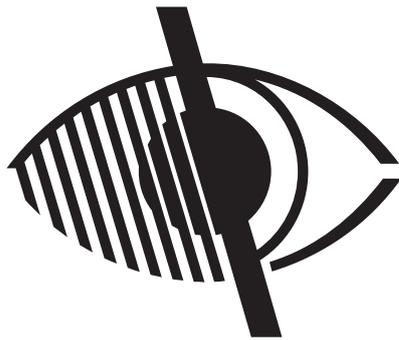


National
Portrait
Gallery



Elizabethan Treasures

MINIATURES BY
HILLIARD & OLIVER

Large Print Guide

Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver were the two most celebrated artists working in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Their fame derived from their portrait miniatures, or as they were known at the time, limnings. These portraits are penetrating depictions of the character and individuality of the monarchs and merchants, aristocrats and citizens of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. They reflect the culture of the time, including the love of symbolism, decorative surfaces, display and secrecy, and are among the greatest works of art of the English Renaissance.

Unless otherwise stated, all miniatures displayed in this exhibition are painted in watercolour and bodycolour on vellum, laid onto card (often a playing card).

The showcase captions in each section of this document are ordered to be read from left to right.

Hilliard and Oliver

Nicholas Hilliard (c.1547–1619) was born into a family of goldsmiths in Devon. As a child he travelled in Germany and Switzerland in the household of a prominent, exiled Protestant family, the Bodleys. He was apprenticed in London to a leading goldsmith, Robert Brandon, whose daughter Alice he married. Hilliard's training in miniature painting is a mystery, but he mastered the medium with extraordinary rapidity. He had an elegant, intricate style that represented the pinnacle of English painting at the time. Hilliard also developed new techniques for creating remarkable, imitative effects.

Isaac Oliver (c.1565–1617), in common with many skilled artisans and artists in London at the time, came from an immigrant family, escaping religious persecution. Born in France, he trained with Hilliard and gradually acquired a similar clientele and status to the older artist. Oliver's connections to the continent were reinforced by his three marriages within the immigrant community in London. Notably, his second wife Sara was the sister of the celebrated painter Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. A trip to Italy reinforced his European outlook. Within his lifetime, he was recognised for the extraordinary contribution that his sophisticated, continental approach brought to English art.

Nicholas Hilliard

Self-portrait, 1577

Artists' self-portraits from the sixteenth century in England are very rare. Only two surviving oil self-portraits are known and three miniatures, including this one of Hilliard. He depicts himself as an elegantly and expensively dressed gentleman; nothing indicates that he is a painter. This reflects his view that 'none should meddle with limning, but gentlemen alone'. Hilliard painted it during his stay in France from 1576 to 1578. Unlike most of his portraits, it is signed in monogram, 'NH', at the right.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London,
Bequeathed by George Salting

Nicholas Hilliard

Alice Hilliard (née Brandon), 1578

The inscription written around the edge of this miniature – probably added by Laurence Hilliard, the sitter's son – records that this is Alice Brandon (1556–1611?), the wife of Nicholas Hilliard. In 1578, the couple were in France. Alice, pregnant with her first child when this miniature was painted, returned to England before her husband. Pinned to her dress is a head of wheat, symbolising fertility, and a carnation, symbolising marriage. Hilliard probably painted this portrait as a memento for himself.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Acquired through The Art Fund

Nicholas Hilliard

Richard Hilliard, 1576–7

Richard Hilliard (c.1518–94) was a goldsmith and prominent citizen of Exeter, who specialised in making church plate and spoons for domestic use. Nicholas was the oldest of his eight children. He was almost certainly visiting Nicholas in France when this was painted, perhaps going to bring back his pregnant daughter-in-law. It is a very fine example of Hilliard's early, highly worked style. This miniature and the self-portrait of Nicholas seem to have been made as a pair.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Bequeathed by George Salting

Isaac Oliver

Self-portrait, c.1590

This confident, vivid image is one of two known self-portraits by Isaac Oliver. Like that of Hilliard, it gives no clue as to the sitter's profession. Oliver's elegant clothing, however, conforms to Hilliard's recommendations for miniature painters: 'Let your apparel be silk, such as sheddeth least dust or hairs'. The self-portraits by Hilliard and Oliver may reflect their knowledge of art on the continent, where self-portraits were more common. Produced early in the artists' careers, they may have been made as part of an attempt to promote themselves to new clients.

National Portrait Gallery, London;
Purchased with help from H.M. Government, 1971

Isaac Oliver

Elizabeth Oliver (née Harding), c.1610–15

Elizabeth Harding (b.1589) was Isaac Oliver's third wife, the daughter of James Harding, a French immigrant, court flautist and composer. She married the much older Oliver in 1606, when she was seventeen. By the stage that this was painted, relatively late in Oliver's career, he often used a soft grey background, which here offsets the bright embroidery on Elizabeth's jacket. The larger-than-usual scale of her face, her over-the-shoulder glance and her half smile give this miniature a particularly intimate feeling.

The Portland Collection

Making miniatures

We know a great deal about the process of miniature painting in the Tudor and Jacobean period. Nicholas Hilliard wrote a manuscript, *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning*, and other texts give further information. Close examination of surviving miniatures has also revealed much about how they were made.

Hilliard was keen to assert the gentlemanly qualities that he felt were required for 'limners', as miniature painters were known at the time. He emphasised the cleanliness and refinement of the process, but also gave fascinating details about the preparation of materials and tools. The technique was based on that of manuscript illumination, using watercolour paint in transparent and opaque ('bodycolour') forms. The paint was applied to fine vellum, made from animal skin, which had been pasted onto card. The card was often a playing card, as these were readily available. The painting process usually involved three sittings, beginning with the face and ending with final refinements to the features and details in the costume and jewellery. Many of the finished miniatures were set in turned ivory boxes or richly enamelled and jewelled lockets, very few of which survive today.

Nicholas Hilliard

An Unknown Woman, unfinished, c.1595

The unfinished state of this miniature gives an insight into the working methods of the artist. It is probably the result of two sittings. The face and hair are near completion, the dress has just been started and the curtain in the background is nearly finished. Almost all of Hilliard's larger-scale, full-length miniatures, known as 'cabinet miniatures', date from the 1590s. This is his only such miniature of a woman. The red curtain background was an innovation at this time, part of an attempt by Hilliard to place the woman in a convincing space.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Bequeathed 1961; Louis Colville Gray Clarke

By an unknown copyist after **Nicholas Hilliard**

A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning,
1624 after a lost original of c.1600

This is the only known manuscript copy of Hilliard's treatise on the art of limning (miniature painting), which was not published until the twentieth century. The manuscript was copied by an unknown scribe presumably from Hilliard's own draft. It is a combination of formal passages, mostly derived from other treatises and theoretical works, and practical instructions. It also has various personal interruptions and diversions on subjects – particularly complaints – that evidently rose to the top of Hilliard's mind as he was writing. It is the earliest known work about miniature painting, and a fascinating window into the artist's life and concerns.

Manuscript, pen and ink on paper

The University of Edinburgh

Making Miniatures:

Artists' Tools and Materials

1 Vellum

Vellum, a fine animal skin, provided a smooth surface on which to paint.

2 Playing cards

Playing cards were a readily-available form of card made from several sheets of paper stuck together with starch paste. They provided a rigid support for the vellum.

3 Dog's tooth burnisher

A burnisher made from a dog's tooth was rubbed over the back of the card after it was stuck to the vellum, providing a smooth surface.

4 Gum arabic

A natural gum made from the sap of the acacia tree which was mixed with pigments and water to make watercolour and its opaque form, bodycolour.

