THE LIMNER COMPANY



SOUTH NETHERLANDISH SCHOOL (circa 1580)

Portrait miniature of a young Lady, wearing gown with double 'S' blackwork gown with black silk mantel, also embroidered with the letter 'S', lace ruff and coif

Circa: circa 1580

circa 1580

Watercolour on vellum

Oval, 45 mm (1 3/8 in) high

Later silver frame with scroll work top

While there is little tradition of portrait miniatures or limnings on vellum being painted in the Southern Netherlands in the late 16th century, there is no doubt that this unknown lady wears the fashion seen in portraits by artists such as Frans Pourbus the Elder (1545-81) who, having trained in Bruges, became one of the leading portraitists in Antwerp in the late 1570s and early 1580s.

The sculptural painting of the sitter's face owes much to the techniques of Isaac and Peter Oliver, but the painting of the ruff – with its raised edges delineated in thicker bodycolour, the transparent coif and careful blackwork looks to Hilliard for his technique in using watercolour to describe textures. The portrait has no gold border, which would usually be found on a portrait miniature painted in England at this time, but this may have been trimmed when the portrait was fitted into a new frame.

Despite wearing no jewels, the sitter is dressed in line with the rich patrician fashions of the day, in black velvet, her gown white silk, stitched with black thread. She wears a white winged cap and her face is elegantly framed with a delicate, and expensive ruff. Her refined attire indicates wealth and status, and is typical of the prosperous merchant class in the Southern Netherlands during the late 16th century. This miniature serves as a reminder that not all limnings of this period were commissioned by nobility or royalty – and that artists such as Nicholas Hilliard accepted commissions from a relatively wide demographic. It is also a reminder that while we appreciate the skill of known artists, others would have

passed through Hilliard’s studio and remain unknown by name.