Portrait Miniatures

Materials & Techniques

Watercolor
The earliest portrait miniatures from the 1500s are watercolor on vellum, a translucent, fine animal skin adhered to the plain side of a playing card with starch paste. The playing card provided a white surface and added support. To ensure an even, smooth bond between the vellum and card, artists rubbed a tool—usually an animal’s tooth in a wooden handle—over the entire surface. Initially, miniaturists prepared their own watercolors by grinding pigments made from minerals, plants, dried insect bodies, and manufactured pigments, many of which contained lead. Pigments were powdered and mixed with gum arabic (a binding agent) and water. By the early 1700s, commercially prepared artists’ materials were readily available.

Watercolor has a delicate transparency, ideal for rendering skin tones. However, watercolor is extremely sensitive to direct light and prone to fading. For this reason, the light levels on this side of the gallery must remain low.

In the 1680s, enamel painting—pigments fused into enamel on metal—formed one of the first technological innovations in portrait miniature painting. Enamel painting is labor intensive because each color requires a separate firing at different temperatures. Although it’s a slow and sometimes problematic process—cracks often occurred during firing—the benefits were dazzling and the colors permanent.

Ivory
By the early 1700s, miniaturists began to paint on ivory. Initially, ivory was cut in sheets about one millimeter thick from elephant tusks. However, by the 1760s the sheets were cut so thin they were transparent. The luminosity of the thin sheets of ivory in combination with the translucency of watercolor proved to be the perfect blend of surface and technique to render skin tones and the transparent fabrics in fashion. To increase ivory’s brightness, artists placed silver foil behind the ivory.

Ivory has a greasy, nonabsorbent surface, thus watercolors tended to run. Therefore, many early paintings on ivory reveal a cautious, mechanical technique. Miniaturists developed new methods to facilitate painting on ivory, including degreasing the surface with vinegar and garlic, or drawing out the grease through heat and then blotting the ivory with paper. Artists also sanded ivory with powdered pumice or sandpaper to roughen the surface, and sometimes added more gum arabic to their watercolor, increasing its stickiness and its ability to adhere to the ivory.

Paper and wax
Wax modeling had been popular since the 1300s. Goldsmiths initially used this method of modeling for designing cast medals. Artists quickly realized, however, that the warm and delicate texture of colored wax closely imitated flesh and blood.

Watercolor on paper was also popular. Quicker and easier to produce, these works were less expensive than ivory or enamel on metal. The disadvantage, however, is that paper discolors. Miniatures in watercolor on paper also functioned as preparatory sketches for ivories.
Tools of the Trade

Such small-scale painting demanded sophisticated technique and precise tools. Details such as hair, clothing, or jewelry might require brushwork or shading, hatching with parallel brushstrokes, or scratching into the surface with scrapers. Stippling with tiny dots of color, often called the water-drop technique, was popular on both vellum and ivory. Methods of working on a smooth support, such as vellum or ivory, were carefully chosen as repainting in watercolor would soften and smear already painted surfaces. These methods required delicate tools, such as small brushes made of squirrel hair and set in goose quills mounted in wooden handles.

Settings & Functions

Artists presented miniatures to their clients in frames. Those intended as jewelry were set in lockets or in small frames affixed to bracelets. Miniatures intended for private viewing may have appeared in simple metal frames and placed in carved ivory or ebony boxes or leather cases. By the 1800s, round metal frames fixed on wooden boards facilitated hanging on walls. Glass enclosed most ivory miniatures to protect them from moisture and scratching. Miniatures rarely retained their original frame, as individual collectors reframed them according to personal taste.

Human hair was often a component of the framing on miniatures. From a single lock of hair to intricately plaited arrangements, hairworks were especially popular in Europe and the United States from the late 1700s to the early 1900s. This art form usually commemorated loss; however, it also could celebrate an engagement or friendship.

The size varies greatly: small miniatures were often private and worn close to the body as jewelry, whereas larger miniatures were for more public settings. Large-scale rectangular miniatures, called cabinet miniatures, developed along with their smaller oval counterparts from the 1500s. The early cabinet miniatures often present a sitter in full length and show interiors in elaborate detail, similar to oil paintings. By the 1800s, however, portrait miniatures emulated small-scale oil painting in terms of size and bold coloring. They also demonstrated a degree of high finish and sharp focus, qualities of their impending rival, the photograph.
During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558–1603), the miniature achieved its highest status, due in part to its greatest exponent, Nicholas Hilliard. His early miniatures followed the queen’s order that no hint of shadow should cloud the royal countenance. Thus, Hilliard depicted her and other patrons in a flat, two-dimensional style [2–3].

