

16th Century British Painting

HANS HOLBEIN the Younger c. 1497-1543

A German and Swiss artist and printmaker who worked in a Northern Renaissance style. He is best known as one of the greatest portraitists of the 16th century. He also produced religious art, satire and Reformation propaganda, and made a significant contribution to the history of book design.



Self Portrait c1497

Some artists can be an integral part of, and simultaneously transcend, their times. Hans Holbein The Younger, a Bavarian artist who made his career as a court painter for Henry VIII of England, was one of the foremost portrait painters of the Northern Renaissance and was very much a part of, and in some ways beyond, his times.



Erasmus of Rotterdam 1523



Thomas Moore 1527

Holbein travelled to England in 1526 in search of work, with a recommendation from Erasmus. He was welcomed into the humanist circle of Thomas More, where he quickly built a high reputation. After returning to Basel for four years, he resumed his career in England in 1532. This time he worked under the patronage of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell. By 1535, he was King's Painter to King Henry VIII. In this role, he produced not only portraits and festive decorations but designs for jewellery, plate and other precious objects. His portraits of the royal family and nobles are a record of the court in the years when Henry was asserting his supremacy over the English church.



***The Abbot, from
the Dance of Death 1523-26***



Jane Seymour c1537



Portrait of Henry VIII c1537



Henry VIII 1539, aged 47



***Portrait of the Merchant
Georg Giese 1532***



Thomas Cromwell



The Ambassadors 1533



Ambassadors, skull

The Ambassadors is his most famous, and perhaps greatest, painting of the period. This life-sized panel portrays Jean de Dinteville, an ambassador of Francis I of France in 1533, and Georges de Selve, Bishop of Lavaur, who visited London the same year. The work incorporates symbols and paradoxes, including an anamorphic (distorted) skull. According to scholars, these encode enigmatic references to learning, religion, mortality, and illusion in the tradition of the Northern Renaissance. Art historians Oskar Bätschmann and Pascal Griener suggest that in *The Ambassadors* "Sciences and arts, objects of luxury and glory, are measured against the grandeur of Death".

Among the clues to the figures' explorative associations are a selection of scientific instruments including two globes (one terrestrial and one celestial), a quadrant, a torquetum, and a polyhedral sundial, as well as various textiles including the floor mosaic, based on a design from Westminster Abbey (the Cosmati pavement, before the High Altar), and the carpet on the upper shelf, which is most notably oriental, an example of Oriental carpets in Renaissance painting. The choice for the inclusion of the two figures can furthermore be seen as symbolic. The figure on the left is in secular attire while the figure on the right is dressed in clerical clothes. Their flanking of the table, which displays open books, symbols of religious knowledge and even a symbolic link to the Virgin, is therefore believed by some critics to be symbolic of a unification of capitalism and the Church.

In contrast, other scholars have suggested the painting contains overtones of religious strife. The conflicts between secular and religious authorities are here represented by Jean de Dinteville, a landowner, and Georges de Selve, the Bishop of Lavaur. The commonly accepted symbol of discord, a lute with a broken string, is included next to a hymnbook in Martin Luther's translation, suggesting strife between scholars and the clergy.

The terrestrial globe on the lower shelf repeats a portion of a cartographically imaginative map created in possibly 1530 and of unknown origin. The map is referred to as the Ambassadors' Globe due to its popularly known appearance in

the painting.

The work has been described as "one of the most staggeringly impressive portraits in Renaissance art."

Anamorphic skull The most notable and famous of Holbein's symbols in the work, however, is the distorted skull which is placed in the bottom center of the composition. The skull, rendered in anamorphic perspective, another invention of the Early Renaissance, is meant to be a visual puzzle as the viewer must approach the painting nearly from high on the right side, or low on the left side, to see the form as an accurate rendering of a human skull. While the skull is evidently intended as a *vanitas* or *memento mori*, it is unclear why Holbein gave it such prominence in this painting. One possibility is that this painting represents three levels: the heavens (as portrayed by the astrolabe and other objects on the upper shelf), the living world (as evidenced by books and a musical instrument on the lower shelf), and death (signified by the skull). It has also been hypothesized that the painting is meant to hang in a stairwell, so that persons walking up the stairs and passing the painting on their left would be startled by the appearance of the skull. A further possibility is that Holbein simply wished to show off his ability with the technique in order to secure future commissions.[6] Artists often incorporated skulls as a reminder of mortality, or at the very least, death. Holbein may have intended the skulls (one as a gray slash and the other as a medallion on Jean de Dinteville's hat) and the crucifix in the upper left corner to encourage contemplation of one's impending death and the resurrection.

