

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

LAVINIA FONTANA

(BOLOGNA, 1552 - ROME, 1614)

Portrait of a Lady

Oil on wood panel (box cover), diameter 5 ½ in (14 cm); 6 ¾ in (17 cm) including border, which serves as a frame.



PROVENANCE

Rome, private collection.

LITERATURE

Unpublished.

This noble lady's face is set within a large ruff, leaving little room for a description of her dress within the reduced space of this miniature portrait painted on wood. The picture would have functioned as the inner cover of a round box, the painted side fitting into a small container that no doubt held the lady's jewels. The support is carved on the back, forming a single piece with the small molded frame.

In both her hair and dress, the sitter shows off numerous sparkling white seed-pearls, revealing how refined her clothing is. This close-up description of the face accentuates her lively gaze, directed at the beholder, while conveying the beginning of a smile, which lends her face an affable expression.

Lavinia Fontana was always inclined to paint miniature portraits, no doubt influenced by the painstaking detail of Flemish art. Our picture is a recent addition to the oeuvre of this rare Bolognese female artist whose life straddled the second half of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. The painting can be dated to between 1604 and 1614 and is therefore a late work in her career, which was based entirely in Bologna except for her last decade, spent in Rome, where she was much sought after by the aristocracy for her talent as portrait painter. Her renown in this field had by then gone well beyond the walls of her native city.