5 Carnation in shell

The flesh tone, made up of a variety of white, red and brown pigments, was called the 'carnation'. Shells were used as palettes.

6 Brushes

Made from squirrel hair set in a quill and mounted on a wooden handle.

7 Lead white in shell

A white pigment made from ground flakes of lead carbonate.

8 Green earth (terre verte) powder, and mixed in shell. A green pigment made from the minerals celadonite and glauconite.

9 Indigo powder and mixed in shell
A deep blue pigment produced from the leaves of Indigofera plants.

10 Red earth in powder form and mixed in shell. Red pigments made from natural earths.

11 Massicot mixed in shell
A yellow pigment made from lead oxide.

12 Vermillion
A red or scarlet pigment made from mercury sulphide, called 'cinnabar'.

13 Azurite
A blue pigment also known as blue bice, used as an alternative to the more expensive ultramarine for the backgrounds of miniatures.

14 Gold leaf & Silver leaf
Leaf is made by hammering gold or silver into thin sheets.

15 Shell gold
A gold or silver paint made by grinding gold or silver leaf with gum arabic in water.

16 Stoat's tooth burnisher
A stoat's tooth set in a wooden stick, used to burnish gold and silver elements in the miniature.

Hilliard's Early Patronage

Nicholas Hilliard completed his apprenticeship with the London goldsmith Robert Brandon in 1569 and produced his earliest-known miniature in 1571. Whether he spent the intervening years training as a miniaturist or whether he was already trained is not known. What is evident is that even at the outset of his career, his skill was exceptional. He came to the attention of the most wealthy and powerful of patrons almost immediately, working for Elizabeth's favourite Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester from 1571 and for the queen herself shortly after this. Leicester was to remain an important patron of the artist until his death.

The miniatures from the first five years of Hilliard's career include portraits of wealthy courtiers and prosperous members of the middle classes. They are round in format, echoing the work of earlier miniaturists and reflecting the shape of coins and medals, and they feature Hilliard's characteristically beautiful calligraphy, recording the year and the sitter's age. These inscriptions are a reminder of the roots of miniature painting in manuscript illumination and of Hilliard's continuing links with the Elizabethan world of words.

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Man, 1572

This is one of Hilliard's earliest miniatures. Its exceptionally good condition reveals the astonishing assurance of the artist's technique and style at the beginning of his career. There are more layers of paint and more modelling in the face than in his economically-painted later miniatures. The elaborate flourishes of the calligraphy are echoed in the exuberant moustache, curling out over the blue background.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Acquired with money bequeathed by Mrs Coppinger Prichard in memory of her father, Thomas Waraker, LL.D., and with the aid of a grant from the Art Fund.

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman, 1572

Of all Hilliard's miniatures, this most clearly illustrates the claim he made in his *Treatise* that 'Holbein's manner of limning I have ever imitated, and hold it for the best'. The large scale of the head and focus on the strong modelling of the features recall the miniatures that Hans Holbein the Younger produced at Henry VIII's court. Although she is simply dressed, the sitter may be a courtier; older women at court, particularly widows, did sometimes wear simple, modest clothing of this type.

The Buccleuch Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1576

Robert Dudley (1532–88) was Queen Elizabeth I's great favourite for the first thirty years of her reign and the only serious English contender for her hand in marriage. He was also a very important patron of art, and of particular significance to Hilliard. He had his portrait painted, by a variety of artists, more than any other Elizabethan courtier. His unusually plain black costume in this miniature is enhanced by the rubies and diamonds depicted in the chain around his neck and on his hat, and by the exceptionally ostentatious flourishes in the inscription.

National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased with help from the Art Fund, the Pilgrim Trust, H.M. Government and an anonymous donor, 1961

Hilliard in France

In September 1576 Nicholas Hilliard travelled to France in the retinue of Sir Amias Paulet, Elizabeth I's ambassador. It seems probable that Elizabeth sent Hilliard to produce a miniature of her then suitor, François, duc d'Anjou, the younger brother of Henri III of France. Hilliard was employed as a *valet-de-chambre* by François – a standard position for a painter in a French royal household – and also set up an independent workshop in Paris as a miniature painter and goldsmith.

Hilliard's stay, until late in 1578, was longer than expected, and he was joined for at least part of the time by his wife and probably also his father. Paulet found himself having to reassure the queen that her valued miniaturist was not planning to remain in France, and that the artist's intention was to increase his knowledge and to make money that would help support him when he returned to England. In the latter objective he seems to have failed, as money troubles haunted him throughout his life. However, he saw earlier French miniatures and made lasting connections with leading French courtiers and cultural figures. Recent research has uncovered new information about the portraits produced by Hilliard during this visit.

François Clouet

Catherine de Médicis, c.1555

France was the only European country other than England with a significant tradition of miniature painting. The leading figure in the later sixteenth century was François Clouet, who died before Hilliard came to France, but whose works Hilliard would have seen. It is perhaps to these that he owed his adoption of an oval format. Catherine de Médicis (1519–89) was the widow of Henri II of France, and a powerful political force in the country. She exchanged portraits with Elizabeth I and the Earl of Leicester in connection with marriage negotiations between Elizabeth and two of her sons, the future Henri III and François, duc d'Anjou.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Nicholas Hilliard

Henri III of France, 1576–8

This recently discovered miniature has never been displayed in public before. Henri III (1551–89) was the third-surviving son of Henri II and Catherine de Médicis. Before he ascended the throne, he had been proposed as a possible suitor for Elizabeth I. The shape of this miniature is an unusually long oval, not only echoing the shape of the king's face but also providing room for the large inscription, which, in both form and content, echoes the wording on the coinage of the period.

Djanogly Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Probably Pierre de Ronsard, 1577

Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85) was one of the most accomplished literary figures of the French Renaissance. He was one of a group of poets operating in the circle of the royal court known as *La Pléiade*. Hilliard knew him, and refers in his *Treatise* to a conversation they had about the rarity, but excellence, of skilful Englishmen. This miniature is displayed here for the first time as Ronsard, a new identification which is supported by the inscribed age and date and by comparison with a drawing of the poet.

Private Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Francis Bacon, later Baron Verulam
and Viscount St Alban, 1578

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was to become Lord Chancellor to King James I and one of the great intellectual figures of late Elizabethan and Jacobean England. In 1576, as a teenager, he was sent to France accompanying the Ambassador Sir Amias Paulet. Bacon was already known for his precocious intellectual abilities, and the inscription on the miniature alludes to this. It can be translated: 'If a worthy portrait were granted, I would prefer the mind.'

National Portrait Gallery, London. Accepted in lieu of tax by H.M. Government and allocated to the Gallery, 2006

Royal Portraiture: Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I was particularly interested in her image and its uses. Hilliard and Oliver were involved in producing portraits for a variety of purposes throughout the queen's life. Hilliard's earliest surviving miniature of her was painted right at the beginning of his career, in 1572. In 1584, a patent was drafted – although not registered – giving Hilliard a monopoly over her portraits in miniature. Although he probably had more access to Elizabeth than any other artist, his later portraits of her present a flattering image of ideal beauty far from the reality of the ageing queen's features.

Hilliard's work for the queen was not limited to miniatures. He designed seals and illuminated legal documents, in which Elizabeth's portrait functioned as a symbol of God-given authority. He also made medals, to be given as rewards to faithful courtiers at key moments. He finally became a salaried royal employee in 1599, as the queen's 'goldsmith and our limner'. By contrast, Oliver, whose only miniature of Elizabeth was an unsparing, naturalistic portrait, was never the valued royal image-maker that Hilliard was. However, he seems to have secured himself a role in providing her portrait for printmakers.