Portrait miniature

A portrait miniature is a miniature portrait painting, usually executed in gouache, watercolour, or enamel. Portrait miniatures developed out of the techniques of the miniatures in illuminated manuscripts, and were popular among 16th-century elites, mainly in England and France, and spread across the rest of Europe from the middle of the 18th-century, remaining highly popular until the development of daguerreotypes and photography in the mid-19th century. They were especially valuable in introducing people to each other over distances; a nobleman proposing the marriage of his daughter might send a courier with her portrait to visit potential suitors. Soldiers and sailors might carry miniatures of their loved ones while traveling, or a wife might keep one of her husband while he was away.



Holbein; *Henry Brandon, 2nd Duke of Suffolk* (age 6) 1541

The first miniaturists used watercolour to paint on stretched vellum. During the second half of the 17th century, vitreous enamel painted on copper became increasingly popular, especially in France. In the 18th century, miniatures were painted with watercolour on ivory, which had now become relatively cheap. As

small in size as 40 mm × 30 mm, portrait miniatures were often used as personal mementos or as jewellery or snuff box covers.

The most well known practitioners of miniatures were Nicholas Hilliard, Isaac and Peter Oliver, and John Hoskins. Holbein also occasionally painted miniatures.

NICHOLAS HILLIARD c. 1547 – 1619

An English goldsmith and limner best known for his portrait miniatures of members of the courts of Elizabeth I and James I of England. He mostly painted small oval miniatures, but also some larger cabinet miniatures, up to about ten inches tall, and at least two famous half-length panel portraits of Elizabeth.

A limner is an illuminator of manuscripts, or more generally, a painter of ornamental decoration.



Self Portrait 1577



Young Man Among Roses

Nicholas Hilliard's '*Young Man Among Roses*' has come to epitomise the romantic vision of the sonnet hero of Shakespeare's England. Tall, with handsome features, curly dark brown hair, and an incipient moustache, he leans with his hand on his heart against the trunk of a tree encircled by a bush of white roses.

This miniature portrait (c. 1587) shows a love-sick young man leaning against a tree, entwined in eglantine roses. It is probably the most famous of the miniature paintings that were popular at the court of Queen Elizabeth I. The long-legged youth with his hand on his heart has become a symbol of Elizabethan romance, male beauty and love poetry.

We know nothing of the miniature's history until the first decade of this century but since its entry into the Museum in 1910 it has come to be recognised not only as one of the most enigmatic of images to come down to us from the age of Elizabeth I but as the chef d'oeuvre of its greatest painter, Nicholas Hilliard. Roy Strong and other scholars have suggested that the curly-haired youth is Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex (1566–1601) – a young favourite of the ageing Queen's in the late 1580s. Devereux was later executed for plotting against Elizabeth I.

Symbolism and secrets

In this painting, critics have found clues that the portrait was commissioned by an ambitious young courtier, keen to declare love for his Queen. The youth wears

black and white which were Elizabeth's personal colours. Roses were also symbolic of the Tudor Queen, who combined the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster. Eglantines were her favourite, and can often be seen in the artworks of this era. The Latin motto at the top reads, Dat poenas laudata fides, a quote from the Roman poet Lucan, pointing out that 'faith, though praised, can cause pain'.



Portrait of unidentified man 1572 Alice 1578



**Elizabeth,
The Pelican Portrait c1572**

ISAAC OLIVER c1656-1617

(Or Olivier) was a French-born English portrait miniature painter. Born in Rouen, he moved to London in 1568 with his Huguenot parents Peter and Epiphany Oliver to escape the Wars of Religion in France. He then studied miniature painting under Nicholas Hilliard; and developed a naturalistic style, which was largely influenced by Italian and Flemish art.



