernard Lens III, show that this miniature was considered a notable likeness of Edward.3 In all recorded copies of this portrait, including those 18th-century versions in the collections of the Duke of Buccleuch and the Earl of Beauchamp (as of 1965), the precise detailing on the costume has been translated faithfully and it is clear that whoever made the copies had either the present work, or another example from the period, close to hand.

As a rare *ad vivum* portrait miniature of Edward VI, the historical importance of this image cannot be overstated. Dying at the age of fifteen, Edward had looked to fulfil the legacy of his father, but, given his youth, his reign was dominated by infighting amongst the nobility, all looking to seize power. Although portrait miniatures were important tools in diplomacy, they also performed a more intimate role in Tudor relationships. It should not be overlooked that this miniature portrait may have been intended as a gift to a member of Edward's family. Intended recipients may have been his half-sisters Mary and Elizabeth, his uncle Edward Seymour, the self-styled Duke of Somerset who would also serve as the Lord Protector, or even his successor, his fated cousin Lady Jane Grey.

[1] Vere, Gaston du C. De (translated), Vasari, Giorgio, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, 1996 Edition, Vol. 2, p. 865.

[2] This has been most recently discussed in Dr. Elizabeth Goldring's book, Nicholas Hilliard, Life of an Artist, published by Yale in 2019. Dr. Goldring notes that Teerlinc received a gift of plate each New Year from Elizabeth I, often from the workshop of Charles Brandon, Hilliard's father-in-law and Goldsmith master.

[3] A version of this portrait, signed by Bernard Lens III, sold at Christie's, London, 7 December 2005, lot 95

Exhibitions

London, Spencer Club, Art Exhibition at Spencer House, 1887, no.467 (as Levina Teerlinc);

London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures, 1889, case XXXIV, no.21 (as Levina Teerlinc);

London, The New Gallery, The Royal House of Stuart, 1889;

London, The New Gallery, The Royal House of Tudor, 1890;

London, The New Gallery, The Royal House of Guelph, 1891;

London, The Fine Art Society, Historical Collection of Miniatures formed by Mr. J. Lumsden Propert, 1897, no.11 (as Levina Teerlinc);

Philip Mould Gallery, 'Jewel in the Hand; Early Portrait Miniatures from Private and Noble Collections', 12 March – 18 April 2019, cat. no. 1;

Compton Verney House, Exhibition 'The Reflected Self; Portrait Miniatures 1550-1850', September 2024-February 2025 as Attributed to Levina Teerlinc.

Literature:

J. L. Propert, A History of Miniature Art (London and New York, 1887), ill. opp. p.66 (as L. Teerlinc);

B. Long, British Miniaturists (London, 1929), p.433 (as Attributed to Levina Teerlinc).