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Author(s):

Edward Town

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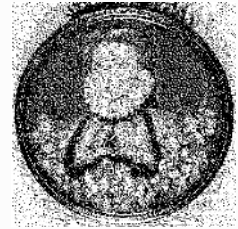
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A Portrait of the Miniaturist as a Young Man: Nicholas Hilliard and the Painters of 1560s London

Article by **Edward Town**

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Abstract

Nothing is known for certain about Nicholas Hilliard's training as an artist. This essay addresses this problem by providing an account of the lives of the artists active in London during the decade in which he completed his apprenticeship. It focuses on the artists John Bettes the Elder, the Master of the Countess of Warwick and Steven van der Meulen, all of whom had a strong profile at Elizabethan court, and would have been familiar to the young Hilliard as he set about becoming painter in the 1560s. It goes on to present new information about a number of other painters rarely discussed in the literature, bringing to light works of art that have not been included in studies of Hilliard's life. Together, this provides both a broad context for Hilliard's formative years and offers a plausible scenario as to how he acquired the skills that made him the most successful miniaturist of his generation.

Introduction

Nicholas Hilliard was secretive; it came naturally to him. A serial debtor, he took an economic approach to the truth, and this got him in and out of trouble. Secrecy was also integral to his argument that limning was of a higher status than painting in oils, and, most of all, that it was he and no one else that was privy to its secrets. In good conscience, he could claim that some techniques—such as placing a spot of liquid silver to mimic the glint of pearl—were his and his alone, but as to where he learnt to take a likeness and handle his materials Hilliard is stubbornly silent. Discoveries made as part of a conservation treatment of two panel paintings made in France by Hilliard in the late 1570s have provided conclusive proof that he did, as the paper record suggests, work in oils, and the similarity of these two pictures to the “Phoenix” and “Pelican” portraits of Elizabeth I—that date to the early to mid-1570s—indicates that Hilliard had acquired this training in England well before his departure for France in 1576.¹ This gives clear proof that, when painting in large, Hilliard worked to the same format and in the same materials as other Tudor painters, even if some aspects of his approach were governed by techniques he used to paint miniatures. As such, it is instructive to conceive of his training in oils and his training in limning as linked, and to consider the possibility that these skills were acquired at around the same time and the same place. The only insight that Hilliard himself

offers on this subject is the frequently cited but persistently opaque statement that although there were “divers other” salaried limners at the Henrican court, Hilliard considered Holbein’s work “for the best”, and that it was Holbein’s manner of limning “I have ever imitated”.² Hilliard esteemed Holbein’s work on three counts: first, Holbein was the most “cunning”, that is, the most skilful and artful practitioner of both painting and limning; second, that Holbein was the “neatest”, and third, that he was “therewithal a good inventor”. In other words, Holbein was a most talented, precise, and ingenious artist—all attributes Hilliard saw abundantly evident in himself.

So much for Hilliard’s opinions. He never knew Holbein, who had died before he was born, but he had, as Elizabeth Goldring suggests, probably come into contact with Holbein’s work as a child. It seems likely Hilliard saw the portrait miniatures by Holbein of Henry and Charles Brandon that had been taken by their mother Katherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, when she fled England in religious exile in 1555, and that these were shown to him in Wessel, while he was part of the household of the Protestant John Bodley.³ These are two of Holbein’s most innovative miniatures, conveying what most other miniaturists failed to achieve: a convincing depiction of a child on a miniature scale. Thus, at an impressionable age, Hilliard was exposed to some of Holbein’s finest work. It is easy to imagine that upon sight of these miniatures Hilliard’s heart was set upon becoming Holbein’s successor as the greatest limner and painter at court. This was no schoolboy daydream. When Hilliard returned to London in 1559, no artist had been able achieve the same status that Holbein had enjoyed as principle painter at court and this was not for lack of trying. The painters Gerlach Flicke, William Scrots, and Hans Eworth had all arrived in England in some hope they might occupy the breach left by Holbein’s death, but by the time Hilliard returned to England in 1559, Flicke had died (1558); Scrots had disappeared (in around 1553); and Eworth was—inexplicably but undeniably—out of favour with the new Elizabethan regime. Individually and collectively, the careers of these artists were of false promise and blighted ambition. There was one artist however, who, even in spite of his limitations as a painter, was able to sustain his career through the troubled middle years of the sixteenth century. This was John Bettes the Elder, active from the mid-1540s, if not before, until to death in the early 1560s.

Tracing Bettes’ career opens up the possibility that perhaps—a little like the lies Hilliard spun to avoid his creditors—there is a kernel of truth in his assertion that it was Holbein he had “ever imitated”. For although Hilliard never knew Holbein, he may have known, and may possibly have trained under an artist who was part of an artistic “dynasty” (that helpful term that Karen Hearn has given us) that begun with Holbein, passed to John Bettes the Elder, and came down to Hilliard through another painter called Arnold Derickson.⁴ Underpinning this account of this artistic dynasty and the wider artisanal composition of London during the first decade of Elizabeth I’s reign is the research undertaken for a biographical dictionary of 848 painters active in that city between the years 1547 and 1625.⁵ It is also informed by technical study of a number of pictures from the 1560s and 1570s undertaken as part of a research project at the Yale Center for British Art and a wider survey of over 5,000 portraits from this period in collaboration with the National Portrait Gallery, London. What follows here does not provide a definitive answer to the question of Hilliard’s training but instead gives the immediate context for the first decade of his life in London based upon the extant material and documentary evidence.

Only a handful of the 848 painters active in London during Hilliard’s lifetime made portable pictures. Most made their livelihoods solely as decorative painters. They painted banners, buildings, buckets, and barges. Some learnt to limn. In itself, limning was not a closely guarded

secret. In 1573, the printer and bookseller Richard Tottell published a short anonymously authored treatise on limning, which ran to several editions over the remaining decades of the century.⁶ The treatise provided instruction as to prepare, mix, and handle various colours, but not the means by which to make portrait miniatures. Thus, working pigments bound in water and gum Arabic on vellum was a skilled but by no means unfamiliar task for Elizabethan painters. For example, in 1600–1601, the painter-stainer Robert Winchell (*fl.* 1585–1618) was paid 20 shillings by the Clothworkers' Company for "lymning certen borders upon vellam with gould and fine coullors" and a further 6 shillings 8 pence for writing the names of the company's benefactors "in liquid gold".⁷ There is no evidence that Winchell produced any type of easel painting or portrait miniature, but the decoration of borders of vellum manuscripts was well within his abilities as a craftsman.