Hilliard generally worked in a small format [1–2], signaling the miniature’s private function. On rare occasions he painted on a larger scale [3]. These large portrait miniatures, called “cabinet pictures,” were housed in public display cabinets similar to this one.

Intricate details dominate Hilliard’s miniatures and reflect the Elizabethan love of elaborate costume and jewelry [1–3]. Some include gold and silver mottoes that relate to the sitter’s identity, such as that surrounding [2], which identifies the year Hilliard painted it, 1576, and the age of the sitter, 39.

First trained as a goldsmith, Hilliard introduced innovative techniques for painting pearls by applying a raised bead of white lead paint topped by a drop of burnished silver. Despite its original brilliance, Hilliard’s painted pearls now appear black, as the silver has tarnished with age. Hilliard’s pupils, including Isaac Oliver and by extension Oliver’s son, Peter, used these methods, accounting for the black jewels in the crown and earrings of the young woman [4].

Between the death of Hilliard and the rise of Samuel Cooper [7–8], John Hoskins was the finest miniature painter in England. Hoskins pioneered a number of miniature techniques, among them the use of landscape or sky backgrounds. This allusion to the outdoors [5] places the sitter in an actual setting and lends an individual sensitivity to the object.

Hoskins’s nephew, Samuel Cooper, trained with his uncle and assimilated Hoskins’s ability to capture individual character. Cooper’s sitters retain the reality of living people without being idealistic [7–8]. Many consider Cooper’s unfinished works, including his portrait of the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes [8], to represent his greatest achievement in capturing an individual likeness.

Equally distinct in both subject matter and style is Richard Gibson’s miniature of Lady Capell [6]. Gibson’s somber colors contribute to the sorrowful mood; Lady Capell was in mourning for her husband. Unlike the smooth brushwork of most miniaturists, Gibson used a distinctive dragged impasto (thickly laid paint) technique he learned from oil painters.

In contrast, Peter Cross combined short brushstrokes and dots to achieve the soft focus in his Portrait of a Woman [9].
1. **Portrait of a Woman**, early 1590s
   Watercolor on card
   Nicholas Hilliard
   (British, about 1547–1619)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1940.1210

2. **Portrait of Baron Howard of Effingham**, 1576
   Watercolor on vellum
   Nicholas Hilliard
   (British, about 1547–1619)
   Gift of Mrs. A. Dean Perry in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Belden Greene 1960.39

3. **Portrait of Anthony Mildmay**, about 1590–93
   Watercolor on vellum
   Nicholas Hilliard
   (British, about 1547–1619)
   Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1926.554

4. **Portrait of a Woman**, about 1616
   Watercolor on card
   Peter Oliver
   (British, about 1594–1647)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1941.559

5. **Portrait of a Man**, about 1630
   Watercolor on card
   John Hoskins
   (British, about 1590–1665)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1941.558

6. **Portrait of Elizabeth Morrison, Lady Capell**, 1650s
   Watercolor on vellum
   Richard Gibson
   (British, about 1615–1690)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1941.555

7. **Portrait of a Woman**, 1646
   Watercolor on vellum
   Samuel Cooper
   (British, 1608–1672)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1940.1204

8. **Portrait of Thomas Hobbes**, about 1660
   Watercolor on vellum
   Samuel Cooper
   (British, 1608–1672)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1949.548

9. **Portrait of a Woman in Blue**, about 1700
   Watercolor on vellum
   Peter Cross
   (British, about 1645–1724)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1941.554
Between 1700 and 1800 Britain's population increased by nearly four million people in tandem with a rise in its national wealth. As a result, many middle-class consumers anxious to flaunt their status fueled the market for portraiture. A new generation of miniaturists proliferated, reaching a zenith from 1770–1800. Richard Cosway [1, 2, 7, 9] and John Smart [8, 10, 11] were among its leading practitioners.