Royal Portraiture: Elizabeth I by Nicholas Hilliard

During his lifetime, Hilliard's work for Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) in other media was more prestigious than his miniatures of her. His training as a goldsmith was put into practice in the designing and making of medals. These valuable objects were given as rewards to favoured courtiers. Hilliard also made designs for seals of the realm. In these, his portrait of the queen was not just a symbol of her power, but actually transmitted her power and authority to legal documents. The frontal pose used in these official images relates back to ancient royal ritual including the Coronation.

Attributed to Nicholas Hilliard

'Dangers Averted' medal, c.1589

Portrait medals became popular with rulers during the Renaissance due to their association with ancient Roman emperors. Hilliard probably designed this medal to celebrate the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. It would have been a suitable reward for the commanders of the fleet. The motto on the front can be translated 'no richer circle in the world than this'. The queen is presented frontally, holding the orb and sceptre: the image of royal authority. The reverse shows an island protected from lightning by a laurel tree, symbolic of the queen's protection of her kingdom.

Gold medal

The Portland Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Elizabeth I, c.1600

In this miniature the crowned queen is shown as she would have appeared at her Coronation in January 1559, with her hair loose, wearing golden robes. Hilliard probably based his composition on an earlier portrait. The miniature, painted late in Elizabeth's reign, was made at a time of nostalgia about the past and anxiety about the present and future. In its frontal pose it echoes his representations of the queen in legal contexts. Its value as a precious object has been increased by the inclusion of a real diamond in the cross of the orb.

Watercolour and bodycolour with gold and silver on vellum laid on card, set with a diamond in the cross of the orb

The Portland Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Design for Elizabeth I's Great Seal of Ireland, c.1590

The most prestigious of Hilliard's royal commissions were his designs for seals of the realm. The wax seal attached to state documents indicated that the contents represented the will of the monarch. Hilliard worked with Derick Anthony, Chief Engraver of the Mint, on designing and making Elizabeth's second Great Seal and later worked on designs for a third Great Seal. This design for a Great Seal of Ireland was intended to convey an impression of Elizabeth's dominion over that country. However, in practice she experienced continual resistance from the Catholic population and the seal was never made.

Pen and black ink with grey wash over graphite on vellum

On loan from The British Museum, London

Nicholas Hilliard

Elizabeth I, 1572

This is the earliest-known miniature of the queen by Hilliard, painted in the second year of his career as a miniaturist. In his *Treatise*, the artist records the first time Elizabeth sat to him for a miniature. They discussed the desirability of not using much shadowing, and the queen chose to sit in 'the open ally of a goodly garden, where no tree was neere, nor anye shadowe at all'. There are no other versions of this early portrait, but Hilliard adapted the face pattern for his oil painting of her, displayed nearby.

National Portrait Gallery, London

Nicholas Hilliard

Elizabeth I Playing the Lute, c.1575

Elizabeth was a talented musician and used performances on the lute to draw a comparison between harmonious music and good governance. There are various accounts of her performing for ambassadors, one of which describes her playing 'very sweetly and skilfully on her instrument, the strings of which were of gold and silver'. This is an exceptionally unusual composition for the time, the only portrait of her in any medium playing a musical instrument. The fact that she is seated on a throne underlines the connection between her music and her rule.

Berkeley Chattels Settlement

Nicholas Hilliard

Elizabeth I, c.1595–1600

Hilliard's late miniatures of the queen, from the late 1580s onwards, always show her as a youthful beauty with softened and idealised features. Such flattery was in part a way of deflecting anxiety about the lack of an obvious heir to the ageing monarch. Most surviving miniatures of Elizabeth are of this late type; this is the largest. The face is faded but would never have been heavily modelled. The focus is on the queen's elaborate dress and her many diamonds and rubies.

National Trust Collections

Nicholas Hilliard

Elizabeth I, c.1580–5

After his return from France, Hilliard's production of miniatures of Elizabeth increased greatly. Although the queen sat for him on more than one occasion, loyal courtiers could commission a miniature without her being present. Hilliard probably kept a miniature in his studio as a pattern, but a contemporary recorded that he could paint her from memory alone. Hilliard seems to have had access to Elizabeth's clothing and jewellery, and here has faithfully reproduced the hundreds of pearls, as well as the diamonds and rubies, that decorate her dress and hair.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Royal Portraiture: Elizabeth I by Isaac Oliver

Isaac Oliver never had the functional role or favoured patronage from Queen Elizabeth I that Hilliard enjoyed, and made few images of her. However, early in his career he painted an allegorical 'cabinet' miniature depicting her, perhaps as a gift, to attract her patronage. The one portrait miniature type he did produce was a searching likeness, and Hilliard's more flattering images were evidently preferred. Oliver's unmatched abilities as a graphic artist did, however, find him a niche providing designs for engravings.

Isaac Oliver

Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses, c.1588

This cabinet miniature presents an Elizabethan interpretation of the classical myth of the Judgement of Paris. The restaging of this myth was popular in pageants, paintings and poetry, suggesting that Elizabeth had the goddesses' virtues of majesty, wisdom and beauty. The composition of this miniature is based on an earlier oil painting by Hans Eworth that belonged to Elizabeth. The elegant, turning figure of Juno in the centre, however, is Oliver's own addition to the composition. Elizabeth's face is not an individualised portrait, and the miniature probably pre-dates Oliver's personal encounter with the queen.

National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased with support from Mark Weiss and the Portrait Fund, 2012

Isaac Oliver

Elizabeth I, c.1589

Oliver's miniature portrait of Elizabeth contrasts strikingly with the portraits that Hilliard was making at the same time. Subtle details in this image of the ageing queen, such as the crease in her forehead, indicate that it was painted from life. It was probably deliberately left unfinished, as a demonstration piece or a pattern for further portraits. It appears to have been used as the pattern for prints of Elizabeth by William Rogers (1589) and Crispijn de Passe the Elder (1592). Elizabeth's response to this portrait is unrecorded, but it does not appear to have been popular.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Purchased with funds from the R. H. Stephenson Bequest

Attributed to **Isaac Oliver**

Elizabeth I, c.1603

This exceptional drawing was produced as the basis for the engraving displayed alongside. Oliver seems to have been commissioned to make it shortly after the queen's death, by the publisher Hans Woutneel, a neighbour of his in the immigrant community in Blackfriars.

The figure is based on the 'Ditchley' oil portrait of the queen by Oliver's brother-in-law Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger; the face is based on idealised late portraits of the queen. At a time when drawings were not usually kept, the survival of this one reflects a growing recognition of Oliver's great skill.

Pen and brown wash and black ink with grey wash on paper, indented for transfer

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Crispijn de Passe the Elder, after Isaac Oliver

Elizabeth I, c.1603

This engraving is the finest printed portrait of Elizabeth I. It was the culmination of a partnership between Oliver, the Flemish bookseller and publisher Hans Woutneel, and the Dutch engraver Crispijn de Passe the Elder. The queen's death provided a commercial opportunity for a high-quality commemorative print. Woutneel sent Oliver's precise and detailed drawing to de Passe, who was a Protestant refugee in Cologne at the time. De Passe transferred Oliver's design onto an engraving plate, adding details in the background and inscriptions. Prints were then made from the plate, and shipped back to England for sale.