The narrative that follows here plays out across the extramural parishes of St Clement Danes, St Mary le Strand, and St Martin-in-the-Fields. But it begins in the heart of the city: hard by Cheapside on Foster Lane, Goldsmiths' Hall was where Nicholas Hilliard was enrolled as an apprentice on 13 November 1562. Just over six and a half years later, on 29 July 1569, he gained the freedom of the Goldsmiths' Company, ostensibly by virtue of his servitude under one of the Royal goldsmiths, Robert Brandon (d. 1591). Herein lies an unusual aspect of Hilliard's education. The duration of apprenticeship was set between seven years at the short end and twelve at the long end. Masters were routinely fined and sometimes ejected from their company altogether for presenting their apprentices shy of seven years. So even before Hilliard was launched into the professional world, he was exceptional.

Things were to continue in the same vein. Within a year, he was attempting to recruit his own apprentices and, by 1571, he had both native and foreign-born craftsmen under his supervision. As Goldring has shown, by the middle of 1571, he was enjoying royal patronage; producing portraits of the queen to be sent as diplomatic gifts in the marriage negotiations with the future Henri III, and by 1573 had received, in reward, grants of land from the crown that bestowed rental income and gentlemanly status.⁸ The portrait in question had been requested by Henri's mother, Catherine de' Medici, who had been so delighted by a miniature of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester received from Dudley early that year, that she demanded a miniature of Queen Elizabeth "made in the same fashion ... pivoted slightly to the right", which as Goldring suggests, may indicate that the French were familiar with Elizabeth's appearance only through the poor quality portraits made in the first years of her reign.

It had been thought that this portrait was lost, but there is an extant miniature that matches the specifications set out by Catherine de' Medici; it had been acquired for the 5th Duke of Portland in 1858 and now at Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire. This miniature shows Elizabeth wearing costume of the early 1570s, with her face turned proper right, wearing an oval shaped jewel suspended by a ribbon and pinned to her chest in front of her heart (fig. 1). The miniature is in excellent condition and displays signature techniques of Hilliard, such as the aforementioned additions of silver highlights to pearls. Nevertheless, it was summarily dismissed by V.J. Murrell and Roy Strong as a questionable likeness of Elizabeth I, and deemed to be a copy made in the 1590s after a lost original by Levina Teerlinc (*fl.* 1545; d. 1576).⁹ This conclusion was reached on three counts: because of the thickness of the carnation that was laid in for the flesh tones; the use of gold-over-brown in the edge line; and the employment of ultramarine, none of which precludes the miniature being an *ad vivum* portrait of the queen made in 1571. Rather, the format, materials, and iconography are entirely consistent with a portrait made to transact a marriage treaty and we know that Hilliard habitually used a circular format in the 1570s, and it

was only subsequent to his return from France, later that decade, that he adopted the oval format for his miniatures. By his own account, Hilliard deemed the “darkest and highest” blue to be Ultramarine of Venice, which was by far the most expensive pigment available to a London painter in the sixteenth century, and thus perfectly appropriate for this most prestigious commission. What is more, the portrait is successful in conveying the same “grandeur” which Catherine had admired in Dudley’s own portrait, and signals Elizabeth’s new-found devotion to her prospective groom, whose portrait miniature was presumably that contained within the oval jewel upon her chest. If this is Hilliard’s earliest portrait of the queen and the masterpiece that launched his career, it begs the question as to how he had gained such confidence and artistic maturity at such a young age.



Figure 1

Nicholas Hilliard, *Elizabeth I*, 1571, watercolour and bodycolour on vellum stuck to plain card, 4 cm diameter. The Portland Collection, Harley Gallery, Welbeck Estate, Nottinghamshire. Digital image courtesy of Bridgeman Images (All rights reserved).

The arguments that follow here build upon those set out by Elizabeth Goldring in her authoritative biography, namely: that Hilliard’s claim that he was self-taught should be dismissed out of hand; that, of the handful of works thought to be juvenilia, some are bogus and not all can be by the same hand; and finally that Roy Strong’s suggestion that he learnt directly from Levina Teerlinc following (an unrecorded) directive from the Queen’s Privy Council is difficult, to the point of being impossible, to sustain.¹⁰ However, this essay diverges from Goldring’s narrative because it does not accept the suggestion that Hilliard received instruction under the poet, painter, and Elder of the Dutch Church in Austin Friars, London, Lucas de Heere (active in England from late 1566 or early 1567 to 1576).¹¹ While it remains possible, even likely, that Teerlinc and de Heere were influences in Hilliard’s development—particularly in his conception of the artist as courtier—there is not sufficient evidence to make a compelling argument for either of them providing him instruction as a miniaturist. Although it would be wrong to dismiss Teerlinc as obscure, aside from the miniature depicting *An Elizabethan Maundy* of around 1560

(fig. 2), which broadly matches descriptions of the limnings she produced as gifts for the queen, given nearly every year between 1559 and 1568, there is currently no miniature that can be securely attributed to her. To be sure, Hilliard would have been aware of her work as he and Brandon delivered the queen's reciprocal gifts of plate to Teerlinc and others, but with her home in Stepney, then still a village outside of London, Teerlinc was a peripheral figure in London's artistic community, and as such it is difficult to make the case that there was regular or sustained interaction with the young Hilliard during the last decade and a half of her life.



Figure 2

Attributed to Levina Teerlinc, *An Elizabethan Maundy*, circa 1560, vellum on playing card, 7 × 5.7 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the late Countess Beauchamp / Madresfield (all rights reserved).