Cosway and Smart were personally and artistically opposite. Cosway was an eccentric showman, prone to ostentatious dress and behavior. Likewise, he depicted Londoners in the most fashionable attire, such as the filmy white muslin dress worn by Fanny Swinburne [1], and the white turbans on the Countess of Mountnorris and Catherine Clemens [2, 9]. Cosway focused the viewer’s attention on the sitter’s face by enlarging their eyes and head. He contrasted a delicate stipple technique for faces with a loose arrangement of linear brushwork elsewhere.

In contrast, Smart lived more quietly. From 1784 to 1794 he went to India, hoping to secure patronage from wealthy princes or those involved in England’s booming trade market. He included the initial “I” (signifying India) in works from this period, a clue to the identity of his Portrait of a Man [10], who may have been an associate of the East India Trading Company. Despite Smart’s use of saturated jewel-tone colors, his work is quieter in tone than Cosway’s due to his cautious stipple technique. This creates an exquisitely smooth surface with little trace of individual brush strokes, except for Smart’s fondness for anatomical details such as crows’ feet, a feature in his own Self-portrait [11].

Although both painters were equally popular, Cosway had a host of followers and rivals. Followers included Andrew and Nathaniel Plimer [5, 6, 12, 13]. Both worked in Cosway's studio where Andrew adopted Cosway’s linear brushwork and his use of large, expressive eyes—a feature that made Andrew’s miniatures soulfully elegant, earning him many admirers. Nathaniel was less prolific, and examples of his work are rare. Although his male and female sitters remain unknown [12, 13], they appear in similarly framed gold lockets with matching braided hairwork, a commemorative element that could signal their union.

George Engleheart was one of Cosway’s greatest rivals and stylistically the closest to his work. However, Engleheart’s miniatures have a more labored tone. Like Cosway, he often placed his figures against a sky background [3]. But the firm drawing, eyes under heavy brows [3, 4], and above all, the use of grays and blacks for the shadows, are distinctive of Engleheart.
1. **Portrait of Fanny Swinburne**, about 1790  
   Richard Cosway  
   (British, 1742–1821)  
   1941.553

2. **Portrait of Anne, Countess of Mountnorris**, about 1790  
   Richard Cosway  
   (British, 1742–1821)  
   1942.1138

3. **Portrait of a Man**, about 1790s  
   George Engleheart  
   (British, 1752–1829)  
   1941.556

4. **Portrait of a Man**, about 1790  
   George Engleheart  
   (British, 1752–1829)  
   1943.640

5. **Portrait of a Woman**, 1790s  
   Andrew Plimer  
   (British, 1763–1837)  
   1943.649

6. **Portrait of a Young Man**, about 1790  
   Andrew Plimer  
   (British, 1763–1837)  
   1942.1153

7. **Portrait of a Man**, about 1780  
   Richard Cosway  
   (British, 1742–1821)  
   1942.1137

8. **Portrait of Constantine Phipps**, 1770  
   John Smart I  
   (British, 1741–1811)  
   1951.437

9. **Portrait of Catherine Clemens and Her Son, John Marcus Clemens**, about 1790  
   Richard Cosway  
   (British, 1742–1821)  
   1941.552

10. **Portrait of a Man**, 1786  
    John Smart I  
    (British, 1741–1811)  
    1949.546

11. **Self-portrait**, 1802  
    John Smart I  
    (British, 1741–1811)  
    1952.95

12. **Portrait of a Man**, 1780s  
    Nathaniel Plimer  
    (British, 1757–1822)  
    1941.562.1

13. **Portrait of a Woman**, 1780s  
    Nathaniel Plimer  
    (British, 1757–1822)  
    1941.562.2

All of the above miniatures are painted in watercolor on ivory, and are part of the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Edward B. Greene Collection.
Though miniature painting had flourished in England from the 1500s, it underwent a fundamental change in the early 1700s when the Venetian artist and pastellist Rosalba Carriera introduced the use of ivory in place of vellum when she began painting the lids of ivory snuffboxes [1]. Carriera’s innovation spread throughout Europe.

Ivory presents a greasy surface that repels watercolor, making it difficult to paint. Carriera revolutionized the process by using watercolor mixed with a gummy white that emulated the powdery surface of her pastels and also adhered to the ivory. She contrasted this technique with a transparent wash in the faces, allowing the ivory ground to emerge. This contrasting effect provided a visual variety that was unattainable on vellum.