Engraving

On loan from The British Museum, London

Nicholas Hilliard and others

Founding Charter of Emmanuel College,
Cambridge: 'The Mildmay Charter',
1583–4

One of Hilliard's roles was to provide portraits for legal documents such as this charter. This is a much more collaborative work than Hilliard's miniatures. Only the head of Elizabeth is likely to be by Hilliard himself, although he probably designed the whole figure of the queen, and perhaps other parts of the charter as well. The queen is shown fully from the front, as in other portraits of her for legal contexts, such as seal designs. This document illustrates the close relationship in Hilliard's work between portraiture and text, and the roots of miniature painting in manuscript illumination.

Watercolour and bodycolour with silver and gold on vellum, with cord and wax seal

The Master and Fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Hilliard at Court

After Hilliard's return from France in 1578, he quickly picked up new patrons, and the 1580s and 1590s were his most productive years. Miniatures by Hilliard became a fashionable part of court life, and many survive from this period, mostly oval in shape. Hilliard's technique for painting faces became more economical and graphic, conjuring beauty and character with the minimum number of well-placed, delicate strokes of the brush. The emphasis on rich jewels, spectacular lace and textiles, often with the addition of fresh flowers pinned to a woman's hair or dress, reflects the elaborate fashions and ostentatious display characteristic of the time.

During this period, Hilliard trained a number of apprentices and assistants. Most of their work is now unknown, but among them was Isaac Oliver. Competition from Oliver, particularly in the 1590s, was probably a stimulus to innovation on Hilliard's part. He began experimenting with full-length portraits, at first on pieces of vellum of a similar size to his head-and-shoulders images. The minute scale of these works seems to have been a frustration and he soon developed a larger-scale format for such works. These would have been framed and hung in intimate 'cabinet rooms' which were becoming popular in large houses.

Nicholas Hilliard

Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke ,
c.1585–90

Mary Sidney (1561–1621) was one of the first significant women writers in English and an important literary patron. She wrote poetry and made translations, completed writing left by her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, at his early death, and supervised the publication of his works. The circular shape of this miniature is unusual for the date, and may perhaps suggest that it was made to form a pair with an earlier one.

National Portrait Gallery, London. Accepted in lieu of tax by H.M. Government and allocated to the Gallery, 1988

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman with a Jewelled Hat, c.1585

The Portland Collection

Unknown Woman in Bed, c.1615

This miniature is unique in Hilliard's oeuvre, showing a high-ranking woman reclining in bed, holding a small book, perhaps a prayer book. It may record the 'lying-in' period associated with pregnancy and childbirth at the time.

The Portland Collection

Unknown Woman with a Cherry, c.1595

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. With money bequeathed by Mrs Coppinger Prichard in memory of her father, Thomas Waraker, LL.D., and with a grant from the Art Fund.

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman with a Thistle,
c.1593–5

The Buccleuch Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman Standing
in a Room, c.1589

It has been suggested that this is Lady Penelope Rich, the inspiration for Sir Philip Sidney's poem 'Astrophil and Stella'.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Nicholas Hilliard

Sir Christopher Hatton, 1588–91

Sir Christopher Hatton (1540–91) was an important courtier and favourite of Elizabeth I. He was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1587 and made a Knight of the Garter in 1588. This miniature may commemorate these two honours; the seal bag and mace of office are on the table, and he wears the collar and garter of the order prominently.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Bequeathed by George Salting

Nicholas Hilliard

Sir Walter Raleigh, c.1585

A soldier, sailor, explorer, scholar, poet and favourite of Elizabeth I, Raleigh (1554–1618) is probably the most famous Elizabethan courtier. At the period when this miniature was painted, he was at the height of favour. The queen nicknamed him 'Water' and lavished rewards on him; he wrote her skilful and much-admired poetry, which was circulated at court. However, his behaviour was frequently rash and politically naive, he made enemies and was eventually executed by James I for disobeying orders during an ill-advised voyage to find El Dorado.

National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased with help from the Art Fund and the Pilgrim Trust, 1959

Nicholas Hilliard

Sir Francis Drake, 1581

Drake (1540–96) is one of the great heroes of English naval history, renowned for his circumnavigation of the globe and for his part in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. However, recent scholarship has also highlighted his extreme ruthlessness and active participation in the early slave trade. Drake completed his three-year circumnavigation in September 1580, loaded with an almost unimaginable amount of mainly Spanish treasure. Elizabeth knighted Drake in spring 1581, and it was probably in this context that Hilliard painted this portrait.

National Portrait Gallery, London. Purchased with help from the Wolfson Foundation and H.M. Government, 1971

Nicholas Hilliard

Sir Thomas Bodley, 1598

Sir Thomas Bodley (1545–1613), scholar and diplomat, was known to Hilliard from childhood. Bodley's family were wealthy Protestant citizens of Exeter, and during the reign of the Catholic Mary I, they had lived as exiles on the continent for four years, accompanied by the young Nicholas Hilliard. This miniature may commemorate Bodley's retirement from public office and the foundation of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, work on which began in 1598. The lidded ivory box in which it is kept may, unusually, be the original.

The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (LP 73)
Given to Oxford University in 1897 by Canon H.N. Ellacombe

Nicholas Hilliard

George Clifford,
3rd Earl of Northumberland, c.1590

George Clifford (1558–1605) was appointed Queen's Champion for the Accession Day Tilt in November 1590; this miniature probably commemorates that appointment. The Tilt, part sport and part theatre, was an annual jousting tournament. Elizabeth's male courtiers competed for her honour through a combination of witty symbolic devices and jousting prowess. Each knight had to present a pasteboard shield decorated with an *impresa*, a combination of word and image symbolising a recent event or his personal philosophy. Cumberland's *impresa*, probably representing an eclipse, alludes to his loyalty to the queen.

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London,
Caird Collection

Symbols and Secrets

The Elizabethans and Jacobeans were fascinated by the use of symbols. Many aspects of English court culture, from masques and tournaments to portraits of the monarch, incorporated symbolic references. Miniatures, associated with the elite and designed to be seen only by a chosen few, were ideal vehicles for such imagery. This could range from general and widely accessible symbols, such as the use of flames to denote burning passion, to the deliberately arcane and obscure.

One particularly popular type of symbol was the *impresa*, a device of Italian origin, which combined an image and a motto to express a meaning personal to its owner. *Imprese* gained popularity in England from the 1580s. They could incorporate a pun on the owner's name or heraldry, or a reference to some recent event. While some *impresa* can be interpreted with confidence, their personal nature makes them especially difficult to decipher when the identity of sitters has been lost. They were often intended to be intelligible only to close friends, and so were particularly well suited to the private nature of miniatures. Although Oliver did paint some symbolic miniatures, Hilliard was more comfortable in this world of inscriptions and artifice.

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Young Man against a Background of Flames, c.1600

This is one of the most evocative of all Elizabethan miniatures and its symbolism is clear. The flames refer to burning, passionate love. The man, dressed only in his undone shirt, holds a jewel. This is perhaps a miniature case containing an image of his love, who was presumably the intended recipient of this portrait. Hilliard has highlighted the flames with powdered gold, so that when the miniature is held and turned in the hand they give the impression of flickering.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Purchased with the assistance of the Murray Bequest

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Man Clasping a Hand from a Cloud, 1588

In this intriguing miniature the sitter is himself part of an *impresa*, clasping a hand emerging from a cloud. The meaning is mysterious but it may refer to faithful love. The motto, which can be translated 'Because of Athenian love' may imply male homosexual love, which was associated with ancient Greece. Devoted male friendships were encouraged in Elizabethan society, but homosexual practices were punishable by death. The miniature perhaps provided a private context for the celebration of such love.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Man, 1616

The symbolism of this miniature lies mainly in the French motto around the sitter's head. It can be translated 'still one [star or sun] shines for me' or 'another [star or sun] shines for me'. The star or sun is indicated by a pictogram. The man pulls on the strings of his shirt, perhaps a way of ensuring that his wrist, onto which a ring is tied, is visible. The meaning is now obscure, as the identity of the man and the context of the miniature are lost.

