THE LIMNER COMPANY



FRENCH SCHOOL (17th century)

Portrait miniature of a Young Lady

Circa: Circa 1660

Circa 1660

5 cm (2 inches)

Oil on metal

Later ebonised wooden frame

While small oil portraits such as this cannot technically be called a ‘miniature’ (as the term derives from the watercolour paint traditionally used), they performed the same function as watercolour miniatures and are, in fact, more robust. Unlike watercolour, oil does not fade when exposed to light and the work also tend to be painted on metal rather than more fragile paper or ivory.

This portrait dates to the second half of the seventeenth century when works in oil on copper were popular in Europe. 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, some artists produced oils on copper as an less expensive alternative to larger oil paintings, encouraging patronage from the merchant and professional classes.

The young sitter’s attire, and appealing wide-eyed, doll-like features, are similar to the beloved and tragic figure of Princess Henrietta Anne of England, Duchess of Orleans (1644-1670). The wide band of intricate lace adorning her low-cut the neckline, with the frills of her chemise peaking over the top, are typically French for this period. The string of very large pearls at her throat and decorating her hair were also de rigueur for those who could afford them during this period.