In Continental Europe, especially France, Carriera’s use of opaque “gouache” was influential. By the 1770s, miniaturists including Antoine Vestier [6], Charles Henard [4], and Jean Jacques de Lusse [5] incorporated Carriera’s techniques. Their miniatures balance transparent and opaque pigments. In contrast, artists in England, particularly Richard Cosway, rarely used gouache, preferring more transparent washes, as evident in the illustration of the diaphanous fabric of Fanny Swinburne’s dress (at the right).

Technique was not the only difference between English and Continental miniaturists. Carriera’s Rococo sensibility and her refined approach to the figure found more currency in France than in England. Note the captivating charm and opulence of the three French female sitters [4–6]. Instead, artists influenced by Cosway [2, 3 & 7], and English sitters in general, keep the viewer at a distance.

Known as the “Cosway of Vienna,” German-born Heinrich Füger became a court painter in Austria. Among his distinguished sitters are Count Tschernitscheff [2], Russian ambassador to Vienna, and Countess Thun [3], a Viennese aristocrat. What aligns Füger with Cosway is the graceful and elegant style they share. Less flamboyant than Cosway, Füger deftly captured the sitter’s individual character. Consider Countess Thun’s contemplative pose, all the more intriguing because Füger may have painted her on the occasion of her engagement in 1793.

At the beginning of the 1800s, artistic cross-currents between Russia and Britain swelled as interest in Russia as an eastern power intensified. Portrait of a Woman by a Russian artist [7] from the 1810s still exhibits characteristics of the British style, including the sitter’s sense of quiet reserve.
Little is known about Anna Maria Carew beyond a document that records her presence at the English court of Charles II (reigned 1660–1685). In 1662, the king awarded her an annual pension of £200 for copying paintings in the Royal Collection in miniature. This tremendous sum attests to Carew’s elevated status and to the value placed on cabinet miniatures. Although miniature painting was considered an artistic occupation well suited to women, relatively few female miniaturists are known before the 18th century.

Carew’s individual style is apparent in the miniature, which retains the grandeur of the baroque original, deftly communicated through the Virgin’s dramatically upturned eyes [1]. However, Carew made several important adjustments from the original work by Anthony van Dyck, which had been in Paris since its creation and during the period that Carew probably executed her version in miniature [2]. The painting was therefore probably known to her only through Paulus Pontius’s engraving [3]. Carew omits the cherub brooch worn by the Virgin in both the original painting and the engraving, and she reverses the colors of the Virgin’s gown and mantle. This latter detail may be further evidence that Carew studied only the engraving and did not see the original, in which Mary wears a red gown. She also eliminated the monumental column base, and instead of a dark cavernous space, Carew chose a more intimate, round format and a plain background suffused with the gentle glow of the halos. The circular format was a significant creative departure from the traditional, rectangular form of cabinet miniatures.
Anna Maria Carew signed her name confidently in gold. A narrow gold border encircles the miniature, underscoring the preciousness of the object, which may have been used in a devotional capacity. Although it was never in the Royal Collection, Carew’s *Madonna and Child* could have been commissioned by someone at the court of Charles II. The patron might have been a Catholic who felt at liberty to commission a religious subject from a well-known painting in spite of the intensely anti-Catholic sentiment throughout England at the time. Charles II was a reluctant persecutor of Catholics, but his attitude of relative tolerance would be stamped out by the anti-Catholic policies of his successors William and Mary toward the end of the century, when this type of work would become even more rare.
During the intense social and political upheaval of the French Revolution (1789–99), patrons continued to commission portraits in miniature, but they were not immune to the changes that the Revolution brought about in fashion, or to the climate of anxiety that gripped the nation.

Four men painted in 1795 represent conservative attitudes toward male portraiture during a critical year between the Reign of Terror (1793–94), during which tens of thousands of people were executed, and the Directory (1795–99), which struggled to restore order to the nation. François Dumont’s Portrait of a Man represents his sitter in a delicate cream-colored waistcoat and billowing necktie [3]. Set against a pale blue background, Dumont creates a lighter atmosphere than we see in portraits by Charles de Chatillon and Lié Louis Périn [4, 2]. In Chatillon’s Portrait of a Man, the sitter wears a miniature with a wheat sheaf made of hair—a reminder of a loved one [fig. A, to the right]. Périn’s Portrait of Noël-François Charles Cailles des Fontaines is also restrained and introspective, appropriate for this sitter who was a lawyer at bailiff’s court in the provincial city of Caen. Marie Gabrielle Capet was an early female member of the French Academy and skilled in pastel, oil painting, and miniatures. Her Portrait of a Man in a Landscape ambitiously incorporates a scene in which a man rows a boat against a rocky coast [5]. The seaside setting probably relates to the vocation of the man represented and casts him in a dramatic light. This work was originally the lid of a snuff box, the bezel of which has been converted to a frame.