What is clear from Hilliard's subsequent career is that he received substantive instruction as a goldsmith. This may have begun during the years 1559–1562 in Exeter under his father but was probably furthered during the years of his apprenticeship under Brandon. From what little we know, the mainstay of Brandon's operation was the supply and delivery of plate for court, which would have involved a sizeable team of assistants casting and engraving, and presumably, Hilliard received instruction in both techniques. Subsequent work as a jeweller and the boast that he—as a goldsmith—had mastery of garnishing stonework is also indicative of training in the workshop of a practising craftsman. Furthermore, his instructions that a limner's workspace should be free of dust, smoke, noise, and stench, and that “the colours themselves may not endure some airs, especially in the sulfurous air of sea-coal and the gilding of goldsmiths” would suggest he had first-hand experience of seeing the discolouration of pigments as a result of sulphurous pollution in a goldsmith's workshop, and that he was alive to the fact that pigments carefully stored and prepared would retain their desired properties.¹²

What we can be sure of is that Hilliard's apprenticeship under Brandon would have thrust Hilliard into the network of the city's most talented craftspeople, wits, and entrepreneurs. Goldring posits that one of the opportunities afforded Hilliard was the chance to study under

Lucas de Heere. The survival of a presentation copy of de Heere's poetry made for the Earl of Hertford in 1573 attests his immediate popularity at court, and his poems allude to portraits that he had made of a number of courtiers.¹³ Yet, there is no portrait that can be even tentatively attributed to de Heere. This is perplexing given that de Heere was active in England for the best part of decade and, by his own account, was clearly admired at court. His world, so far as it can be recovered, was centred in the émigré community of the Dutch Church and his pursuit of courtly patronage, which sometimes put him at loggerheads with members of his congregation.¹⁴ His extant work on paper shows him to be a talented draftsman, trained in the Flemish tradition (fig. 3)—a tradition passed down to his student, John de Critz the Elder, and also evident in the work of latter's brother-in-law, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. It is important to stress though that there is nothing about Hilliard's work that suggests that his draughtsmanship was informed from exposure to these artists in the same way that Isaac Oliver's work shows the clear influence of de Critz and Gheeraerts, who were all members of the same family. Rather, Hilliard's stiff, stylised portraits owe far more to the work of painters active in London in the mid-1560s, who were products of an artistic lineage that led directly to Holbein.¹⁵



Figure 3

Lukas de Heere, *A Siren Luring Seafarers to their Doom*, 1576, pen and brown ink and blue wash on paper, 32.9 × 44.2 cm. Collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (RP-T-1911-83). Digital image courtesy of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Public domain).

John Bettes the Elder

Chief among the painters at court was the portraitist, miniaturist, and wood-engraver John Bettes the Elder, first recorded in 1527 as working under Hans Holbein on the decoration of the banqueting house at Greenwich Palace ahead of the arrival of the French embassy.¹⁶ Although only a handful of paintings have been attributed to Bettes, he was clearly an important artist in the years that followed Holbein's death in 1543.¹⁷ From at least 1556, if not before, he was domiciled in the extramural parish of St Martin-in-the-Fields, which had been home to the royal miniaturist Lucas Horenbout (d. 1544) and his wife Margaret Holsewyther (b. ca. 1504; d. after 1560), and the queen's Serjeant Painter Nicholas Lizard (d. 1571), the latter of whom seems to have worked as part of the team of painters that included Bettes who realized Holbein's designs for the decoration of Greenwich in 1527.¹⁸

The touchstone picture for Bettes' oeuvre is the signed and dated *Unknown Man in a Black Cap* of 1545, plausibly identified as Sir William Butts (fig. 4); for the same likeness appears in a three-quarter-length version (albeit in reverse) now at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston.¹⁹ The signed picture, now at Tate Britain, was recorded at Brome Hall, Suffolk, in the late eighteenth century as one of what seems to have been of two paintings by Bettes there at that time.²⁰ As Roy Strong observed, this Tate picture establishes Bettes as “an artist of considerable talent with mannerisms in his draughtsmanship that reflect an intense study of if not training by Holbein”.²¹ Subsequent examination of this portrait by Rica Jones and Joyce H. Townsend has shown that Bettes prepared his panel with the same salmon-coloured priming used by Holbein in the late 1530s—a strong indication that Bettes received instruction from Holbein.²² As part of the technical study undertaken on two other works, *Sir William Cavendish*²³ and the aforementioned *Sir William Butts*²⁴ were attributed to Bettes. In turn, there is a further series of portraits of the 1550s and early 1560s that share the same combination of sturdy corporeal volume and nuanced linear detail, that together give shape to the oeuvre of this solid if unspectacular exponent of Holbein's style.²⁵



Figure 4

John Bettes the Elder, *An Unknown Man in a Black Cap*, 1545, oil on panel, 47 × 41 cm. Collection of Tate (N01496). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

That Bettes also worked in limning is confirmed by payments of Queen Catherine Parr of 1546–1547 for £3 for portraits of the king and the queen, which were engraved by an artisan named “Gyles”, along with six other pictures that were not described.²⁶ His reputation was sufficient for his work to be cited by Richard Haydocke in the third book of his 1598 translation of Lomazzo's treatise on painting, along with the painter and architect “Shoote” (i.e. John Shute, d. 1563). Haydocke states that;

And in Limming, where the colours are likewise mixed with gummes, but laied with a thicke body and substance: wherein much arte and neatnesse is required. This was much used in

*former times in Churchbookes, (as is well knowne) as also drawing by the life in small models, dealt in also of late years by some of our Country-men; as Shoote, Bettes &c. but brought to rare perfection we now see, by the most ingenious, painefull and skillful Master Nicholas Hilliard, as his well profiting scholar Isaacke Oliver...*²⁷

Haydocke was keen for Hilliard to commit his knowledge of the art of limning to paper in his own treatise, and may have gleaned this history of limning in England from Hilliard himself.



