THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to PIERRE SIGNAC (1623 - 1684)

Portrait enamel of a young Girl, wearing a pink dress with white lace trim, her hair worn curled, with a pearl necklace and earrings; circa 1660

Circa: circa 1660

circa 1660

Enamel on metal

Rectangular, 21 x 18 mm (⅘ x ⅔ in)

Associated gilt-metal mount

This remarkably small example of a portrait on enamel dates from the early period of the medium's development. Though it cannot be attributed with certainty, the style of the enamel reflects that used by Pierre Signac, one of the most skilled enamel painters of the period. He learned the art of enamel painting from Henri Toutin of Paris, and in 1647 was invited to Stockholm by Queen Christina of Sweden. He painted numerous portraits of Queen Christina and her successors Charles X Gustav and Charles XI, both in enamel and in watercolour on vellum, a technique which he learned from Alexander Cooper, the younger brother of Samuel Cooper, who also found patronage at the Swedish court.

The young girl depicted here, probably in her early teens, is depicted in a fashion popular among women in general in the 1660s. At this date female sitters, both adult and child, wear their hair in a similar style, as well as the distinctive ‘vandyke’ collar of lace. At the time, children’s clothing was not particularly distinct from that of their parents. In unidentified and undated portraits like the present example, youth is more often recognised in the facial features of the sitter- the young girl here has been depicted with rounded and flushed cheeks to emphasise her age.

Aside from the size of the miniature, its rectangular shape is rather unusual. Large cabinet miniatures were often rectangular, but small examples like this one are more often seen in an oval or circular shape. A good example of this is a tiny enamel of Queen Kristina, made by Signac for a ring setting

circa 1647-54 [1]. When sold in 1980, this miniature was housed in what appears to be its original frame- a hinged, enamelled, bracelet clasp decorated with table-cut diamonds. This original casing has since been lost, but would have allowed the miniature to be worn as jewellery and revealed only when the wearer decided this was appropriate. Very few cases like these survive today.

[1] Nationalmuseum, Sweden, Inventory number Indep 37.