Dumont was an important figure in French miniature painting, and his work spans pre- and post-revolutionary France. We do not know the identity of the sitter in his Portrait of a Woman in a Brown Dress [1]. The rich, dark tones create a quiet, introspective mood, drawing attention to her warm and open expression. The tenor is quite different in Dumont’s Portrait of Mademoiselle Marie-Anne Adelaide Le Normand [7]. She was a fortuneteller consulted by revolutionary leaders and Empress Josephine. After having his fortune told, one visitor described her this way: “It was impossible for imagination to conceive a more hideous being. She looked like a monstrous toad, bloated and venomous. She had one wall-eye, but the other was a piercer . . . the walls of the room were covered with huge bats, nailed by their wings to the ceiling, stuffed owls, cabalistic signs, skeletons.”
Rotation 7:
The Development of Painting en Grande Miniature in France, 1795–1820

Following the French Revolution (1789–1799) and the resulting interruption of state-sponsored commissions, portraiture attained a new level of prominence at the French Salons. Artists developed new methods to keep pace with an increased desire for portraiture, and to attract new clientele. Miniature portraits hung adjacent to oil paintings at the Salon. To contend with this, miniaturists began working on a larger scale, framing their works like oil paintings rather than pieces of jewelry. The transformation of tiny portraits on ivory to what became known as portraits en grande miniature developed out of the pressures and opportunities afforded by Salon exhibitions.

The intimate subject and lack of finish suggest that Jean Baptiste Jacques Augustin's Self-Portrait [2] was intended for a private rather than public audience. Unlike the larger works in the rotation, it is painted on ivory, which is a challenging surface requiring careful preparation in order for the watercolor to adhere. By contrast, vellum, a translucent fine animal skin, was less costly and more forgiving, thus facilitating rapid work on larger surfaces. This rare self-portrait provides an intimate view of one of the greatest French miniature painters, employed by the French court and Napoleon.

The two other miniaturists in this rotation, Jean-Urbain Guérin [1,5] and Jean-Baptiste Isabey [3,4,6] both studied with French painter Jacques Louis David (1748–1825). Although seven years his senior, Guérin also studied with Isabey. Stylistic similarities are evident between Guérin and Isabey, particularly in the decision to use simple backgrounds and to flatter sitters by painting them with a soft gauze of color—the 19th-century equivalent of air-brushing.

Before the revolution, Guérin painted portraits of the royal family, including Marie-Antoinette, and painted ladies of the court and Napoleonic generals during the 19th century. The sitter in his dramatically colored Portrait of a Man [2], wears the Spanish Order of Charles III. Guérin's portraits are more clearly defined than those by Isabey, as is apparent in the Portrait of a Young Woman in White [5], whose bizarrely attenuated neck is used to dramatic effect on this lid for a small box.

In contrast, portraits by the highly fashionable painter Isabey are characterized by their ethereality, filmy washes of color, and the diaphanous veils of his female sitters [3,6]. Isabey was Empress Joséphine's chief painter, and chief decorator and director of Imperial festivities to her successor, Marie-Louise. In 1814, at the request of a French statesman representing the Congress of Vienna, Isabey traveled to Vienna to paint delegates. His Portrait of a Man [4] may be one of these figures, suggested by the signature: Isabey/À Vienne/1814. Isabey also painted members of high society, including Portrait of Hortense de Perregaux, Duchess of Ragusa [6], represented here in the year following her divorce from the Napoleonic General Auguste de Marmot, Duc de Ragusa.