The Portland Collection

Beyond the Court

During the lifetimes of Hilliard and Oliver, the middle classes grew greatly in prosperity and number. This led to a rise in demand for precious objects that until then were almost exclusively associated with the landed aristocracy and the court. The commissioning of portrait miniatures became increasingly popular among wealthy middle-class patrons, and they were more likely to pay their bills than courtiers. These sitters were the artists' social peers, sometimes their friends or family. Although their miniatures are often simpler in conception than court portraits, among them are some of the most powerful works of the period.

It can be difficult to identify individuals as middle class simply by their appearance in portraits. Middle-class men and courtiers often appear to be wearing similarly expensive black doublets and fine linen ruffs. Middle-class women, on the other hand, are usually more easily distinguished, wearing dark-coloured and modestly constructed garments with simpler jewellery than their aristocratic counterparts. Their heads are usually covered with a white cap and often a hat. The preservation of class distinction in dress reflects a wider tension at the time between social and financial aspirations, and a concern for what was proper and seemly for one's station in life.

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman with a Lace Cap, 1578?

Although Hilliard managed to secure prestigious court patronage right at the beginning of his career, throughout his life he also painted miniatures of middle-class sitters. This woman is, typically for someone of her status, dressed in just black and white, although the textiles are expensive and she wears a gold necklace. Although the date written on this miniature is 1573, the last digit has been changed and a date of 1578 is more likely to be correct.

The Portland Collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman, 1587

This is Oliver's earliest-known dated portrait miniature. The identity of the sitter is unknown, although her relatively simple costume, lack of jewellery and tall hat indicate that she is from the middle classes. The unusual three-quarter-length composition of this miniature derives from prints by Hendrik Goltzius, the most influential continental printmaker of his day. It appears to have been an experiment by Oliver, which he is only known to have repeated in one other miniature, a self-portrait.

The Buccleuch Collection

Attributed to **Isaac Oliver**

Unknown Man, 1588

This is one of a group of miniatures dated 1588, the second year of Oliver's known career as a miniaturist. We cannot be certain of the man's social status, but until the early 1590s, Oliver seems to have been establishing his reputation mainly through portraits of wealthy merchants and members of the immigrant community in which he lived. The miniature's authorship has been debated, and it seems likely that if not actually by Oliver himself, it was produced by an otherwise unknown close associate with whom he was working in that year.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Bequeathed; 1937 by Leonard Daneham Cunliffe

Nicholas Hilliard

Leonard Darr, 1591

This miniature is exceptional not just in quality and condition, but also in including the name of the sitter. Leonard Darr (c.1554–1615) was a merchant of Totnes, Devon, later serving as mayor and as a Member of Parliament for the town. The miniature may perhaps have been a gift connected with his civic ambitions. As both Darr and Hilliard were from the county, it could be that they were introduced through mutual Devon connections.

The Portland Collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman Wearing a Hat, c.1590–5

The sitter in this beautiful and extremely well-preserved miniature is clearly a very wealthy middle-class woman, with her necklace of diamonds and pearls. The remarkable impression of softness in the modelling of her face and hair is created by stippling in different shades of red, brown and grey. It recalls paintings by Italian renaissance artists such as Correggio, whose works Oliver could have seen while he was in Italy in 1596.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Woman, 1602

While the woman in this miniature is clearly middle class, the Latin motto echoes the use of *imprese* on courtier portraits, but does not seem as mysterious in its intention. It can be translated as 'she appears and truly is', meaning that she appears beautiful and truly is beautiful, inside and out. The fresh flowers on her dress, characteristic of most of Hilliard's female portraits, reinforce the message of youth and beauty.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Bequeathed by Mrs Doris Herschorn

Portraits of Children

With the exception of princes and princesses, there are very few miniatures of children from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. At this time, children were rarely depicted on their own in any medium. There were probably very particular contexts for the handful of surviving miniatures: they may have been members of the artist's family, or children of close friends or very important patrons. Drawings of children, indeed portrait drawings of any kind from this period in England, are even rarer.

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Girls aged 5 and 4, 1590

These two miniatures were obviously produced as a pair, and probably show sisters, perhaps daughters of prosperous friends or acquaintances of Oliver's among the immigrant community in which he lived. Although they are dressed identically, Oliver has responded to them as individuals, showing one slightly smiling, while the other looks more solemn. The older girl holds a pink, or carnation, and the younger girl a fruit, probably an apple. Both items were sometimes shown in the hands of the Christ Child in paintings, and they may possibly have some religious significance here. However, without knowing the identity of the girls or the original context of these portraits, the specific meaning is now lost.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Bequeathed by George Salting

Nicholas Hilliard

Unknown Girl aged 10, 1609

This very beautiful, little-known miniature depicts a child of very high status, with expensive jewellery, a richly-coloured silk dress and a very fashionable hairstyle. The 'NH' monogram is exceptional; the only other surviving miniatures to be signed by Hilliard in this way depict members of his own family. However, given the girl's dress and jewellery, this cannot be one of Hilliard's children, but must be the daughter of one of his most important court patrons. The 'NH' may perhaps be a specific addition at the patron's request, reflecting Hilliard's outstanding reputation.

Private Collection

Attributed to **Isaac Oliver**

Portrait of a Boy, c.1590–1600

This is the only known portrait drawing associated with Oliver, and one of a very few surviving English portrait drawings of this period. There is very little that can be said about it with certainty. Oliver's name has been written on it at a later date, but it is difficult to think of any other artist in England in this period who could draw with this skill. It was at one time thought to represent Henry, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of James I, but the boy does not resemble securely identified portraits of the prince. It seems most likely to be a portrait of a close relative of the artist.

Red and black chalk, tallow watercolour
and black ink

The Buccleuch Collection

Oliver's Early Court Patrons

For the first decade of Oliver's career, his sitters seem to have been mainly from the middle classes, but this was to change with the patronage of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth's last great favourite. Oliver painted Essex, his friend the 3rd Earl of Southampton, and others in their circle including Southampton's cousins, the Browne brothers. Essex's patronage of Oliver forms an interesting parallel with the Earl of Leicester's patronage of Hilliard. The artist's association with the rising man at court must have opened new doors for him. At the same time, Essex's choice of the younger artist to promote his image marked him out as a progressive patron.

Although he was just as capable as Hilliard of depicting an elaborately dressed courtier bedecked in jewels, on the whole Oliver's focus seems to have been the individuality of his sitter's faces. However, as well as producing portraits from sittings, he made replicas of his portraits of important sitters. He would have kept patterns in the studio for this purpose. Such miniatures could be distributed to supporters or commissioned by admirers, and worn visibly to advertise loyalty or hidden to conceal allegiance.

Isaac Oliver

Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex,
c.1596

One of the most famous of all Elizabethan courtiers, Robert Devereux (1565–1601) was Elizabeth I's great favourite in the last years of her reign. His career was marked by a series of notable military successes and catastrophic failures. He was hugely ambitious and, in 1601, led a rebellion, which failed and resulted in his execution. There are more miniatures of Essex by Oliver than of any other non-royal sitter. They all relate to one sitting, probably shortly after a military triumph in 1596.

