Miniature portrait - portarit of an uknown young lady

Metalwork Collection

Accession Nr.:	51.32.1
Artist/Maker:	Cior, Pierre Charles (1769 - 1838) / painter
Date of production:	late 18th century
Place of production:	Great-Britain (presumably)
Materials:	gilt bronze frame; ivory
Techniques:	watercolour
Dimensions:	diameter: 10,4 cm diameter: 7,6 cm height: 13 cm

The earliest known miniature painted on ivory is the portrait of Dorothea Ursula von Württemberg from 1577. At that time, it was an exceptional piece of artwork – after the 17th century experiments it became widespread only in the 18th century.
The ivory board offers unique technical opportunities. Its delicate transparency makes the realistic presentation of the body and the hair possible this effect can be further strengthened by applying various tones. The slight transparency of human skin was depicted on the 0.3–0.5 mm thick boards by placing a gold or silver foil on the back at the skin-coloured parts. This solution is used on the portrait of the young lady holding the brown hen.
Miniature painting required experience and a firm hand, since the moist-sensitive surface could not be changed, and scraping the too thick paint layer was considered undesirable.
Ivory twists easily, therefore it was stiffened with paper and cardboard prior to painting. The material used for mounting sometimes gives important clues about the date of execution. On the paper sheet fitted to the back of the picture of the lady dressed in white, wearing a pink scarf there is a stripe of paper torn out of a longer text, with the inscription ‘18a Januarij 1781’. This is most likely the date when the miniature was made.
Miniatures were always integrated with the frame, the glass and the back. These accessories were important both for aesthetic reasons and for the protection from external effects (dust and humidity). The maker delivered the miniature to the client with the glass and the frame fitted.
The portraits presented here have high quality frames, most likely made for slightly larger miniatures those presently in them were applied on green velvet and silk bases.

Literature

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