Portraits continued to be painted en grand miniature as the century progressed until they were nearly the same scale as small oil paintings. The end of miniature portrait painting as a distinct genre came in the mid 19th century, due to the rapid expansion of photography.
1. **Portrait of a Man**, 1810
   Watercolor on ivory
   Jean-Urbain Guérin
   (French, 1760–1836)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1942.1135

2. **Self-Portrait**, about 1805
   Watercolor on ivory
   Jean-Baptiste Jacques Augustin
   (French, 1759–1832)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1940.1202

3. **Portrait of a Woman in a White Dress**, about 1794–95
   Watercolor on vellum
   Jean-Baptiste Isabey
   (French, 1767–1855)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1942.1147

4. **Portrait of a Man**, 1814
   Watercolor on vellum
   Jean-Baptiste Isabey
   (French, 1767–1855)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1943.645

5. **RECENT ACQUISITION**
   **Portrait of a Young Woman in White**, about 1795
   Watercolor on ivory
   Jean-Urbaine Guérin
   (French, 1760–1836)
   Bequest of Muriel Butkin 2008.293

6. **Portrait of Hortense de Perregaux**, 1818
   Watercolor on vellum
   Jean-Baptiste Isabey
   (French, 1767–1855)
   The Edward B. Greene Collection 1942.1146
Joseph Daniel was a Jewish artist who worked in Bath, a fashionable English spa town and important center for portrait painting during the 18th century. Little is known about Joseph’s education except that he and his brothers, Abraham and Phineas, who also painted miniatures and worked as jewelers and engravers, were taught by their mother. Joseph was among the most highly sought-after miniaturists working in Bath.

The unknown sitter in this miniature wears a powdered wig, which was falling out of fashion during this period, and holds in his outstretched hand a goblet probably containing the water visitors to Bath drank and bathed in for its restorative qualities. The *New Bath Guide* for 1786 noted that, “Many people have come to Bath, tired with taking medicines (at home) to no manner of purpose at all; they have drank the Bath Water with abundance of delight and pleasure, and by the help of a little physic have recovered to admiration.”

The gentleman here may have commissioned the miniature to commemorate his return to health, attributed to taking the waters. The strong shadows crossing his face lend intensity to his spellbound expression, and Daniel’s attention to detail is apparent in the reflection of the window visible in the curved glass (fig. 1).

This type of virtuoso portrait might have been displayed in the artist’s studio to attract clients, many of whom found entertainment in having their portrait painted while they were in Bath. Artists in Bath often arranged their studios as showrooms, and those who could afford it were situated near shops that sold...
luxury goods. Because they required fewer sittings than oil portraits and could be completed rapidly, miniatures were popular among tourists. This portrait’s size, coloring, and breaking of the picture plane are atypical of miniatures painted in Britain during the late 1700s. The rectangular format—large for a miniature on ivory—anticipates 19th-century miniaturists who competed with the oil paintings among which their work was exhibited. The golden-brown color and grayish flesh tones are typical of Daniel’s work, and the monumentality of the sitter’s gesture is enhanced by Daniel’s characteristic use of gum arabic mixed with watercolor, which results in a rich tone and texture intended to emulate oil painting. The golden hues of this portrait echo those of 17th-century Dutch portraits, which were gaining popularity in Britain during the period that Daniel was painting.

One example by Frans Hals, *The Merry Drinker*, has a similar palette, composition, and gesture while underscoring an important distinction between types of drinking portraits (fig. 2). While Hals’s man has imbibed alcohol perhaps to the point of drunkenness, Daniel’s sitter soberly draws attention to his glass of water, the significance of which transcends the fleeting acts of toasting and drinking.

Fig. 2. *The Merry Drinker*, 1628–30. Frans Hals (Dutch, about 1581–1666). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Rotation 11: Miniatures from the Bequest of Muriel Butkin

A small but formidable collection of eight portrait miniatures was left to the museum by Muriel Butkin in 2008. Muriel's husband, Noah, was fond of indulging her love of art and jewelry, and it is possible that these miniatures were a Valentine's Day present to her. All but one was purchased from the Norton Galleries in New York in early February of 1975.

The Butkins' finest miniatures were mostly French, including a portrait of Antoine Roy, Minister of Finance of France, painted by Jean-Baptiste Jacques Augustin at the height of his career. The red badge on Roy’s left lapel is the ribbon of the order of the legion d’honneur, which he received in 1820. This portrait exemplifies the artist’s later, classicizing style, with a virtuoso blending of hues to create vivid flesh tones. The lid of a box in this case is significant primarily for its miniature by Pierre Louis Bouvier, a Swiss artist new to the museum’s collection. The refined treatment of the lush forest landscape makes this work distinctive, since miniatures usually lavished more attention on the sitter than the background. Bouvier’s miniatures often depict sitters in elaborate outdoor settings.