National Portrait Gallery, London

Isaac Oliver

Henry Wriothesley,
3rd Earl of Southampton, c.1596

Henry Wriothesley (1573–1624) was one of the most glamorous and well-connected young men in Elizabeth's court during her later years, and the dedicatee of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*. He was a close friend and ally of Robert Devereux and was drawn into the rebellion of 1601. Condemned to life imprisonment, he was released by James I. This miniature, painted at the height of his popularity, was probably deliberately left unfinished and intended as a studio pattern for the production of further miniatures.

Private collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Man, c.1595–1600

Nothing is known about this sitter, although his elaborately slashed satin doublet and lace-edged ruff suggest that he was wealthy. This is one of Oliver's most searching and characterful portraits.

The Portland Collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman with a Heart Jewel in her Hair, c.1600

There are relatively few surviving miniatures by Oliver of court women from the Elizabethan period, and it seems that Hilliard was a more popular choice in these circles at this time. This miniature reveals, however, that Oliver could also produce a decorative image of a glamorous young woman. The use of a dark grey background brings out the silvery-grey tones of the sitter's dress and jewellery, and contrasts with her bright, golden hair.

The Buccleuch Collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman in Mourning, c.1600

The sitter in this miniature is shown in mourning dress including a 'widow's peak' headdress; she is probably mourning her husband. The Latin inscription can be translated 'Unfortunate beholder', suggesting that he who views her portrait will be unfortunate as his heart will be lost. The woman's slight smile seems to reinforce this impression. The conflicting messages of loss and allurements are characteristic of the use of miniatures in courtly games of inaccessibility and availability, of outward decorum and secret impropriety.

The Buccleuch Collection

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman in Mourning, c.1615

By contrast with the woman displayed alongside, this sitter has a mournful expression. She wears a locket, presumably containing a miniature of her deceased husband. The locket's red enamelling, which is now damaged, matches that of the locket in which the widow's portrait is set. Because they could be concealed beneath a lid or revealed and viewed, miniatures lent themselves perfectly to the simultaneously public and private expressions of emotion that were characteristic of court life.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Purchased with funds from the Captain H B Murray Bequest

Isaac Oliver

The Browne Brothers, 1598

This miniature is one of the most ambitious and original of all Oliver's portraits. Family group portraits were unusual in this period, the poses invariably stiff and awkward. Oliver's composition reflects his knowledge of continental art, deriving from a French print and from depictions of the Three Graces. The miniature evokes the brothers' affection as well as depicting the elegant room and costly clothes with technical brilliance. The Browne family were devout Catholics, but loyal to the Protestant Elizabeth I. From left to right, they are John; Anthony Maria, 2nd Viscount Montague; and William. The Latin motto can be translated as 'The character is similar to the appearance'. The identity of the man at the far right is unknown.

The Burghley House Collection

Oliver at the Court of James I

Oliver's patronage by the Earl of Essex and his circle put him in a good position to pick up new patrons when James VI of Scotland ascended the English throne as James I in 1603. Essex had been a supporter of James, and the new king brought with him powerful new courtiers seeking to make a mark at the English court. Among the women at court, Oliver's most important patron was Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford. There are more miniatures of her by Oliver than of any other female courtier. Many of Oliver's later portraits of women feature revealing dresses, with loose hair, and sometimes a mantle sweeping over one shoulder, fashions that reflect the popularity of the entertainments known as masques.

Oliver's early miniatures had been highly worked portraits, strongly shadowed and inscribed around the edge like Hilliard's. In these later works he largely abandoned inscriptions and increasingly used coloured stipple to build up volume and shape, creating strikingly soft effects. He also experimented with different coloured backgrounds. Throughout his career, however, he suited his style to his sitter, producing a notably diverse range of works.

Isaac Oliver

Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox,
later Duke of Richmond, c.1603

Ludovick Stuart (1574–1624) was a relation of King James, and the only non-royal duke in Britain at the time of James's accession to the English throne. He was installed as a Knight of the Garter in 1603, and his portrait by Oliver perhaps celebrates this honour. The confidence and precision with which this miniature is painted exemplify Oliver's mature style. Under magnification, the beard, hair and face can be seen to be entirely modelled with layers of tiny curling lines in different shades of brown.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Bequeathed 1937 by Leonard Daneham Cunliffe

Isaac Oliver, and studio

Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox,
later Duke of Richmond, c.1603

This version of Oliver's miniature of Ludovick Stuart belonged to his third wife, Frances (née Howard). Its distinctive heart shape echoes the badge of the Lennox family. During her widowhood, the Duchess treasured it as a memorial of her husband, and she was depicted wearing it over her heart in a number of paintings.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Isaac Oliver

John Donne, 1616

John Donne (1572–1631) was one of the most original and admired poets of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period, and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. Donne commissioned a range of extraordinary images of himself, and he clearly valued the distinctive skill of the great miniaturists of his age. He wrote about Hilliard in his poem 'The Storme', but the only known miniature of him is this sober but penetrating image by Oliver.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford,
1610–15

Lucy Harington was a Lady of the Bedchamber to Anne of Denmark, and one of the most notable patrons of literature and art at the Jacobean court. Her friends included John Donne, who dedicated poems to her. The 3rd Earl of Bedford, Harington's husband, was a political ally of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex. Like Essex, she was painted many times by Oliver; most of her miniatures are repetitions of this type, which may show her dressed for performance in a masque.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford,
c.1615

This striking and unusually large miniature appears to be of Lucy Harington, Oliver's most important non-royal female patron. The swirling veil and pose give the miniature a sense of movement and theatre, now diminished by damage to the background and blackening of the silver highlights. In its pristine state, it would have been spectacular, the shimmering, misty veil contrasting strikingly with areas of richly coloured embroidery.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. With money bequeathed by Mrs Coppinger Prichard in memory of her father, Thomas Waraker, LL.D., and with a grant from the Art Fund.

Isaac Oliver

A Young Woman, probably
Venetia Stanley, later Lady Digby, c.1615

Venetia Stanley was one of the most famous 'beauties' of her day, also known for the romance and drama of her relationship with Sir Kenelm Digby. The striking, full-face depiction is unusual, both in Oliver's oeuvre and in portraiture generally, in this period. The loose hair flowing over her low-cut embroidered bodice and the red spangled mantle tied over her shoulder are features of costume inspired by court masques.

Sherborne Castle, Dorset

Love, Landscape and Melancholy

From the late 1580s, both Hilliard and Oliver, like other artists of their day, produced a number of portraits of men listlessly leaning, sitting or reclining in gardens, or in wilder landscapes. Common poses included the head resting on one hand or the arms crossed. These images would have been read by their contemporaries as depictions of the fashionable 'complaint' of Melancholy.

Melancholy could simply be sadness or involve more complex associations. Medical theory at the time held that four 'humours' – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – determined the health, behaviour and character of all humans. The dominance of one humour over the others was believed to create certain physical, emotional and intellectual conditions. Melancholy was thought to be the result of too much black bile. It was associated with intellectual effort and, particularly, philosophical thought, but also with disappointed love.

The natural or cultivated landscape provided a context in which the melancholic individual could find solitude and quiet in which to indulge in reflection. The development of larger-format 'cabinet miniatures' at this time perfectly suited the depiction of Melancholy and gave both Hilliard and Oliver the opportunity to create more complex and evocative settings.