Figure 5

R. Clamp after John Bettes the Elder, *Sir John Godsalve*, 1792, stipple engraving, 18.8 × 14 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1852,0612.235). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

There is only one miniature documented as by Bettes and it is not thought to have survived. It was recorded by George Vertue and is known only through an engraving by Sylvester Harding, published in 1792 (fig. 5). The sitter is thought, although unlikely, to be Sir John Godsalve (1506–1556). The engraving suggests that the miniature was circular with an inscription “Captum in Castris ad Boloinam 1440”. It is not known upon what grounds Vertue based his attribution, but there must be other miniatures by Bettes from the middle years of the sixteenth century lurking among works traditionally attributed to Teerlinc and Hilliard. Such miniatures might include the *Portrait of a Woman called Mary Neville*;²⁸ an *Unknown Lady* of circa 1550;²⁹ *Margaret Wotton, Marchioness of Dorset*,³⁰ which is derived from a drawing by Holbein and exists in various versions in large. Likewise, there is another group of miniatures that forms a discrete group, which includes *An Unknown Woman Holding a Monkey* of circa 1555;³¹ *Portrait of an Unknown Woman*, circa 1560,³²

and the miniatures *Catherine Grey*³³ and *Catherine Grey, Countess of Hertford with Her Son* (Duke of Rutland) of circa 1560, which are sometimes given to Teerlinc. To this list might also be added the portrait miniatures of Henry Fitzalan and Catherine Grey³⁴ and a portrait of *Edward VI.*³⁵ Much work still needs to be undertaken in order to unpick this set of miniatures to distinguish who painted what, but their very survival attests to the continuation of painting portraits in limning throughout the 1550s and early 1560s and with Bettes one of a small number of limners active during this time-frame, he must remain a candidate as the author of some of this work.

Bettes is thought to be the “Skilful Briton” responsible for the portrait of Franz Burchard, Chancellor of Saxony of 1559, who is known only through a woodcut published in the following year. Describing the production of Edward Halle’s *Chronicle* of 1550 in his *Actes and Monuments* or *Book of Martyrs* of 1570, John Foxe states that “soome were drawers for his [Halle’s] petrgrree and vyniet, some were grauers, the names of whom were Iohn Bets, & Tyrral, which be now both dead”.³⁶ On these grounds, it is possible to add the title illustration of Halle’s *Chronicle* to this small body of woodblock engravings by Bettes, of which there are surely more waiting to be discovered. For example, it is difficult to imagine that Bettes was not called upon

by John Day to help illustrate the monumentally large and amply illustrated *Actes and Monuments* which appeared in print in 1563.³⁷



Figure 6

John Bettes, Title page for William Cunningham, *Cosmographical Glasse*, (published by John Day), 1559, woodcut engraving, 25.5 × 17 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1895,1214.115). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Bettes' fully attributed work as a book illustrator includes the title page to William Cunningham's *Cosmographical Glasse* published by John Day in 1559 (fig. 6), which he signed "IB·F", that is, "Iohannes Bettes Fecit" and which was repurposed by Day for Henry Billingsley's English translation of Euclid's *The Elements of Geometrie* in 1570 and *Alfredi Regis Res Gestae* in 1574. In fact, the portrait of William Cunningham, sitting at a table and looking out beyond the picture plane is sufficiently similar to the touchstone picture at Tate to suggest that it may also have been by Bettes. What seems to have been missed or misconstrued by previous authors is that the same "IB·F" monogram appears on the "Nordovicvm Angliæ Civitas"—the bird's-eye view of the city of Norwich dated 1558 that is included in the *Cosmographical Glasse*. Although on a different scale, this woodblock map is close in style to the so-called "Agas map" of London made in 1561–1563—both share an identical form of scrolled banderole that carries the inscription. There is not sufficient space to explore this idea here fully, but it points to Bettes' significance as one

of the most pre-eminent artists of the early Elizabethan period and an integral part of a network of writers, publishers, and illustrators who disseminated the ideas and beliefs of the fledgling regime of Elizabeth I, and possibly the artist responsible for the "Agas map".

It is important to situate the young Hilliard within this context not only because he would have passed nearby Bettes' studio frequently as he travelled to and from court, but also because these were the pictures and publications that would have shaped Hilliard's world-view. It should come as no surprise that Hilliard went on to become a book illustrator in his own right, providing the designs and possibly also cutting the title-page to the *Sermons of Mast Iohn Calvin* (London, 1571) in collaboration with the Dutch cutter, Charles Tressa. Strong points out that this title-page are stylistically similar to that used a few years earlier for *A dictionarie of French and English* (London, 1570) and then subsequently reused for successive printings of the *Psalmes of David* and others.³⁸ The suggestion by Goldring is that Hilliard was put forward for this work by John Bodley or Robert Dudley. Whatever the case, it is worth considering that in providing designs and possibly also cutting these blocks for the title-pages, he was following in Holbein's footsteps, and participating in a tradition that had been passed down from Holbein to Bettes. Might Hilliard have known John Bettes the Elder? If so, it could only have been for a year at the most, as Bettes died shortly after Hilliard begun his apprenticeship. There has been confusion as to when Bettes passed away. The parish registers of St Martin-in-the-Fields record the burial of two individuals with is name: on 3 April 1563, when 2s. 4d. was spent on the burial and 28 May

1565, when nothing was spent. Given Bettes' professional success, it seems likely he was the person who died in 1563. He was survived by his son John, who went on to become a painter in his own right. His earliest signed and dated works date from 1575 and show the lingering influence, though somewhat diffused, of his father's Holbeinesque approach to portraiture, for example, his portrait *An Unidentified Member of the Tyrell Family*.³⁹

