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**Elizabethan and Jacobean Miniature  
Paintings in Context**

**Edited by Catharine MacLeod and  
Alexander Marr**



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Cover image: Left portrait: Isaac Oliver, Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox, later Duke of Richmond, circa 1605, watercolour on vellum, laid onto table-book leaf, 5.7 × 4.4 cm. Collection of National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 3063); Right portrait: Isaac Oliver, *Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox, later Duke of Richmond*, circa 1603, watercolour on vellum, laid on card, 4.9 × 4 cm. Collection of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (FM 3869). . Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London (All rights reserved); Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (All rights reserved).

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# Introduction

Catharine MacLeod and Alexander Marr

## **Authors**

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The essays in this special issue arose in part from a two-day international conference on Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver, sponsored by the Paul Mellon Centre and the University of Cambridge, and hosted by the National Portrait Gallery to coincide with the exhibition *Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver* (2019). We convened the conference because we felt the time was right for a reappraisal of the English portrait miniature in context, providing an opportunity for the presentation of new work on iconography, attribution, technique, collecting, and display, and assessing how the miniature relates to local and international contexts such as religion, politics, trade, exploration, migration, and the sister arts. The essays presented here include papers developed from presentations given at the conference and newly commissioned work. We hope that other elements of the conference's rich and varied programme will be published elsewhere, and we are grateful to all the contributors and participants for their stimulating presentations and the ensuing discussions, which have informed the shape of this special issue.

English portrait miniatures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have always been valued by collectors and they quickly entered national museums such as the V&A and the National Portrait Gallery upon the founding of those institutions in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, antiquarians such as George Vertue and Horace Walpole collected anecdotes about miniatures' artists and sitters, providing the basis for the connoisseurial work of curators in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> This early scholarship tended to focus upon the identification of sitters and, to a lesser extent, attribution to the two leading exponents of the art in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods: Nicholas Hilliard and his sometime student, Isaac Oliver. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, surveys of important private collections augmented the curatorial work being undertaken in the museums, with the production of a number of notable *catalogues raisonnés* of country house collections.<sup>2</sup> The biographies of Hilliard and Oliver were studied only spasmodically up to the Second World War and Hilliard's manuscript *The Arte of Limning* was edited for the first time by Philip Norman in 1912, for the Walpole Society.<sup>3</sup> Not until mid-century, however, were miniatures studied in the round. Notable contributions by Carl Winter, John Pope-Hennessy, and Torben Holck Colding assessed miniatures comparatively, in their social and intellectual contexts, and with regard to artistic developments on the Continent.<sup>4</sup> Their research paved the way for the ground-breaking work of Graham Reynolds and Roy Strong, who, in a series of essays, books, and exhibitions from the late 1940s to the 1980s, transformed the study of portrait miniatures.

Reynolds and Strong advanced arguments about miniatures' meaning and significance in connection to Elizabethan and Jacobean court culture and its politics (especially Elizabeth I's personal iconography), literature, and performance (such as the court masque), and artistic and intellectual developments in France, the Netherlands, and Italy.<sup>5</sup> Both redefined the oeuvres of Hilliard and Oliver by making new discoveries and attributions—work that was significantly augmented by research on these artists' biographies by Erna Auerbach, Mary Edmond, and Jill Finsten.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, new interpretations of the social and cultural meanings and uses of miniatures were presented by scholars of English literature such as Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard and Patricia Fumerton, who emphasised respectively the language of colour in miniatures and their secrecy and intimacy, not least in relation to comparable developments in poetry.<sup>7</sup> Equally, Ann Bermingham and Kim Sloan showed the ways in which professional miniature painting was entwined with the growth of amateur art practice and appreciation, and its connection to watercolour and its uses more broadly, such as John White's documentary drawings of the Americas.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite the breadth and quality of this post-war scholarship, gaps and (in the case of artists' biographies) errors remained, many of which in Hilliard's case have been filled and corrected with great verve by Elizabeth Goldring in her recent study of that artist.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, significant technical research—supported by careful reading of contemporary texts such as Hilliard's *The Arte of Limning* and Edward Norgate's *Miniatura or the Art of Limning*—has been undertaken over the past several decades at the V&A (the national collection of portrait miniatures) first by Jim Murrell and more recently by Alan Derbyshire, Katherine Coombs, and others, placing renewed emphasis on the materiality of miniatures and the need for document-based scholarship to be accompanied by cutting-edge technical research.<sup>10</sup>

The articles that make up this special issue of *British Art Studies* represent a variety of subjects and approaches, but they are linked together by their presentation of multi-disciplinary information gleaned from a renewed focus on the objects themselves. Close examination and consideration of miniatures in a variety of contexts has revealed new connections, meanings, and functions, and it has opened up further questions and potential avenues of enquiry. In recent decades, the development of new non-invasive techniques for the examination of works of art and their constituent parts has enabled revelations about the way miniatures were made. This volume presents important discoveries in this area. These have sometimes led to new attributions, but have also provided important information about materials and techniques, how artists and their workshops operated in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, and the relationships between works of art and the various instructional treatises that were circulating at the time.

