

Portrait Miniatures



The Origins of the Portrait Miniature

These gem like paintings first appeared at the royal courts of England and France from the early 16th century and were commonly used to introduce suitors for marriage. In the late 1530s for example, Henry VIII dispatched his court painter Hans Holbein the younger, to the Duchy of Cleves with a commission to paint his possible future wife, Anne. The painting which Holbein created was not a life size oil which had previously been the fashion, but a tiny watercolour on vellum - stretched and treated animal skin.

Why are they called Miniatures?

Although this may seem obvious, miniatures are not always small. The word comes from the Latin *miniare* which means 'to colour with red lead' - the vermilion paint used to illuminate the capital letters in medieval religious manuscripts, which often included a portrait of a religious figure.

Miniatures developed out of the fashion for these portraits to be portable and free of their manuscript setting. Miniatures are also sometimes referred to as *limnings* derived from Latin meaning 'paintings in the little'.

The purpose of the Portrait Miniature

Usually no larger than could fit in the palm of the hand, miniatures were specially made as mementos of loved ones. Long before the advent of mobile phones, iPods and picture messaging at the touch of a button, people wanted portable images, like a snapshot in a wallet, and these handheld keepsakes were often created to remember a person's nearest and dearest, facilitate and celebrate marriages, commemorate births and venerate deaths.

Little Jewels

Portrait miniatures for the most part were made to be worn as jewels, either as pendants, locket, bracelets and brooches or concealed in precious settings. Usually oval or circular in shape, they often also contained a lock of the braided hair of the sitter. The pendant in the first Jacobite case is a fine example of this; it includes a gold profile of Charles I, a lock of his hair and a fragment of the block on which he was executed.



Hidden Treasure

Cabinet miniatures were popular at court during the 17th century. These miniature portraits were usually larger, about ten inches high, and encased in oval or rectangular ornate frames. Collectors of art would hang these paintings in a *cabinet* or 'treasure room'; this relatively small and private room was typically used by just one person.



Charles II
Oil on Panel



Anne of Denmark
Coloured print

Methods and Materials

The methods and materials used to paint portrait miniatures have varied over time. They include watercolour on paper, vellum or ivory; oil on copper, paper and gemstones; and enamel on copper, porcelain or gold. Plumbagos were detailed graphite drawings, and silhouettes, cut from black paper or card, were very popular. This variety of techniques illustrates the popularity of the portrait miniature during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.



Bonnie Prince Charlie
Watercolour on Ivory



Graphite silhouette on plaster

Thàinig Meanbh-dhealbh



Mar a thàinig am meanbh-dhealbh gu bith

Nochd na dealbhannan seudach seo an toiseach aig cùirtean rioghail Shasainn is na Frainge tràth san 16mh linn is bhiodh luchd-suirghe a bha airson pòsadh gan cleachdadh gu tric. Mar eisimpleir, anmoch sna 1530an chuir Henry VIII am peantair cùirte aige, Hans Holbein òg, gu ruige an *Duchy of Cleves* le barantas gus dealbh a pheantadh de dh'Anna, a bha e an dòchas pòsadh. Cha do pheant Holbein dealbh peant-ola de mheud fìor mar a bha air a bhith san fhasan roimhe, ach dealbh beag biodach de pheant-uisge air craiceann beathaich a bha air a leudachadh is air a leigheas.

Carson a tha Meanbh-dhealbhannan orra?

Gu h-iongantach, chan eil meanbh-dhealbhannan an-còmhnaidh beag. Tha am facal *miniature* a' tighinn bhon Laideann *miniare* a tha a' ciallachadh 'dathte le luaidhe dhearg' – am peant *vermillion* a bha air a chleachdadh gus na prìomh litrichean ann an sgrìobhainnean cràbhach bho na meadhan-aoisean a shoilleireachadh, is a bha gu tric a' gabhail a-steach dealbhannan de character cràbhach. Thàinig meanbh-dhealbhannan a-mach à fasan airson nan dealbhannan beaga seo a bhith gluasach is saor bho na sgrìobhainnean san robh iad air an suidheachadh. Tha meanbh-dhealbhannan cuideachd air an ainmeachadh mar *limnings* – a tha a' ciallachadh 'dealbhannan beaga' ann an Laideann.

Adhbhar a' Mheanbh-dheilbh

Sa bhitheantas cha robh meanbh-dhealbhannan càil na bu mhotha na do bhois, is bha iad air an dèanamh gus cuimhne a chumail air luchd gaoil. Fada mus tainig fònaichean-làimhe, iPodan is teachdaireachdan a shealladh dealbh le bhith dìreach a' bruthadh putan, bha daoine ag iarraidh dealbhannan gluasach, a b' urrainn dhaibh a ghiùlain leotha. Mar sin bha na cuimhneachain beaga seo air an cruthachadh gus cuimhne a chumail air luchd gaoil, agus gus pòsadh, breith is bàs a chomharrachadh.

Seudan Beaga

Bha meanbh-dhealbhannan air an dèanamh mar bu trice airson a bhith air an caitheamh mar sheudan, an dàrna cuid mar chrochadain, mar ghlasagan-muineil, mar bhainn-làimhe is mar bhroidsichean, no air am falach ann an cùil luachmhor. Bha iad mar bu trice ugh-chruthach no cruinn nan cumadh, is bhiodh cuailleann de dh'fhalt dualach an neach-suidhe gu tric nam broinn. Tha an crochadan sa chiad chèis Sheumasach na dheagh eisimpleir air a seo; tha slios-shealladh òir de Theàrlach I ann, còmhla ri cuailleann dhen fhalt aige agus criomag den bhloc air an deach a chur gu bàs.



Ulaidh Fhalaichte

Bha iartas mòr ann airson meanbh-dhealbhannan caibineit san 17mh linn. Mar bu trice, bha na meanbh-dhealbhannan seo na bu mhotha, mu dheich òirlich de dh'àirde, agus taisgte ann am frèamaichean grinne ugh-chruthach no ceithir-cheàrnach. Bhiodh luchd-cruinneachaidh obair-ealain a' crochadh nan dealbhannan seo ann an caibineat no ann an 'seòmar ulaidh'; bhiodh an seòmar seo sa bhitheantas beag agus prìobhaideach is cha bhiodh ga chleachdadh gu h-àbhaisteach ach dìreach aon neach.



Teàrlach I
Ola air Pannal



Anna na Danmhairg
Clò-bhuailadh Dathte

Modhan is Stuthan

Tha na modhan is na stuthan a thathar a' cleachdadh gus meanbh-dhealbhannan a pheantadh air atharrachadh rè ùine. Am measg nam modhan tha peant-uisge air pàipear, craiceann no deud-chnàimh; peant-ola air copar, pàipear is seudan; agus cruann air copar, obair-chrèadha no òr. Bha fèill mhòr air *plumbagos* – 's e sin dealbhannan graifit, agus sgàil-riochdan fìor mhionaideach, air an gearradh bho phàipear no bho chairt dhubh. Tha am measgachadh de dhòighean-obrach a' sealltainn cho mòr-chòrdte 's a bha am meanbh-dhealbh rè nan 16mh, 17mh is 18mh linntean.



Sgàil-riochd Graifit air Plèastar



Am Prionnsa Teàrlach
Peant-uisge air Deud-chnàimh