

Abstract

A Study on *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* by Nicholas Hilliard

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Nicholas Hilliard was a late sixteenth century English portrait miniature artist in the court of Elizabeth I. A portrait miniature, which was then called limning, is a small portrait painted using a Middle Ages manuscript illumination technique that became independent from manuscript pages during the 1520s in both France and England. The portrait miniatures painted by Nicholas Hilliard were some of the most sophisticated and fashionable products among Elizabethan courtiers. Around 1600, Hilliard wrote *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* at the request of Richard Haydocke, who translated the work of Paolo Lomazzo, an Italian Mannerist artist. In *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning*, Hilliard describes the technique of portrait miniature painting, including which colors should be used, and claims that portrait miniature is an especially precious form of painting. Hilliard was also a skilled goldsmith, having made medals and jewelry, including lockets to encase miniature portraits, and in his treatise he inserts a long descriptive section on precious stones.

This dissertation studies Hilliard's *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* to both investigate factors related to the popularity of his portrait miniatures in England and to explore the characteristics of his treatise. The dissertation unfolds in four principle sections: the first chapter explores various elements that helped portrait miniatures become independent from illuminated manuscripts, while reviewing Hilliard's life and his works.

The second chapter investigates Hilliard's theory of portrait miniature painting and his practical instructions of his own methods and materials, after addressing various evaluations on *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning*, which has generally been esteemed as the first and most important document on the history of English art written by an English born artist.

The third chapter examines Hilliard's precious stones section in depth, along with some literature on this subject, which are called the Lapidaries, such as *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder, *Mineralium* by Albertus Magnus, *De Natura Fossilium* by Georgius Agricola, who is called the father of modern mineralogy, and sixteenth century treatises. Hilliard stays away from the superstitions, mysterious powers, and virtues of stones that are characteristically enumerated in the aforementioned literature. Instead, he explicitly maintains the importance of the color purity and brilliance of precious stones, which demonstrates the modern sense of value he places on precious stones. Furthermore, he mentions the color varieties, heat reactions, and other characteristics of precious stones that he has observed. Interestingly, the influence of Hilliard's treatise was found in writings by his fellow goldsmiths in later generations.

The fourth chapter examines how Hilliard's thought on precious stones is reflected in his miniatures. He grudgingly describes how to paint diamonds, rubies, and pearls, but his pupils disclose the details of their master's secret technique in their manuals.

His portrait miniatures' costume and jewelry details are meticulously painted with bright color and luster. He has freely utilized the technique and material, as well as the knowledge of goldsmiths in painting. Hilliard's unique techniques would be one of the causes of the great popularity of his portrait miniatures. The examination of the part of his description on precious stones demonstrates the modern and scientific views espoused in Hilliard's treatise.