As stated above, Robert Brandon's back and forth to court would have regularly taken him and his assistants from Cheapside to Whitehall. Their route would have taken them past the courtier homes that lined the Strand and also the artists' workshops in the extramural parishes of St Clement Danes, St Mary le Strand, and St Martin-in-the-Fields. Many of these craftsmen held salaried positions at the Office of Works in Scotland Yard. Collectively, they formed a creative quarter of the city whose principle patrons were the courtiers and members of the gentry who lodged to the west of the city during Parliament and the winter season. Goldring makes the point that Hilliard's relationship with that most pre-eminent of courtiers Robert Dudley, probably first begun in 1566, when Dudley ordered a huge consignment of plate from Brandon. Managing and delivering this order would have necessitated frequent visits to Dudley's London home, Durham House, and there Hilliard would have gained sight of the portrait of Dudley made in around 1562 by Steven van der Meulen, the artist charged with travelling to Sweden to take the likeness of the queen's then suitor Erik XIV (fig. 7).⁴⁰ Van der Meulen had come to London in 1560, travelled on his diplomatic mission to Sweden in 1561, and died in October 1563, a casualty of the outbreak of plague that year.⁴¹



Figure 7

Steven van der Meulen, *Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester*, circa 1562, oil on panel, 110 × 80 cm. Collection of Waddesdon (Rothschild Family) (Acc no: 14.1996). Digital image courtesy of Waddesdon Image Library, Photo: Mike Fear (all rights reserved).

Great things had been expected of van der Meulen at court. After his return from Sweden, he found favour with important patrons such as Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel and his son-in-law Lord Lumley, who commissioned portraits of their family by him and recorded the authorship of

these pictures as a point of pride in inventories of their collections. To them, van der Meulen was “the famous painter steven”.⁴² Some of these pictures survive, albeit in a compromised condition, yet their inherent quality is still there to be seen, justifying the succession of rewards that came his way following his return from Sweden. In early 1562, he received rights of denization, an important step towards establishing himself as the pre-eminent artist at court, as it allowed him to work without interruption from meddling native-born painters. At the time of his death, he was living in St Andrew Undershaft, the same parish that Hans Holbein had lived in the heart of the city. Had he lived, the only competition van der Meulen would have immediately met would have been Hans Eworth, an artist who had been resident in England since the mid to late 1540s, and although he was still a talent to be reckoned with, he had somehow fallen out of favour at Elizabeth’s court. As Thornton and Cain have observed, Hilliard’s work shows the influence of van der Meulen portraits, such that of Robert Dudley cited above, taking from him the same characteristic pose “which gives a sharp, dramatic angle to the sitter’s face, with the eyes turned as if in a sudden glance, sometimes haughty, sometime intimate, towards the spectator”.⁴³ As will be seen, Hilliard was not the only artist to borrow from van der Meulen.

Other contemporaries

The other foreign-born artists active in London in the early to mid-1560s were Leonard Adrianson (from 1556); Rowland Artem (from 1531); John (or Jan) Benson (from around 1564); Arnold Derickson (from 1549); Pangrace Inglishe (from 1543); and Jacob Matheusen (from 1562). Their names have come down to us through their appearance in Returns of Aliens, parish registers, the records of the Dutch and Italian churches in London, and wills and other testaments. These allow for the construction of cogent biographies for each of these painters, and even though no extant works can currently be ascribed to them, collectively they provide a fulsome picture of London’s artistic population in the years of Hilliard’s apprenticeship. As such, it is no longer sufficient for historians of Tudor art to insist that the paper record is too thin to ever attempt making connections between extant paintings and these artists. London in the sixteenth century was one of the most heavily surveyed and recorded of all European societies, and while there are frustrating gaps in our knowledge, these are the names of the painters responsible for many of the paintings that have come down to us from the early to mid-1560s. In 1567, this all changed. That year, the city received an influx of over twenty-five émigré painters after the failure of the “Wonderyear” of 1566 and the violent repression of the Protestant rebellion by the Duke of Alba between 1567 and 1572. What set the painters already active in London apart from the larger group of painters who arrived from the Low Countries from 1566 onwards is that the foreign painters already resident were dispersed across the breadth of the city and the evidence suggests that there was sufficient tolerance that they could survive without having to form into close family units in the way that subsequent generations of foreigners such as the Gheeraerts, de Critz, and Oliver families were compelled to do.

Leonard Adrianson was born in Brabant in around 1536 and had come to England in around 1556.⁴⁴ He was described as a painter in the Returns of Aliens but it goes on to say that he made his living making woodblocks for the printers, which explains his admission to the Stationers’ Company in 1563 and subsequent denization in 1568. Rowland Artem was born in Antwerp but seems to have come to England as a child. He was of an earlier generation than the other painters in this group and worked under the Italian artist Anthony Toto (b. 1499; d. in or before 1554) on decorative projects in the royal palaces during the 1530s. He started a family in the 1550s, but left no further record of his work as a painter and must have been a decent age when he died in

1578.⁴⁵ Hailing from Bruges, Jan Benson (1530–1573) can probably be identified as the son of the painter Ambrosius Benson (d. 1550). Jan Benson is the only individual from this group to be actively identified in contemporary records as a “picturemaker”—that is, a maker of portable paintings—and he was domiciled in the east of the City until his death in 1573.⁴⁶ Pangrace Inglishe arrived in England in around 1543 and was in the employ of the Office of Revels throughout the 1570s but he disappears from the record in the following decade.⁴⁷ Originally from Breda, Jacob Mattheusen was granted denizen status by latter patent of 12 June 1562, and seems to have enjoyed prosperity and status during his time in London. When he came to make his will in August 1570, he was resident in the parish of St Sepulchre without Newgate. He made various bequests of money to his family and made gifts of pictures to his two executors and to the Englishman Richard Baker, who was a painter active in London from 1551 until his death in 1574 or 1575.⁴⁸ Baker is an interesting figure, one of the few native-born artists, who can be seen to have willingly engaged with the Netherlandish painters who arrived over the course of the 1560s. Tellingly, Baker was also cited in the 1570 will of the Bruges-born painter John de Frank, and was, alongside Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder, given responsibility for the education of de Frank’s children, whose names are not given.⁴⁹ It is possible that Frank was the father of Hilliard’s apprentice, William Franke, and more likely still that Mattheusen was the father of Hilliard’s pupil Peter who in 1588 made bequests to both Isaac Oliver and Rowland Lockey—then also studying under Hilliard.⁵⁰ This gives good reason to believe that Hilliard had active engagement with the émigré community of painters established in London during the 1560s. Of these, Arnold Derickson is the most intriguing. He first appears in Southwark in 1549 as a servant of Hans Eworth but in 1556 found himself in St Martin-in-the-Fields as one of three men bound for appearance of John Bettes the Elder at court.⁵¹ Two years later, Derickson married a woman at that parish called Elizabeth Bettes, who was probably Bettes’ daughter or at the least a member of his family. Derickson remained in St Martin-in-the-Fields after Bettes’ death in 1563 and was recorded there in 1568 alongside his servant Christopher Sowlofe in the Return of Aliens for that year. At this moment, Derickson and Sowlofe were said to be members of the Dutch Church. He was probably the painter “Arnold” paid the considerable sum of £4 6s. 10d. for a portrait of Sir Henry Sidney in 1565–1566—a painting which does not seem to have survived.⁵² Derickson is also probably the painter named Arnold paid 30s. by the Office of Revels during Christmas 1572–1573 for a painting of Andromeda. He next appears in 18 November 1580, when he was granted a license to marry the spinster Lucy Andrianson, who may have been the daughter of a parishioner of St Martin-in-the-Fields named John who was buried in that parish on 23 July that year.⁵³