Isaac Oliver

Young Man Seated under a Tree, 1590–5

This is the earliest of Oliver's larger-scale portrait miniatures. The man's pose, leaning against a tree in a landscape, arms crossed, suggests melancholy: in this case, perhaps brought on by disappointed love. The single, discarded glove may well have a symbolic meaning; gloves sometimes had erotic associations at this time. The couple walking in the background may also be part of the story – perhaps the sitter's lover has abandoned him for someone else. The composition is remarkable for Oliver's confident handling of linear perspective – a very rare skill in English art at this time.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Nicholas Hilliard

Young Man among Roses, c.1587

This is probably the earliest of Hilliard's larger-scale 'cabinet' miniatures. The symbolism of the roses, combining beautiful flowers and sharp thorns, and the Latin motto, suggest that its subject is the pain associated with loyalty to someone who has fallen from favour. It has been suggested that the miniature depicts the young Earl of Essex pining for the loss of the queen's favour, but the context of the poem from which the motto is taken suggests a political affiliation gone wrong. The elegant, elongated pose relates to paintings Hilliard may have seen in France.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Bequeathed by George Salting

Nicholas Hilliard

Henry Percy,
9th Earl of Northumberland, 1590–3

In one of Hilliard's largest and most ambitious miniatures, Henry Percy (1564–1632), a patron of scientists and mathematicians, is depicted in an attitude of scholarly melancholy. He lies in a strangely geometrical garden, a book beside him and a cannon ball and a feather in equilibrium in the background. The exact meaning of this work is lost, and its ambition outstrips its execution. Hilliard is not at ease with the aerial view or linear perspective, and the large, blank areas provide no opportunity for his precise and evocative delineation of intricate details.

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam RP-T-1981-2

Purchased with the support of the Rijksmuseum-Stichting

Isaac Oliver

Sir Edward Herbert, later
1st Baron Herbert of Cherbury, 1610–14

Edward Herbert (1582?–1648) was a soldier, poet, philosopher and diplomat. He is shown here simultaneously as a melancholic philosopher and a chivalric knight. He lies in a typical melancholic pose, but behind him, elaborate tournament armour is hung on a tree and he wears a tournament shield decorated with a symbolic *impresa*. He may be contemplating the competing demands of philosophy and chivalry. As he records in his autobiography, Herbert was a popular and dashing young man at court at this time, and he commissioned a number of portraits of himself, of which this is the most complex and introspective.

National Trust Collections, Powis Castle, The Powis Collection. Acquired by private treaty sale with the help of grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury and a bequest from Winifred Hooper, in 2016

Masques

In the Jacobean period, the love of symbolism that the Elizabethans had conveyed through tournaments and visual imagery – including miniatures – found increasingly important expression in masques.

These were hugely expensive and elaborate court entertainments involving music, dance, poetry and sometimes prose. They were performed by courtiers and members of the royal family. Some took place in the Inns of Court and at courtiers' homes, but the most spectacular were staged at royal palaces, and involved magnificent costumes and sets. Their ultimate aim was always the glorification of the monarch, and their texts and visual effects were intended to convey the virtue, power and honour of James I and his family.

Queen Anne was an especially important patron of, and participant in, masques. Prince Henry, her eldest son, also commissioned them. The most important cultural figures of the day were employed to create these extraordinary events, including the playwright Ben Jonson and the designer and architect Inigo Jones. Isaac Oliver, with his close connections to Queen Anne, was evidently commissioned to make a number of permanent mementos of these otherwise ephemeral occasions, recording participants' extraordinary appearances at a key moment in their court careers.

Isaac Oliver

Henry, Prince of Wales, c.1610

It is possible that this portrait relates to Prince Henry's role in *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610), an indoor martial display, or the masque *Oberon* (1611). He is presented in the manner of an ancient Roman emperor, wearing a Jacobean idea of classical armour, draped in a richly embroidered red cloak. The profile portrait recalls the portraiture on Roman medals. Oliver also used this profile portrait of the prince as the basis for a drawing of him exercising with a pike, now lost, which belonged to Charles I.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. With money bequeathed by Mrs Coppinger Prichard in memory of her father Thomas Waraker, LL.D., and with a grant from the Art Fund.

Isaac Oliver

Anne of Denmark in Masque Costume, c.1610

Queen Anne was the most significant patron of masques at the Jacobean court, commissioning and performing in six of them between 1604 and 1611. These lavish events, derived ultimately from Italian court entertainments, enabled the queen to indulge her love of fine clothes and jewellery, her passion for music and dancing, and her interest in Italian culture. The motto, in Italian, can be translated as 'I serve by reigning'. The dark marks on her face are discoloured retouching.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman in Masque Costume, perhaps as 'Flora', c.1605

The character played by this woman has been identified as Flora, the Roman goddess of spring and flowers, on the basis of her headdress. However, she may represent some other allegorical character. The revealing nature of the dress seems to have been characteristic of masques, in which the normal expectations of decorum were, to an extent, suspended. The audience of such masques was an elite group of nobles and royalty. An even more limited group of viewers would have had access to this intimate image.

SK-A-4347 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Woman in Masque Costume, 1609

The elaborate character of this woman's dress and hair decoration indicates that she is dressed for a court entertainment and probably represents an allegorical character. The costume does not correspond exactly with any of the surviving designs by Inigo Jones for royal masques, but it may have been adapted. It reflects the extraordinary inventiveness and expense that went into the creation of masques. It most closely resembles the dress of Catherine Somerset, Lady Windsor, in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*, performed in February 1609.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Presented by The Art Fund

Royal Portraiture: The Stuarts

The accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne on the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 marked the beginning of a new ruling dynasty and new possibilities for portraiture. From early in his reign, King James I of England required portraits for various internal political and external diplomatic purposes. Miniatures were given as gifts during the peace negotiations with Spain in 1604 and were also distributed to loyal courtiers, both old and new. Unlike Elizabeth, James seems regularly to have paid both for miniatures and for their jewelled cases, sometimes apparently made by Hilliard, although very few original cases survive.

The presence of a queen consort and three royal children was also a stimulus to portrait production. While James patronised 'our well-beloved servant Nicholas Hillyard', in 1605 the more artistically adventurous queen consort Anne of Denmark appointed Isaac Oliver her 'Painter for the art of limning' for the same salary as Hilliard, £40 a year. Anne had family connections with many European courts, and her contacts expanded as marriage negotiations progressed on behalf of her three children, Henry, Prince of Wales, Princess Elizabeth and Charles, Duke of York. Both artists were commissioned to paint the royal children, and produced very different portraits.

Top Row

Nicholas Hilliard

James VI of Scotland and I of England,
1603–8

James VI of Scotland (1566–1625) was the only child of Mary, Queen of Scots and the first cousin twice removed of Elizabeth I. He acceded to the English throne as James I in 1603 and retained Hilliard in his position as court limner. Hilliard's miniatures of James fall into three basic types. This is an example of the earliest type, when the king was aged around forty.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Anne of Denmark, c.1605

After 1603, there was a high demand for portraits of Anne (1574–1619) for newly favoured courtiers and as gifts for foreign rulers. This is the earliest known miniature of her by Oliver. She holds her right hand to her breast, in a gesture that emphasises the personal, intimate nature of the miniature as a gift. It was to become standard in miniatures of her.

