

THE LIMNER COMPANY



DUTCH or ENGLISH SCHOOL

Portrait oil of a gentleman, wearing a lace-trimmed rebato collar and a black embroidered jacket

Circa: circa 1630

circa 1630

Oil on copper

Oval, 5.4 cm (2 1/8 in) high

Previously identified as George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham, this portrait is more likely to have been painted a few years after his assassination, in the early 1630s. It is not known who the gentleman depicted in this portrait is, though we do know that he was painted at a time when the political sphere in Britain was shifting, and Charles I, who had become King in 1625, had declared a period of personal rule. This would last 11 years, and saw controversies such as the raising of funds through 'ship money' and the fining of noblemen who did not attend his coronation. As the nature of these controversies suggests, this was a period in which the monarch was facing financial struggle, and by the 1640s, he was forced to declare bankruptcy.

This portrait was not painted far into the decade, given that the collar that the gentleman wears is high and held by metal off the fabric of his doublet. By the mid-to-late 1630s, these collars had been replaced by 'falling' collars, more often made with only lace, and which draped over the shoulders and upper chest of the wearer's doublet. Furthermore, his hair is rather distinctive. In the heyday of George Villiers' influence, men's hair was often combed back at the fringe to form a small quiff. Here, the fringe has instead been left to fall over the forehead and is cut short. As with the collar, this can be seen as an in-between of styles. In later years, the fringe would be worn slightly longer and parted, with curled, rather than straight, hair.

The unknown artist responsible for this miniature has paid particular attention to the embroidery on the

gentleman's doublet, which is subtle, given that it is black-on-black. Furthermore, the pleats in the sitter's collar are visible. These pleats would have been created in the fabric, which was supported by a wire or pasteboard structure. Extant examples of these collars can be found throughout important collections today, including the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Frustratingly, few artists producing these small oil on copper portraits are known by name, but many show a Dutch influence in the handling of the paint and the palette and may have been painted by Protestant immigrants escaping religious persecution in their own countries.