

THE LIMNER COMPANY



OTTAVIO LEONI (1578 - 1630)

Portrait of a young Lady, head and shoulders, in a burgundy dress with elaborate collar, wearing a pearl necklace

Circa: circa 1615

circa 1615

Oil on copper

Oval, 51 mm (2 in) high

Gold frame with monochromatic enamelled reverse

The close correspondence between this refined miniature and a recurring female type found in the portraits of Ottavio Leoni confirms the attribution to the artist and allows its execution to be placed around the middle of the second decade of the 17th century. The sitter, whose expression is at once introspective and gently composed, closely recalls the Young Lady in the British Museum ([museum no. 1895.0915.663](#)). Parallels are evident in the coiffure—drawn up high and softly arranged over the forehead—the cut of the dress, with its reinforced sleeves and rigid flat collar opening onto an embroidered bodice, and in the rich accessories, notably the large drop earrings and the pearl necklace. Certain physiognomic likenesses may also be observed with the drawn and painted portraits of Maddalena Telli, Leoni's stepdaughter, although the elaborately structured gown worn by the present sitter, trimmed with gold braid, suggests a woman of higher social rank[1].

Set against a subtly animated dark ground, the effigy represents an important addition to Leoni's activity in small-scale painting in Rome. Its particularly close relationship to the Portrait of a young lady with necklace and pearl pendants at Chantilly[2] is noteworthy: that miniature appears to portray the same woman, shown there against a pale blue ground imitating painted stone[3]. In addition to the difference in the colour of the dress—here rendered in a violet hue—one further detail distinguishes the present work from the Chantilly example: the double-strand pearl necklace tied at the sitter's breast, comparable to that worn by the Lady in the British Museum. The two works should therefore be regarded as distinct autograph originals, conceived within a similar metal mounting.

The miniature now in France bears, on the reverse, an early attribution to Leoni, together with a number, now almost illegible, which evidently referred to a larger series of painted likenesses. The young woman portrayed was likely someone within the artist's personal circle, given her repeated appearance in his portrait oeuvre. Within the densely populated "gallery" of faces created by Leoni, works of this kind demonstrate how the celebrated draughtsman succeeded, even in small-scale paintings, in capturing the immediacy and psychological acuity that distinguish his remarkable *alla macchia* sheets.

This Catalogue note has been translated from Yuri Primarosa's original Italian text.

[1] Y. Primarosa, Ottavio Leoni (1578-1630), eccellente miniator di ritratti. Catalogo ragionato dei disegni e dei dipinti, Rome 2017, pp. 10-23.

[2] Ottavio Leoni, Portrait of a young lady wearing a pearl necklace, circa 1615, oil on copper, 55 mm high, Musée Condé, Chantilly. © RMN - Grand Palais.

[3] Chantilly, Musée Condé, inv. OA-1632. Oil on copper, 5 x 3.9 cm. Provenance: acquired from Colnaghi, February 1866. Inscribed on the reverse of the gold framing support: Ottavio Leoni. See Y. Primarosa, Ottavio Leoni (1578- 1630)..., p. 697.