Also among the Butkin miniatures are works by Rosalba Carriera and Anna Claypoole Peale, which enhance the museum’s small but growing collection of important female miniature painters. The portrait by Anna Claypoole Peale, an American artist of the Peale family dynasty that included the better-known Charles Willson, Rembrandt Peale, and James Peale, is regarded as among the finest of her female portraits. Rosalba Carriera’s portrait of a woman with a little dog wagging its tongue is typical of her early work, which is colorful, highly detailed and playful in spirit (fig. 1). Carriera initiated the practice of painting miniatures on ivory (as opposed to vellum) as embellishments to snuff box lids.

The miniature portrait of Grand Duchess Catherine Pavlovna as a child is based on an original full-scale oil painting. In the 1790s, the artist Dmitry Levitsky painted the four eldest daughters of Tsar Paul I as part of a series now in the Pavlovsk Palace in Russia (fig. 2). This miniature portrait of Catherine was painted more than sixty years later by the Russian court painter Alois Gustav Rokstuhl. This portrait of the Grand Duchess (who rejected...
the hand of Napoleon and eventually became Queen of Württemberg) is an important contribution to the museum’s small but growing collection of miniature portraits of children. Finally, Alexander Cooper’s portrait of Elizabeth Stuart, Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia, exemplifies a type of official portrait widely circulated by monarchs as diplomatic gifts and gestures of partiality (fig. 3). This example is still housed in its original blue, white, and black enamel locket with the initials of Elizabeth Stuart surmounted by a crown.

Reference wall label:

Fig. 3. Portrait
Elizabeth Stuart,
Electress Palatine and
Queen of Bohemia,
about 1630s.
Alexander Cooper
(British, 1609–1658).
Watercolor on vellum;
3.1 x 2.8 cm. The
Cleveland Museum of
Art, Bequest of Murial
Butkin 2008.292
Rotation 12: Performing Femininity on the Eve of Revolution

The flirtatious smiles and sumptuous costumes of these elegant French ladies disguise the fact that they are engaged in the serious business of performing the skills elite eighteenth-century women were expected to cultivate.

More than simply ways to pass leisure time, playing music, reading, and writing were highly valued means of expressing intellect, marriageability, and aesthetic sensibilities. These closely related portraits were painted by three different artists, and together they exemplify hallmarks of late-eighteenth-century French miniature painting: the circular format, a seated figure painted at three-quarter length, and attention lavished on details of the sitter’s environment.

François Dumont’s Portrait of a Woman at a Harpsichord represents a woman in the act of playing a sonata (figs. 1 and 2). Her pale and delicately tapered fingers touch the keys almost absent-mindedly as she smiles confidently at the viewer, confirming the ease with which she makes music.

Fig. 1. (above) Portrait of a Woman at a Harpsichord (detail), about 1788. François Dumont (French, 1751–1831). Watercolor on ivory; diam. 2 7/8 in. Edward B. Greene Collection 1942.1139

Fig. 2. (below) Detail of music sheet, with “sonata” written at top. From Portrait of a Woman at a Harpsichord (above).
The woman in Maximilien Villers’s miniature has a more pensive expression that makes the juxtaposition of her highly revealing dress unexpected. She holds her place in a book with a colorful floral cover that draws attention to the ring on her finger, which is probably a wedding ring (fig. 3) often worn on the right hand by Roman Catholics in the eighteenth century.

The coquettish grin of André Pujos’s sitter is tempered by the row of books next to her writing table, at which she cradles in her arms a long letter that she has been reading—her quill pen poised for response (fig. 4). For each of these unknown young women, the French Revolution of 1789 would have brought upheaval to their lives, rendering this kind of overtly luxurious aristocratic portraiture practically extinct in France for the next generation.
Portrait miniatures were portable luxury objects treasured by their owners not only because they contained a cherished portrait, but often because of the precious materials from which they were crafted. These 14 miniatures spanning 230 years represent a variety of approaches to ornamenting the back of a portrait and suggest the wealth of information that can be hidden from view.

