Exhibition of Portrait Miniatures

BY

Alyn Williams

P.R.E.S., R.B.A., A.R.C.A.
MINIATURE PORTRAITS are literally what the word signifies: portraits in little.

The original miniature painters were the decorators of illuminated missals, and the word is derived from the Latin minutum or small lead, the pigment which the early illuminators used for their initial letters.

After the invention of printing and engraving, the art entered into a new phase. The miniaturists then turned their attention to minute copies of large pictures, and a demand was created for small portraits.

The First Period of miniature portrait painting began with Hans Holbein in the 16th century. He was closely followed by other eminent artists all of whom painted their tiny portraits in gouache or body color on vellum or cardboard, similar material to that used by the earlier illuminators.

During the Second Period, Richard Cosway and his contemporaries in the latter part of the 18th century inaugurated another improvement in the adoption of ivory as a basis, and the more general use of transparent water color as a medium.

The introduction of photography was followed by an interval during which there was a decline in interest in miniature portraits.

The Third Period and present revival of the art resulted from the founding, twenty years ago, of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters in England, and was greatly due to the reaction against the inartistic colored photographs often masquerading as miniatures, and to the interest awakened by many eminent art critics, to the beauty of the miniature masterpieces of the past.

Following the foundation of the London Society others were organized both in Paris and America—and miniature painting has again become the fashion with a large public which recognizes that a beautiful miniature is at once a jewel, a portrait, and a family heirloom to be treasured for all time.
EXHIBITION
OF
MINIATURE PORTRAITS
TO BE HELD AT
CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE
NOVEMBER 16 TO DECEMBER 14, 1914

BY
ALYN WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF MINIATURE PAINTERS, ENGLAND

STUDIO
ROOM 1, 4, CONGRESS HOTEL, CHICAGO
1 H. M. Queen Alexandra, Buckingham Palace, 1904
2 H. M. Queen Mary when Duchess of York, York House, 1894
3 His Eminence, Cardinal Gibbons, Baltimore, 1912
4 Ex-President, William H. Taft, The White House, 1911
5 H. M. King Edward VII, Buckingham Palace, 1904
6 Sir Gardiner Engleheart, London, 1910
7 Vincent de Dominguez, London, 1905
8 Vinson, son of E. B. McLean, Washington, 1911
9 Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, New York, 1911
10 Dorothy Brathwaite, London, 1906
11 Captain Symonds, R. N., London, 1908
12 Lady Evans, London, 1909
13 Late W. Matieu Williams, F. R. A. S.
14 A Portrait, London, 1913
15 Miss Nancy Whitman, New York, 1913
16  Mrs. Nicholas Longworth, Washington, 1910
17  Mrs. Louis Duveen, London, 1906
18  Mrs. Stocks, London, 1904
19  Marquis de Villalobos, Washington, 1911
20  Lady Hamilton, London
21  Miss White, London
22  Mrs. O. J. Buck, Chicago, 1912
23  Mrs. Nelson Buck and Children, Chicago, 1912
24  Miss Gwendolin Burdon
25  The Countess of Clonmel, London
26  Mrs. Lawrence, London
27  A portrait
28  Study of a Child’s Head
29  Nude, Venus Aphrodite
30  Nude, The Siren
31  Nude, Flotsam
“Mr. Alyn Williams in England was the first President of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, and he is its President still. When writing my big book, ‘The History of Portrait Miniatures,’ dedicated by consent to Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, I asked the Queen whether I might be permitted, as an example of the finest modern miniature work, to which reference was made in the final chapter, to use as an illustration a portrait of herself by a man whom I consider as standing at the head of English Miniature Painters. To this request Her Majesty graciously gave her permission. Accordingly, from direct sittings given to Mr. Alyn Williams by the Queen, a miniature portrait was painted which greatly pleased Her Majesty and which, after being exhibited at that year’s Royal Academy, I had the honour to present to the Queen. Her Majesty, who expressed herself as being delighted with its beauty and charm, was good enough to sign one of the replicas of the miniature and the original was carefully copied for the frontispiece of my book.

“So pleased were the Royal Family with the work Alyn Williams did for the Queen, that the King then gave him sittings, with the result that an excellent miniature of His Majesty was produced.

“Need I say more? It is clear that Mr. Williams gave the greatest satisfaction to the Royal Family, who are notoriously careful as to whom they employ, and who are particular as to the portrait produced.

“When I was writing my article for the ‘Encyclopaedia Britannica’ on Miniature Painting, I had occasion to refer to the Modern School, and I singled out my friend again as the representative man of British Miniature Painters, and I have commissioned him to do various works for myself, and have recommended him far and wide. He is delicate and delightful in colouring, accurate in portraiture, pleasing in effect. I am quite sure that all who see his exhibitions will admire his works, and I am equally certain that all who get to know the artist will thoroughly appreciate him, and give him their fullest confidence.

“GEO. C. WILLIAMSON.”
Some Extracts from Press Notices

"Graphic," October 25th, 1902.

"Miniature-painting has not produced the masters who were looked for, almost expected, from the recent revival. The reason, perhaps, is that the public, with unfailing instinct, have usually gone to the less competent practitioners, attracted by the very qualities which are not those which prove the master. One of the few exceptions is Mr. Alyn Williams, who is holding an exhibition in the Dare Gallery. There is, perhaps, more true artistry in his work than in that of others; certainly there is nothing of the smooth, unproachable photographic quality which delights the ignorant and prevents the rise of the art to its normal level. For that there might be a level established is, I think, undoubted, if buyers would exercise intelligence instead of indulging their want of taste."


"Modern miniatures by Mr. Alyn Williams are to be seen at Dowdeswell's galleries, together with a collection of eyes painted in miniature on ivory nearly a hundred years ago. One feels almost inclined to regret the time and pains spent on painting an eye which would have gone a long way towards reproducing the whole face, but a great variety in the treatment of the single feature has been achieved. Many are shaded by locks of hair; they are blue, brown, grey, and hazel; some are vivacious and sparkling, others soft and dreamy; the bright eye of a child, the sympathetic glance of the mother; the cold, determined expression of the eye of a student or of a man of business—all are to be found in these glass cases. Some of them are historic, as, for instance, Mrs. Fitzherbert's eye, worn by the Prince Regent in a bracelet, and his own eye framed for his charmer as a brooch. Mr. Alyn Williams has followed the old fashion lately, and painted single eyes set in gold rings; but attention soon wanders from them to his beautiful portraits hanging round the rest of the room. His likenesses of the King and Queen are lent by the Corporation of London, to whom they belong. Pretty young girls in large hats and diaphanous dresses, nymphs and sea-mermaids, mothers with their children, dignitaries of Church and State, officers in uniform, and learned scholars have all sat to Mr. Alyn Williams, and have been faithfully painted."

"The Globe" (New York), December 2nd, 1907.

"ART AND ARTISTS.—Alyn Williams, who is President of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters of England, is in this country and holds an exhibition of his work at the galleries of Arthur Tooth & Sons, 59, Fifth Avenue, where a score and a half of his small portraits may be seen. It may as well be stated at once that Mr. Williams is a highly trained workman and worthy of serious consideration, in contrast to so many of the foreigners who come over here in quest of American patronage. . . . The sitters include many English people of prominence, the Queen herself being among the patrons."