Self Portrait c1595 (aged about 30)

After the death of Elizabeth I, he became a painter of James I's court



Young Man Seated under a Tree 1590-95 (12.4 x 8.9cm)

One of the finest miniatures in Oliver's oeuvre and one of the most famous images in British art, *Portrait of a Young Man* reveals the artist elaborating on the full-length format first developed by Hilliard in the 1580s. The increased dimensions and the inclusion of the full-length figure extended the possibilities of the portrait miniature by allowing for the depiction of a detailed background and the introduction of a narrative element. Oliver always demonstrated particular skill in placing the figure in its setting and this miniature is in many respects comparable with Hilliard's *Young Man Among Roses* of c.158



Portrait of a Young Man, Philip Sydney 1605



Edward Herbert c1610-14

Edward Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury KCB (1583 – 1648) was an Anglo-Welsh soldier, diplomat, historian, poet and religious philosopher.

PETER OLIVER 1594 – 1648

Born in Isleworth, Middlesex, he was the eldest son of Isaac Oliver.



Tarquin and Lucretia 1630-40



Charles I c1625-32

Charles I (1600-1649) Watercolour on vellum laid on playing card

This is the final miniature of Charles I in a series by Peter Oliver in the Royal Collection spanning a period of approximately eight years from c. 1620 onwards. As a work of Peter Oliver's artistic maturity, it displays the more naturalistic and painterly style which he had developed under the influence of artists at court such as Daniel Mytens. It also serves as a bridge to the work of the miniaturist John Hoskins (c. 1590-1665)

JOHN HOSKINS 1589 or 1590 – 1664



The **Miniature of Anne Boleyn** 17th century

This beautiful miniature, although painted in the 17th century, is said to have been based on “an ancient original”. Anne Boleyn’s biographer, historian Eric Ives, puts forward the idea that Hoskins may have had access to a lost Holbein portrait of Anne Boleyn, a full-length portrait ... known to have existed as late as 1773. Ives believes that this miniature “is the best depiction of Anne we are ever likely to have, failing the discovery of new material”, so it is an important work of art.

SIR ANTHONY VAN DYCK 1599 – 1641

Van Dyck was a Flemish Baroque artist who became the leading court painter in England, after enjoying great success in Italy and Flanders. He is most famous for his portraits of Charles I of England and his family and court, painted with a relaxed elegance that was to be the dominant influence on English portrait-painting for the next 150 years.



Self Portrait 1613-14
(age 14/15)



Self Portrait 1633

In 1620, at the instigation of George Villiers, Marquess of Buckingham, van Dyck went to England for the first time where he worked for King James I of England, receiving £100. It was in London in the collection of the Earl of Arundel that he first saw the work of Titian, whose use of colour and subtle modeling of form would prove transformational, offering a new stylistic language that would enrich the compositional lessons learned from Rubens.



Christ Crowned with Thorns c1620

He returned in 1632 to England. Altogether van Dyck has been estimated to have painted forty portraits of King Charles himself, as well as about thirty of the Queen, nine of Earl of Strafford and multiple ones of other courtiers. He painted many of the court, and also himself and his mistress, Margaret Lemon.



***Charles I with
M. de St Antoine*** 1633



Charles I at the Hunt c1635

Royal patronage: King Charles I was the most passionate and generous collector of art among the British monarchs, and saw art as a way of promoting his elevated view of the monarchy. In 1628, he bought the fabulous collection that the Gonzagas of Mantua were forced to dispose of, and he had been trying since his accession in 1625 to bring leading foreign painters to England. In 1626, he was able to persuade Orazio Gentileschi to settle in England, later to be joined by his daughter Artemisia and some of his sons. Rubens was an especial target, who eventually came on a diplomatic mission, which included painting, in 1630.



Cupid and Psyche 1638



***Lord John Stuart and His Brother
Lord Bernard Stuart*** c1638