Miniatures are fine art objects to which the setting is integral and reveals whether the portrait functioned as jewelry, a mourning memento, or was gradually inscribed with its own exhibition history or provenance. Frequently patrons would spend substantially more than the cost of the portrait to have it placed in a gold or silver case outfitted with pearls, enamel, diamonds, colored glass, or elaborate hair work.

The addition of hair (usually belonging to the person depicted) enhanced the intimacy of the object. In the case of Horace Hone’s portrait of Lady Grace Anna Newenham [no. 1] the hair on the back of the case is formed into a typical Irish belt shape, appropriate for this Irish artist and patron. On the other hand, a wheat-sheaf motif could suggest death and is frequently seen in mourning miniatures [no. 10].

The backs of miniatures can contain information illuminating the object’s history. For instance, the back of the portrait of Ethel Coe by Martha Baker [no. 7] tells us that the work was exhibited as “The Blue Gown” in 1904 at the St. Louis World’s Fair. When John Smart’s portrait of a man [no. 6] revealed no clues as to the identity of the sitter, the elaborate coat of arms enabled researchers to identify the family name as Lawrence, comparing the date of the portrait with peers of that name until a match was made with portraits of Soulden Lawrence. Please see the back of this card depicting the portraits on the front of each miniature. All of these miniatures are watercolor on ivory, except for numbers 4, 9, and 13, which are enamel.
Rotation 14: Portrait Miniatures in Enamel

Unlike fragile portrait miniatures painted in watercolor on vellum or ivory, which are prone to cracking, fading, and flaking, enamels are resilient, impervious to the effects of light, and retain their striking original colors over time. Partly for this reason enamel was considered ideal for reproducing famous paintings and treasured portraits in a reduced and luminous form.

The complicated and labor-intensive process of enameling required the artist to fire numerous layers of colored metal oxide at different temperatures. This process made it difficult to produce a faithful portrait likeness, though masters of the medium like Jacques Thouron were able to create portraits of remarkable subtlety imbued with the sitter’s personality [no. 6]. The back of an enamel is also glazed in the process, creating the “counter enamel”—a surface where enamelist often signed and dated their work and sometimes identified the sitter (figs. 1, 2).

Figure 1. Counter enamel of Bone, Portrait of General Sir Charles Grey. Inscribed: “Sir Chas. Grey K. B. / Henry Bone pinx Aug.st 1794”

Figure 2. Counter enamel of Essex, Portrait of Napoleon. Inscribed: “Napoleon Buonaparte Painted by W. Essex. Jan.y 1841 Enamel painter to Her Majesty. after a min.e painted expressly for the Empress Marie Louise by T. B. T. Duchesne. Ad 1814”
The heyday of enamel painting was the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Among the enamel specialists were the Swiss Jean Petitot [nos. 3–5] and the German Christian Friedrich Zincke [nos. 9, 10], who worked in England where he was patronized by Queen Anne, King George I, and King George II, the latter a great lover of enamels. One of the features that helps us identify Zincke’s work are the lips painted in two different colors—purplish-pink on top and orange below (fig. 3). Some portrait miniaturists like Jean-Baptiste Jacques Augustin worked in a variety of media including watercolor on ivory and enamel. He produced many versions of this portrait of King Louis XVIII, which would have been much in demand as a diplomatic gift from the king to loyal courtiers or foreign allies [no. 7]. The desire for portraits of Napoleon Bonaparte helped to create a market for miniatures that William Essex was fueling long after the emperor’s death [no. 2].

Henry Bone ushered in an enamel renaissance during the late 1700s with his miniatures, which include sensitive and elegant works like this portrait of General Sir Charles Grey [no. 1], after a portrait by his contemporary Thomas Lawrence. An innovator of new techniques, Bone retained the brilliance and purity of colors in layered glass enamel while achieving fine, naturalistic details by using overglazes for the faces.

Finally, though the tradition of enamel portraiture is primarily associated with European miniaturists, one of the most widely recognized enamels was created by an American artist. William Russell Birch’s portrait of George Washington [no. 8] is one of around 60 versions executed by the artist after oil portraits of the president by Gilbert Stuart. Given the opportunity to have Washington sit for him directly, Birch demurred, remarking that he preferred to apply his skill to reproducing in enamel the admirable and iconic work of Stuart.