Waddesdon (National Trust). Accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to the National Trust for display at Waddesdon Manor, 1990

Bottom Row

Nicholas Hilliard

James VI of Scotland
and I of England, 1609–14

This work belongs to the second of the three portrait types that Hilliard produced of the king. James is presented without a hat and closer to the picture plane than in the earlier portraits. Another innovation is the use of a red curtain background, which became Hilliard's preferred background for his Stuart portraits.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Anne of Denmark, c.1612

Most of Oliver's miniatures of Anne show her in the same pose, but his response to her changing appearance – costume, hairstyle and the contours of her face – suggests that she sat for him repeatedly. Anne wears various jewels, including, just below her hand, a locket probably containing a miniature. Both Hilliard and Oliver sometimes depicted miniatures within miniatures, thus emphasising the reciprocity of miniature giving and wearing.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Purchased with help from the Art Fund, 1957

Nicholas Hilliard

Henry, Prince of Wales, 1607

Prince Henry (1594–1612) was the eldest son of James I and Anne of Denmark. The widely held view of Henry as an ideal Renaissance prince meant that his sudden death from typhoid fever, aged only eighteen, was a profound blow to national hopes. This miniature shows Henry in a suit of French armour, and celebrates his youthful martial valour and future promise as a warrior-king. This miniature and a smaller variant are the only known miniatures of Prince Henry by Hilliard.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Isaac Oliver

Henry, Prince of Wales, 1610–12

This is Isaac Oliver's largest and most magnificent royal portrait. It dates from the period when Henry was head of his own household, with expanded opportunities to exercise cultural patronage. After 1610, he never again sat to Nicholas Hilliard, choosing instead to be painted by Oliver. Oliver painted many smaller-scale, oval versions of this portrait. This miniature was a treasured possession of Prince Charles, later King Charles I, after his older brother's death.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Nicholas Hilliard

Princess Elizabeth, later Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia, 1605–8

Elizabeth (1596–1662), James and Anne's only surviving daughter, was seen as a great royal asset: beautiful, charming and eminently marriageable. A number of portraits of her as a child survive, some painted for potential foreign suitors, others as gifts for her family, who saw her infrequently during her childhood, as she was brought up away from court until the age of twelve. This is one of Hilliard's most skilfully executed miniatures of a member of the Stuart royal family.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Isaac Oliver

Princess Elizabeth, later Electress
Palatine and Queen of Bohemia, 1605–8

This miniature seems to have always been in the British royal family and may have been painted for Anne or Henry, Prince of Wales. It probably dates from around the same time as Hilliard's miniature of the princess. Oliver's stronger and more nuanced modelling of the face means that although both miniatures are faded, Oliver's presents a greater illusion of reality, and a stronger sense of the princess's individuality.

Lent by Her Majesty The Queen

Nicholas Hilliard

Charles I as Duke of York, c.1611

Prince Charles (1600–49) was the second son of James and Anne. He ascended the throne as Charles I in 1625. The present portrait, which has never before been exhibited, is the second of three by Hilliard. Like his brother and sister, Charles was brought up as a child away from court. Miniatures were made of the prince for his family, for courtiers and for the purpose of marriage negotiations.

Djanogly Collection

Isaac Oliver

Charles I as Duke of York, c.1611

Prince Charles continued the royal patronage of Isaac Oliver established by his mother Anne and brother Henry. After about 1613, all the prince's miniatures were by Oliver until the artist's death. This unfinished portrait has long been identified as Prince Charles. However, early portraits of Prince Charles and Prince Henry have frequently been confused, and it is possible that this portrait actually represents Henry, around 1605.

The Portland Collection

Nicholas Hilliard

'Peace with Spain' medal, 1604

This is the only medal securely linked to Hilliard by documentary evidence. The medal was struck to commemorate the end of nineteen years of war with Spain in 1604. The portrait of the king translates the pattern used in Hilliard's earliest miniatures of him into the medium of gold. The reverse shows allegorical female figures of Peace, to the left, and Religion, to the right. The medal was made with a loop so that it could be presented as a mark of the king's favour and worn as a badge of allegiance. Only twelve gold examples were struck, for the most favoured courtiers, while less costly examples were cast in silver and bronze.

Gold medal

On loan from The British Museum, London

An artist in the studio of **Nicholas Hilliard**

Anne of Denmark, c.1610

This miniature is, exceptionally, still in the lavish jewelled case, known as the Eglinton Jewel, which was made for it in 1610. Its preservation illustrates the way in which royal miniatures were sometimes treated almost as religious relics and preserved intact. George Heriot (1563–1624) was a royal goldsmith from Edinburgh who followed the court to England. On a background of red enamel, diamonds form two letters S, probably for 'Sophia', Anne's mother, two linked letters C and, in the centre, Anne of Denmark's personal cipher 'CAR'. The 'C' was for her brother Christian IV of Denmark and the 'AR' for 'Anna Regina'. The miniature, probably by a pupil of Hilliard rather than the artist himself, is based on Oliver's depictions of Anne. There is no secure evidence that Anne ever had a sitting with Hilliard.

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. Bequeathed; 1937 by Leonard Daneham Cunliffe

Oliver: Beyond the Portrait Miniature

Throughout his career, Isaac Oliver produced images other than portrait miniatures. His earliest work may be a drawing, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. More drawings followed, in a variety of media, of subjects from mythology or the Bible. Some of these seem to have been studies for cabinet miniatures. Others were perhaps exercises or intended as finished artworks in their own right, although the collecting of drawings in England was still rare. Oliver also produced images that combined his skills as a portrait miniaturist with other subjects, such as depictions of Christ and the goddess Diana.

All these works reflect Oliver's knowledge of, and interest in, continental art practice, making him exceptional among his contemporaries in England. The fact that they survive today is testament to the high regard in which they have always been held. By contrast, Hilliard is known to have produced one scene from the Bible, a depiction of the *Wise and Foolish Virgins*, which was given as a gift to Elizabeth I in 1584, but it does not survive, and no other such works by him are currently known.

Isaac Oliver

An Allegory, 1590–95

This cabinet miniature appears to be an allegory of virtuous and immoral love. On the left, a soberly dressed group of middle-class women, accompanied by a man, walk through woodland. To the right, richly and colourfully dressed women, probably prostitutes, are gathered around a reclining man. Behind these figures a number of other couples embrace in the woodland, and three different types of hunting are taking place: hawking, boar-hunting and shooting ducks. The miniature displays Oliver's extraordinary skill, at a relatively early stage in his career, in creating a complex, crowded scene, convincing spatial recession and a sense of movement.

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

Isaac Oliver

Unknown Penitent Young Man, c.1595–1610

One of the most unusual works in Oliver's oeuvre, the subject of this miniature has been a matter of conjecture and debate since its earliest record. It has variously been identified as a portrait of a melancholy young man, or a depiction of St John the Apostle, the Prodigal Son or St Sebastian. The lack of clothing, intense gesture and facial expression are more suggestive of the religious imagery of the period than of secular portraiture. Although mysterious, it remains an outstanding example of Oliver's experimental and unconventional art.

The Portland Collection

Isaac Oliver

Jesus Christ, c.1610–15

While the prevailing taste in paintings in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean society was for portraits, there were knowledgeable collectors, including Protestants, who valued religious art. The technique of this miniature is the culmination of Oliver's experiments with stippling. The modelling of the head is executed entirely in stipple of different colours, with no lines at all. The effect produced is one of profound softness, imitating and yet exceeding that in works by Italian Renaissance artists such as Correggio and Federico Barocci, evidently with the intention of creating a profoundly spiritual effect.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Isaac Oliver

Diana, 1615

Oliver was experimental throughout his career; this is a late example of such experimentation. Depicting the goddess Diana (identified by the crescent moon in her hair), it is not strictly a miniature, as the support is fine linen cambric rather than vellum. The opaque bodycolour is blended and applied in a broad, painterly fashion, very unlike its use in Oliver's portrait miniatures, with no stippling, minimal hatching and only a tiny amount of transparent colour in the nostrils and line of the mouth.

Watercolour and bodycolour with gold on sized cambric, laid down on a thin panel of limewood

Victoria and Albert Museum, London;
Purchased with funds from the R. H. Stephenson Bequest

