



Chinese Elder, oil, 6" x 4"  
by Carol Lee Thompson

## Intrepid Women of Miniature Portraiture

By Linda Lawler

Would you endure unfavorable comments regarding your character or cut off your hair and dress as a man all to pursue a life in art? Would you allow your husband to place limits on your career?

Women were excluded from life drawing and ateliers up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to society's moral conventions, although a few intrepid ladies did manage to gain entry into a male dominated world. Needlework, music, poetry, and porcelain painting were deemed suitable creative outlets for genteel

women. Many fine examples of portraits exist on porcelain plates, vases, and tiny porcelain pendants. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century the practice of illuminating (tiny decorations and illustrations) documents and manuscripts gave way to the creation of miniature portraits. Unfortunately in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the movement to printing was a setback for most female artists, although a few still were able to carry on.

A small number of talented women worked alongside their fathers or husbands. The practice of daughters obtaining training from



artist fathers is documented throughout the middle ages and Renaissance and the daughters of Maitre Honoré and Jean le Noir were among these female miniatures artists. Flemish miniature portrait artist, Levina Teerlinc (died 1576) was trained by her father during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and her clientele included the English Queen Mary, Lady Jane Grey, and the children of Henry VIII. Miniature portraiture flourished during this period as these small portraits were used much the same way that we use photographic snapshots today. These portraits were often given as tokens of affection or sent to distant places as a way to introduce and impress potential suitors, family members, and acquaintances.

Rosalba Carriera (1675 - 1757) was a Venetian Rococo painter thought to be the first artist to use ivory as a surface to put her tiny portraits onto. In her youth, portrait miniatures were her specialty. At a time when snuff taking was popular, Rosalba used the ivory lids of snuff boxes for her tiny portraits. Her portrait work evolved into conventional sized portrait painting, and she is credited with the development of the exclusive use of pastels.

Among America's contributions to the miniature portrait art form, Mary Roberts (died 1761) is the first female colonist to work in this art form and is credited with having painted the first watercolor on ivory miniature in the new colonies. Anna Claypoole Peale (1791 - 1878), the daughter of American artist, James Peale, was considered a professional artist in her early teens. Her uncle, Charles Wilson Peale, America's most famous painter in that era, held her work in high esteem. Her work was featured at the first exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Anna and her sister Sarah Miriam were the first women to be elected members of the Pennsylvania Academy in 1824. Anna painted many famous persons of her time including Presidents Andrew Jackson and James Monroe.

In Great Britain, Ann Foldstone, later Ann Mee (1770 - 1851) also trained with her father, mixing colors, and preparing canvases for him. She began to paint her own works at the age of twelve. A pupil of George Romney, her role as a professional portrait painter exposed her to comment about her character, sometimes unfavorably. It was held as unseemly for a woman to spend time alone

with a gentleman sitter and in the intimate setting and close quarters of a portrait studio, gossip about impropriety was likely. After her marriage, her husband placed restrictions upon her career. She was permitted to paint ladies only and the sitter was never to be accompanied by a gentleman at the sittings. Among her clients were Queen Charlotte and the Queen's daughters.

The contributions of women to miniature portraiture continue today:

Joan Willies, RMS, MAA, HS, MPSGS, Hon. MASE. Joan is an elected member of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors and Gravers of England. Among her most cherished commissions is her commission to paint Rudolf Nureyev for the New York Library of Performing Arts at the Lincoln Center.

Carol Lee Thompson OPA. Carol's works hang in corporate and private collections including the Butler Institute of Art and the Academy Art Museum. She has won numerous awards including the Oil Painters of America Award of Excellence and 12 awards in international miniature competitions.

Markissia Touliatos MAA, RMS. Markissia recently completed two commissions for the Governor's Mansion in her home state, for the Florida's First Ladies permanent collection. She counts among her many awards, Best Portrait at Hilliard Society Annual International Exhibition, Somerset, England and Best of Show MPSGS of Washington DC International Exhibition in 2009.

Rachelle Siegrist. Rachelle was commissioned to paint President Barack Obama in 2011 by the Woolaroc Museum. The Woolaroc Museum and Butler Institute of American Art house complete sets of Presidential portrait miniatures. Her work is currently part of a traveling museum exhibition which premiered at the R. W. Norton Art Gallery in Shreveport, LA in 2010 and travels to over a dozen museums through 2014. 🌀



Rudolf Nureyev in the Role of Don Juan, oil on ivory, 3" x 4" by Joan Willies, in the collection of New York Library of Performing Arts at Lincoln Center



President Barack Obama, opaque watercolor on rag board, 3 1/8" x 2 3/8", by Rachelle Siegrist, in the collection of Woolaroc Museum, Bartlesville, OK



Girl with Red Bow, oil on ivory, 2 1/2" x 3" by Markissia Touliatos