

THE LIMNER COMPANY



AUSTRIAN SCHOOL

Portrait miniature of Leopold I, wearing lace cravat and the Order of the Golden Fleece, his hair worn curled and down

Circa: circa 1670s

Watercolour on vellum

Oval, 34 mm (1 3/8 in) high

Dating to the 1670s, this portrait of Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor, emerges from ten years into his forty-seven-year reign. The composition may have been taken from the full-scale portraits by Benjamin

Block (1631-1690)^[1], which date from the same decade. Though not fully visible here, he wears the Order of the Golden Fleece around his neck, which he would have received as a birthright as a member of the House of Habsburg. This is fully visible in Block's portraits, though there are some differences indicating this could have been painted from an *ad vivum* sitting by a court miniaturist. These include more well-defined curls in Leopold's wig and a slightly different style of lace cravat.

The miniature also bears a resemblance to a miniature held by Eleonore Magdalena of Pfalz-Neuburg (1655-1720), Leopold's third wife, in the Royal Collection (RCIN 406641). Reproductions of the painting are not high-quality enough to confirm that this is the same miniature, however. Leopold married three times between 1666 and 1676, and it is likely that portrait miniatures like the present example were painted for all his wives.

Leopold had a rather controversial reign, defined by war and financial insecurity. It was under him that the Kuruc risings began, following the execution of three Hungarian noblemen after the end of the war against the Turks. They were not happy with the exchange of Turkish rule for Habsburg rule, and execution was Leopold's answer. It was also under Leopold that Strasbourg was ceded to the French at the Treaty of Rijswijk. As a devout catholic, he played a key role in the Counter-Reformation, and was also responsible for the expulsion of Jewish Austrians from Vienna.

His life and reign, as with many Habsburg rulers, were also defined by his looks. He was known as 'Hogmouth' for his protruding 'Habsburg Chin' and lips, both of which have been captured here. However, these have not been exaggerated to make the portrait honest rather than satirical. It is not surprising that he would have commissioned miniatures of himself, as Leopold was known as a cultured emperor. He held operas and ballets within the Viennese court, and was even a composer himself.

[1] One of which is currently on show at the Schloss Ambras Innsbruck, on loan from the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 6745.