Derickson is of particular interest and importance because he provides the link to Bettes, and from Bettes back to Holbein. He is also the strongest candidate for the artist known today as the “Master of the Countess of Warwick”, a name coined by Roy Strong in the 1960s for an artist responsible for the eponymous portrait of Anne Russell, countess of Warwick, and seven other portraits of courtiers and their families that date from the second half of the 1560s.⁵⁴ These portraits share the same static posture of Bettes and Holbein but do not convey the stillness or serenity of their work. The influence of Eworth can also be seen in the clasped hands and the verse and prose inscriptions extolling the virtues of his sitters, but the limitations of his draughtsmanship result in the portraits failing to deliver the same pious intensity of a portrait such as Eworth’s *Elizabeth Roydon* of 1563. Since Roy Strong first provided an outline for this group in 1969, the number of paintings that can be ascribed to the Master of the Countess of Warwick has grown considerably, and now comprises over fifty pictures dating from 1561 to

1570, thus establishing him by some distance as the most successful and prolific artist of that decade, and one that Hilliard would have encountered through his visits to court and the courtier homes of London.

While the identification of Arnold Derickson as the Master of the Countess of Warwick cannot be proved, it can be said that he fits the profile of this artist more comfortably than any other painter of the period. The chronology of events that saw him described as a servant in 1549 and then married in 1558 makes it likely that he was born in around 1535, putting him in his mid-thirties at the time of Bettes' death in 1563. At this point, he seems to have taken over Bettes' workshop in St Martin-in-the-Fields, which he ran, with success, until at least the end of the decade and possibly longer. That John Bettes the Younger did not take over the running of his father's workshops is probably explained by the fact that he was just a little too young at the time. Bettes the Younger married in 1571 and neither lived nor worked as an adult in St Martin-in-the-Fields. Instead, he moved into the city where he made portraits for second-tier gentry and civic elites. The bequest in Bettes the Younger's will to his son and namesake of "a Picture being the Picture of his Grandfather", suggests that the former had inherited his father's possessions without any trouble. So perhaps his departure from St Martin-in-the-Fields was made of his own volition at a time when he wanted to strike out on his own.⁵⁵

The Master of the Countess of Warwick

As can be seen, at the midpoint of the decade, there were only a handful of skilled foreign artists in London. Van der Meulen was dead, Eworth was persona non grata at court, and only Derickson seems to have held a commanding position, placed as he was at the doorstep of the courtier homes along the Strand. By 1566, if not before, he had been joined in the area by George Gower, who would go on to become Hilliard's great rival and was then living in the Savoy district of the parish of St Mary le Strand.⁵⁶ Stylistically, the Master of the Countess of Warwick seems to have been a major influence on George Gower, to the point where it is almost impossible to tell where the career of the former ends and latter other begins. Goldring and others have also drawn comparisons between Hilliard's early work and that of George Gower.⁵⁷ What has not been mentioned is that there is a strong affinity between the work of Gower, the Master of the Countess of Warwick, and the early work of Nicholas Hilliard. All three artists privilege the depiction of linear detail drawn with the brush over any attempt to achieve an illusionistic sense of depth, with the stiff deportment of their sitters, often imparting a haughty demeanour—similarities encapsulated in Gower's portrait of an unknown woman of 1572 holding open a jewel that contains a circular portrait miniature (fig. 8).



Figure 8

George Gower, *Unknown Woman*, 1572, oil on panel, 83.9 × 63.5 cm. Collection of The Viscount De L'Isle, Penshurst Place, Kent. Digital image courtesy of The Viscount De L'Isle (all rights reserved).

Crucially, there is evidence that the Master of the Countess of Warwick produced portraits that were copied as miniatures, possibly within the same studio. The best example of this is the portrait of *Sir Thomas Knyvett* once at Ashwelthorpe but now part of the collection at Compton Verney (fig. 9). It is impossible to establish whether this is Thomas Knyvett of Ashwelthorpe or Thomas Knyvett of Westminster and Escrick York. Both were roughly the same age, both had connections at court. What is significant though is that there is a portrait miniature of the same sitter, wearing the same costume and the same gold chain that bears an inscription very similar to, but not totally identical to those that appear on Hilliard's fully attributed miniatures in the following decade (fig. 10). The technique and particularly the drawing cannot be said to be instantly recognisable as that of Hilliard's mature style, but perhaps this can be explained by the fact that Hilliard was still at this point a young artist honing his technique and that this was not a work that was produced from the life, which was his preferred manner of working. It does though show an ability to handle shell gold, float-in an azure background and place the gold lettering, which bears close comparison to his signature form of flourishes of the capital "A" of Año, and the short, stubby style of his twos and sevens. This miniature has in the past been attributed (by Strong) to Levina Teerlinc, but was included in Graham Reynolds' brief article on Hilliard's juvenilia: a group of miniatures too disparate in style to be convincing.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this attribution to Hilliard should be taken seriously, as should the portrait *Man in an Armillary Sphere* of the same year, with the Italian phrase "SO + CHE + IO + SONO + INTESO", written across the central band of the armillary sphere (fig. 11). The sitter in this miniature has a something of a resemblance to the sitter in the portrait *Hugh Fitzwilliam* (ca. 1534–ca. 1576) of *Emley, Sprotborough and Haddlesey Yorkshire* (fig. 12).⁵⁹ To this group might also be added

another portrait, *Unknown Courtier* of circa 1565 currently attributed to François Clouet in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo, Buenos Aires (fig. 13).⁶⁰