This is an area with expanding potential to reveal more about, for example, the links between English miniatures and Continental practice, and miniature painting in other genres, such as manuscript illumination.

A focus on previously neglected aspects of miniature painting in several of the articles presented here reveals more about the roles that miniatures played within specific societal contexts and about the ways that making and meaning interconnect. The choice of particular playing cards for backing; the relationship between the ways in which miniatures and watercolours produced for very different purposes were received and understood; the symbolism and identity of miniatures painted outside the “canon” of works by Hilliard and Oliver: all of these have fascinating implications for the workings of Tudor and Jacobean society. Again, new questions and avenues for research are opened up by these articles, especially across traditional art-historical genre boundaries. For example, future directions for research could include work on the textual and visual connections between miniatures and prints, looking at the broader cultural backdrop that informed the reception of symbolic references and more apparently straightforward visual representations in this period. Notably, miniature painting of the middle of the sixteenth century remains an area about which very little is known, and over which the shadowy figure of Levina Teerlinc maintains a siren-like but still largely undefined presence.

Finally, a number of articles in this issue are concerned with miniatures in the context of relationships between individuals: sitters, patrons, and artists. Here, new research in this volume casts light on the role miniatures played in national and international politics, and the interconnections between miniatures, miniaturists, and the wider artistic community in London in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The central place that miniatures held in the elite cultural life of the period is illuminated by all the essays in this volume. It is hoped that their publication will not just inform and entertain, but will also provoke new questions and stimulate new avenues of enquiry about this most fascinating and distinctive art form.

## Footnotes

- 1 Vertue, G. (1929–1952) “Notebooks”. *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 29, 30.; and Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1849).
- 2 For example, R.W. Goulding, *The Welbeck Abbey Miniatures Belonging to His Grace the Duke of Portland: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1916); and H.A. Kennedy, *Early English Portrait Miniatures in the Collection of the Duke of Buccleuch* (London: The Studio, 1917). Significant early catalogues of public collections include Adolph P. Oppé, *English Drawings (Stuart and Georgian Period) in the Collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle* (London: Phaidon, 1950).
- 3 Philip Norman (ed.), “Nicholas Hilliard’s Treatise Concerning ‘The Arte of Limning’”, with Introduction and Notes by Philip Norman, L.L.D.”, *The Volume of the Walpole Society* 1 (1912): 1–54. The *Treatise* was subsequently edited more thoroughly by R.K.R. Thornton and T.G.S. Kain as *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981).

- 4 Carl Winter, *Elizabethan Miniatures* (London: Penguin, 1943); John Pope-Hennessy, "Nicholas Hilliard and Mannerist Art Theory", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 6 (1943): 89–100; John Pope-Hennessy, *A Lecture on Nicholas Hilliard* (London: Home and Van Thal, 1949); and Torben Holck Colding, *Aspects of Miniature Painting: Its Origins and Development* (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1953).
- 5 Their many significant studies include Graham Reynolds, *Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver: An Exhibition to Commemorate the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of Nicholas Hilliard* (London: V&A, 1947); Graham Reynolds, *English Portrait Miniatures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Roy Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court* (London: V&A, 1983); and Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983).
- 6 Erna Auerbach, *Nicholas Hilliard* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); Mary Edmond, *Hilliard & Oliver: The Lives of Two Great Miniaturists* (London: Robert Hale, 1983); and Jill Finsten, *Isaac Oliver at the Courts of Elizabeth I and James I*, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1981).
- 7 Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard, *Silent Elizabethans: The Language of Colour in the Miniatures of Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2000); and Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Miniatures' connection to literature has provoked some rather more fanciful and now discredited arguments, such as Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare by Hilliard, a Portrait Deciphered* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977).
- 8 Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2000); and Kim Sloan (ed.), *European Visions: American Voices* (London: British Museum, 2009).
- 9 Elizabeth Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard: Life of An Artist* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2019).
- 10 See, for example, Jim Murrell, *The Way How to Lymne: Tudor Miniatures Observed* (London: V&A, 1983); Edward Norgate, *Miniatura or the Art of Limning*, edited by Jeffrey M. Muller and Jim Murrell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Katherine Coombs and Alan Derbyshire, "Nicholas Hilliard's Workshop Practice Reconsidered", in Tarnya Cooper, Aviva Burnstock, Maurice Howard, and Edward Town (eds), *Painting in Britain 1500–1630: Production, Influences, and Patronage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 241–245.

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