

THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL

Memorial portrait miniatures of Queen Mary II (1662-1694) and King William III (1650-1702)

Circa: circa 1702

circa 1702

1.6 x 0 cm (0 ⁵/₈ x 0 inches)

Watercolour on vellum

Princess Mary (1662-1694), later Queen Mary II (from here on out referred to as Mary II), was born at St. James's Palace to King James II and his first wife Anne Hyde. While her parents were Roman Catholic converts, Mary II was raised as a Protestant, eventually becoming a prominent member of the Church of England. Her Protestant upbringing was a conscious decision made based on the apprehension surrounding her parents' Catholic beliefs.

On 4 November 1667, Mary II married Prince William of Orange (1650-1702), later King William III (from here on out referred to as William III). The two were first cousins, as William III's mother and Mary II's father were siblings. William III was born in the Hague, Netherlands as the only son of William II, Prince of Orange, who died eight days prior to his birth, and Princess Consort, Amalia of Solms-Braunfels.

Mary II's new husband was also a staunch Protestant, having been brought up within the Calvinist tradition. For the first year of their marriage, the couple lived in the Netherlands where Mary II did her best to enmesh herself within Dutch society.

At the same time, concerns were rising in the British kingdoms in regard to the Roman Catholic agenda of King James II and the potential continuation of this policy under the future reign of his newly born heir.

While Mary II and William III shared King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria as their grandparents, only Mary II had a direct claim to the British throne with her father King James II in power; however, the new male heir posed a threat to Mary II's claim. Motivated by these factors, William III accepted the invitation from James II's opposition to travel to England with a sizable Protestant army in November 1688, prompting James II to flee the country in December, thereby abdicating his throne. In his absence, Mary II and William III were crowned Queen and King of England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1689. While William III was fourth in line to the throne before they wed, it was Mary II's direct lineage that made their ascension possible. The two are the only monarchs to ever rule jointly in this threefold kingdom, sharing

equal power and rank until Mary II's untimely death from Smallpox in December 1694 at age 32. William III was inconsolable for months after his wife's passing, with the official mourning period lasting over two years.[1] He spent £50,000 to honour her memory with an elaborate funeral that took place in March the following year in Westminster Abbey.[2] William III ruled alone until his own death from pneumonia in March 1702; the respiratory illness was a complication from injuries he sustained after a terrible fall from his horse the month before.

Assuming they were not altered after initial production, the current miniatures were commissioned after the monarchs' deaths, with the skull and death date over Mary II's right shoulder and the same over William III's left shoulder indicating they had passed. These portraits likely served a dual purpose, commemorating the tragic demise of the sitters while simultaneously displaying the wearer's allegiance to the Protestant cause represented by the two sovereigns. While William III may not have been a favourite among the British people, Mary II was notably beloved by the nation, and her passing sent a shockwave of grief across the country. Writing from Gloucester soon after Mary II's death, William Lawrence reflected that while "the sorrow was begun" in London, it "spreads apace, and these remoter parts equally feel the loss." He added that "the throne never was nor ever will be filled with so much virtue... She seemed not only born to rule but to reform a corrupted age; some murmured at her life, but all suffer on her death." [3] Portrait miniatures were often worn by mourners to honour their loved ones, and the widespread adoration of Mary II prompted the production of works like this after her death.

Although they can contain personal sentiment, portrait miniatures of a nation's ruler have also traditionally been worn to display political support for the individual in power, especially in the 17th century. For example, during the English Civil War, rings with the portrait of Mary II's and William III's grandfather King Charles I were given out to Royalists who wore them as a display of their allegiance to his cause.

While these miniatures are not the only of their kind, they are particularly important because they remain together as a pair. Many of this sort were originally commissioned as pairs, likely due to the sovereigns' joint rule, but most appear to have been split up over the centuries. Their provenance is also important. John Hill was Page to Queen Anne's future husband, George of Denmark. He was also Groom of the Bedchamber to the only child to survive beyond infancy born to George and Anne - Prince William, Duke of Gloucester (1689-1700). As a member of the royal household, Hill would have been cherished these miniatures as relics of the successful couple at the heart of the 'Glorious Revolution'.

[1] Paul S. Fritz, "The Trade in Death: The Royal Funerals, 1685–1830," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 3 (Spring 1982): p. 307, n. 42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738157>.

[2] Westminster Abbey. "Mary II." <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/royals/mary-ii/>.

[3] William Lawrence to Sir Michael Hicks, 5 January 1695, quoted in Craig Rose, *England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion, and War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 43; quoted in Alex Garganigo, "William without Mary: Mourning Sensibly in the Public Sphere," *The Seventeenth Century* 23, no. 1 (March 2008): 105, doi:10.1080/0268117X.2008.10555607.