Figure 9

The Master of the Countess of Warwick | Arnold Derickson?, *Sir Thomas Knyvett*, circa 1569, oil on panel, 99.1 × 71.7 cm. Collection of Compton Verney, Warwickshire (CVCSC : 0257.B). Digital image courtesy of Compton Verney, Warwickshire (all rights reserved).



Figure 10

Nicholas Hilliard?, *Sir Thomas Knyvett*, 1569, vellum stuck to plain card. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the late Countess Beauchamp / Madresfield (All rights reserved).



Figure 11

Nicholas Hilliard, *Man in an Armillary Sphere*, 1569, watercolour on vellum, 5.9 x 4.5 cm. Collection of Waddesdon (National Trust), accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to the National Trust for display at Waddesdon Manor, 1990 (Acc no: 3542). Digital image courtesy of Waddesdon Image Library. Photo: Angelo Hornak (All rights reserved).



Figure 12

The Master of the Countess of Warwick | Arnold Derickson?, *Hugh Fitzwilliam of Emley, Sprotborough and Haddlesey Yorkshire*, 1568, oil on panel, 85 × 62 cm. Collection of Milton Hall. Digital image courtesy of The Hamilton Kerr Institute (all rights reserved).



Figure 13

Nicholas Hilliard?, *Unknown Courtier*, circa 1565, gouache on parchment, oval height 3.5 cm. Collection of Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo, Buenos Aires. Digital image courtesy of Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo, Buenos Aires (all rights reserved).

That the portrait of *Sir Thomas Knyvett* is so faithfully derived from the painting in large gives the clearest indication that there may have been a sustained contact between Hilliard and the Master of the Countess of Warwick that provided the opportunity for a transference of knowledge and skills to the former from the latter. This would make perfect sense: Hilliard was the aspiring, cocksure apprentice, and the Master of the Countess of Warwick was the pre-eminent artist at court following the death of John Bettes in 1563 until Hilliard's dazzling arrival on the court scene in 1571. Close comparison of his early, fully attributed work from the 1570s shows how closely Hilliard's draughtsmanship followed the Master of the Countess of Warwick when taking a likeness. Although it is currently impossible to prove he was indeed the Master of the Countess of Warwick, Arnold Derickson was a member of Bettes' household and seems to have taken over the running of his studio after his death. It seems perfectly plausible to suggest that Bettes taught Derickson what he in turn had learned from Holbein—both in painting with oils and in miniature—and that this was the means by which the tradition of limning came down to Hilliard in the mid-1560s. Although this line of descent from himself to Holbein was not as direct as he might have liked to admit, this was the artistic tradition to which Hilliard belonged. It was a fusion of Netherlandish and German influences that came together in the crucible that was London's artistic community of the mid-1560s. There is still much to be learned about this significant but understudied chapter in British art but placing Hilliard within this melting pot of nationalities and ideas is important, because it takes a significant step in demystifying the career of one of Britain's most enigmatic artists. Although Hilliard may have taken a magpie approach to assembling his skill set, he cannot have been an autodidact, and while his talents were singular

and his techniques were secret, his approach to creating a likeness was shaped by the artists whose lives have been described above.

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About the author

Edward Town is Head of Collections Information and Access at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. He was a co-author and contributor to *Painting in Britain 1500–1630* (British Academy, 2015) and has published numerous articles on artistic production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including: *A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters 1547–1625* (Walpole Society, 2014); *A Fête at Bermondsey—an English Landscape by Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder*, *The Burlington Magazine*, May 2015; and with Juliet Carey and Sarah Bayliss was a co-author on the article *Nicholas Hilliard's Portraits of Elizabeth I and Sir Amias Paulet*, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2018.

Footnotes

1. Sarah Bayliss, Juliet Carey, and Edward Town, “Nicholas Hilliard’s Portraits of Elizabeth I and Sir Amias Paulet”, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2018, 718–726.
2. R.K.R. Thornton and T.G.S. Cain (eds), *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning* (Ashington: The Mid Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet Press Limited, 1992), 49.
3. Elizabeth Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard: Life of an Artist* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2019), 45–47.
4. Karen Hearn, *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530–1630* (London: Tate Gallery, 1995).
5. Edward Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, *Walpole Society* 76 (2014): 1–235.
6. Anonymous, *A very proper treatise, wherein is sett forth the arte of limming* (London: Richard Tottell, 1573).
7. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 192.
8. Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard*, 103–109; for the grants of land, see Erna Auerbach, *Tudor Artists: A Study of Painters in the Royal Service and of Portraiture on Illuminated Documents from the Accession of Henry VIII to the Death of Elizabeth I* (London: Athlone Press, 1954), 168.
9. Roy Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court: The Portrait Miniature Rediscovered, 1520–1620* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983), 87.
10. John Murdoch, Jim Murrell, Patrick J. Noon, and Roy Strong, *The English Miniature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 49; and Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 68. For a discussion of the supposed juvenilia, see Graham Reynolds, “New Light on Nicholas Hilliard”, *The British Art Journal*

- 12, no. 2: 19–21; and for a rebuttal, see Katherine Coombs and Alan Derbyshire, “Nicholas Hilliard’s Workshop Practice Reconsidered”, in Tarnya Cooper, Aviva Burnstock, Maurice Howard, and Edward Town (eds), *Painting in Britain 1500–1630: Production, Influences and Patronage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2015), 243.
11. Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard*, 79–83.
 12. V.J. Murrell, “The Art of Limning”, in Roy Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court: The Portrait Miniature Rediscovered, 1520–1620* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983), 13.
 13. Frederica van Dam, “‘Tableau Poétique’: A Recently Discovered Manuscript by the Flemish Painter-Poet Lucas D’Heere (1534–1584)”, *Dutch Crossing* 34, March 2014, 20–38.
 14. Hope Walker, “Netherlandish Immigrant Painters and the Dutch Reformed Church of London, Austin Friars, 1560–1580”, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 63 (2013): 58–81.
 15. This idea was first put forward by Rab MacGibbon in “The Most Ingenious Master and his Well-Profiting Scholar: Brief Lives of Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver”, in Catharine MacLeod (ed.), *Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019), 30–39.
 16. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 35; and Glenn Richardson, “Entertainments for the French Ambassadors at the Court of Henry VIII”, *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1995), 412.
 17. Roy Strong, *The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture* (London: Paul Mellon Foundation, 1969), 66–68.
 18. For Holsewyther, see Susan James, “Holsewyther, Margaret (b. c. 1504, d. after 1560), Royal Miniaturist”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2020, DOI:10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.90000369540. Accessed 7 August 2020. For Lizard, see Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 131.
 19. (35.1751)
 20. Brome Hall was the home of the Bacon family, who were descendants of William Butts’ brother. The confusing list of pictures from circa 1775 reads “Portrait of ____ John Bettes|Dr Butts Physician to Henry 8th on it in Gilt Letters fecit a Johan Bettes|Anglois”. This matches the wording of the picture at Tate Britain. British Library Add. MS 5762 E2.
 21. Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature*, 56.
 22. Rica Jones, “The Methods and Materials of Three Tudor Artists: Bettes, Hilliard and Ketel”, in Karen Hearn (ed.), *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530–1630* (London: Tate Gallery, 1995), 231–235.
 23. The Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement.
 24. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
 25. These include a portrait of an unknown man, age forty, oil on panel, 1553, sold at Christie’s, London, 13 July 1923 (lot 115); *Alice Barnham with her two children*, oil on panel, 1557, 38 x 33 in, Berger Collection, Denver Art Museum, Colorado; *William Hewett*, oil on panel, circa 1560, 39 x 33 in; on loan to the Museum of London; and *Richard Callard*, oil on panel, 1560, 93 x 70.5 cm, with Weiss Gallery, London, 2018; and *Unknown Man in Black Cap*, oil on panel, 35 x 25 in, Hampel Fine Art Auctions, Munich, 2 July 2020 (no. 564).
 26. Hearn, *Dynasties*, 46–47.
 27. Richard Haydocke, *A tracte containing the artes of curious painting carving buildinge written first in Italian by Io. Paul Lomatius painter of Milan and Englished by R.H. student in physik* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598), 126. For Haydocke and Hilliard, see Alexander Marr,

- “Pregnant Wit: *ingegno* in Renaissance England”, *British Art Studies*, Issue 1 (2015), DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/amarr.
28. Philips, 10 November 1998 (lot 115).
 29. Private Collection, Heinz Archive.
 30. Buccleuch Collection.
 31. This was offered for sale by Christie’s, 1995–1996, Heinz Archive.
 32. Victoria & Albert Museum, P.48-1984.
 33. Victoria & Albert Museum, P.10-1979.
 34. Collection of the Duke of Carlisle.
 35. Sotheby’s, London, 6 December 2018 (lot 1).
 36. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 2nd edn (London: John Day, 1570).
 37. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments*, 1st edn (London: John Day, 1563).
 38. Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court*, 62.
 39. An oil on panel, 1575, State Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow. A portrait of a younger sitter *Daniel Bedenham*, oil on panel, 1575 (Private Collection) shows the influence of the trends in portraiture that had been made fashionable since his father’s death by George Gower.
 40. The resulting portrait appears to be the picture at the National Museum of Sweden, Stockholm attributed currently to Domenicus Verwitt, inscribed “ERICUS D.G. SVE CORVM GOTHORVM.VA(N)D A LORVMQ. ETC.REX ÆTATIS SVÆ 28; 1561”.
 41. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 176.
 42. Mark Evans (ed.), *Art Collecting an Lineage in the Elizabethan Age: The Lumley Inventory and Pedigree (Facsimile and Commentary on the Manuscript in the Possession of the Earls of Scarborough)* (London: Roxburghe Club, 2010).
 43. Thornton and Cain, *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning*, 22.
 44. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 26.
 45. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 29.
 46. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 34.
 47. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 113.
 48. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 140.
 49. See Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”: for Baker, 31; for de Frank, 68; and for Gheeraerts, 86–87.
 50. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 140–141.
 51. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 71.
 52. “Arnold, for my lord’s picture”, *Historical Manuscript Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De l’Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place, Kent*, Vol. I, HMSO, London, 1925, 241.
 53. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 71; and John Vivian Kitto, *The Register of St. Martins-in-the Fields London 1619–1636*, 66 (London: Harleian Society Registers, 1936), 24.
 54. Strong, *The English Icon*, 107–114; Strong later suggested Nicholas Lizard as a candidate presumably on the grounds that he died in 1571, that is, soon after this artist fades from view, but does not articulate his thinking; see Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature*, 68.
 55. Town, “A Biographical Dictionary of London Painters: 1547–1625”, 35–36.
 56. Edward Town and Jessica David, “George Gower (ca. 1538–1596): Portraitist, Mercer, Serjeant-Painter”, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2020, 739–755.

57. Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard*, 93–99.
58. Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature*, 59; Reynolds, “New Light on Nicholas Hilliard”, 19–21.
59. For a discussion of this miniature (with a different opinion about its attribution) in relation to the portrait of Fitzwilliam, see Alexander Marr’s “An Early *Impresa* Miniature: *Man in an Armillary Sphere* (1569)”, in this volume.
60. I would like to record my thanks to Céline Cachaud for bringing this work to my attention and for her thoughts on its date and attribution.

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