

# PORTRAITURE

## LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY

Portraits have been used in courtship over the centuries, brokering relationships, documenting marital union and being exchanged in illicit affairs. Marriage was sometimes a form of diplomacy and without the means to travel easily prospective couples may not get to see each other in person, so portraiture became an essential means to ensure that any potential partner was desirable. This was of particular importance to royal unions where the artists of royal courts might be under particular pressure to exaggerate the attractiveness of the potential bride or groom to be.

Henry VIII would famously dispatch his own trusted court painter, Hans Holbein the Younger, to document future potential brides so as not to be deceived about their looks. In 1795, the future Queen Caroline of England spoke of how disappointed she was upon first meeting her fiancé, the Prince of Wales: *'I find him very fat, and by no means as beautiful as his portrait.'*

The Wallace Collection holds some intriguing portraits that link to the theme of love and marriage. These portraits would naturally aim to show their subjects in the most attractive light.

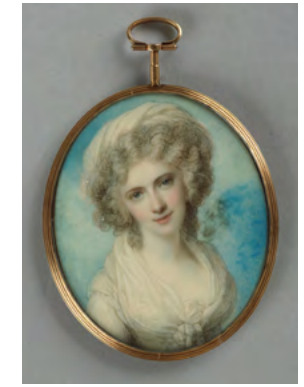
### KEY WORKS



Anthony van Dyck,  
*Marie de Raet*, 1631



Anthony van Dyck,  
*Philippe Le Roy*, 1630



Richard Cosway,  
*Maria Cosway*, c. 1785-90



Frans Hals, *The Laughing Cavalier*, 1624



Thomas Gainsborough,  
*Mrs Mary Robinson (Perdita)*, 1781

# THE LAUGHING CAVALIER

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



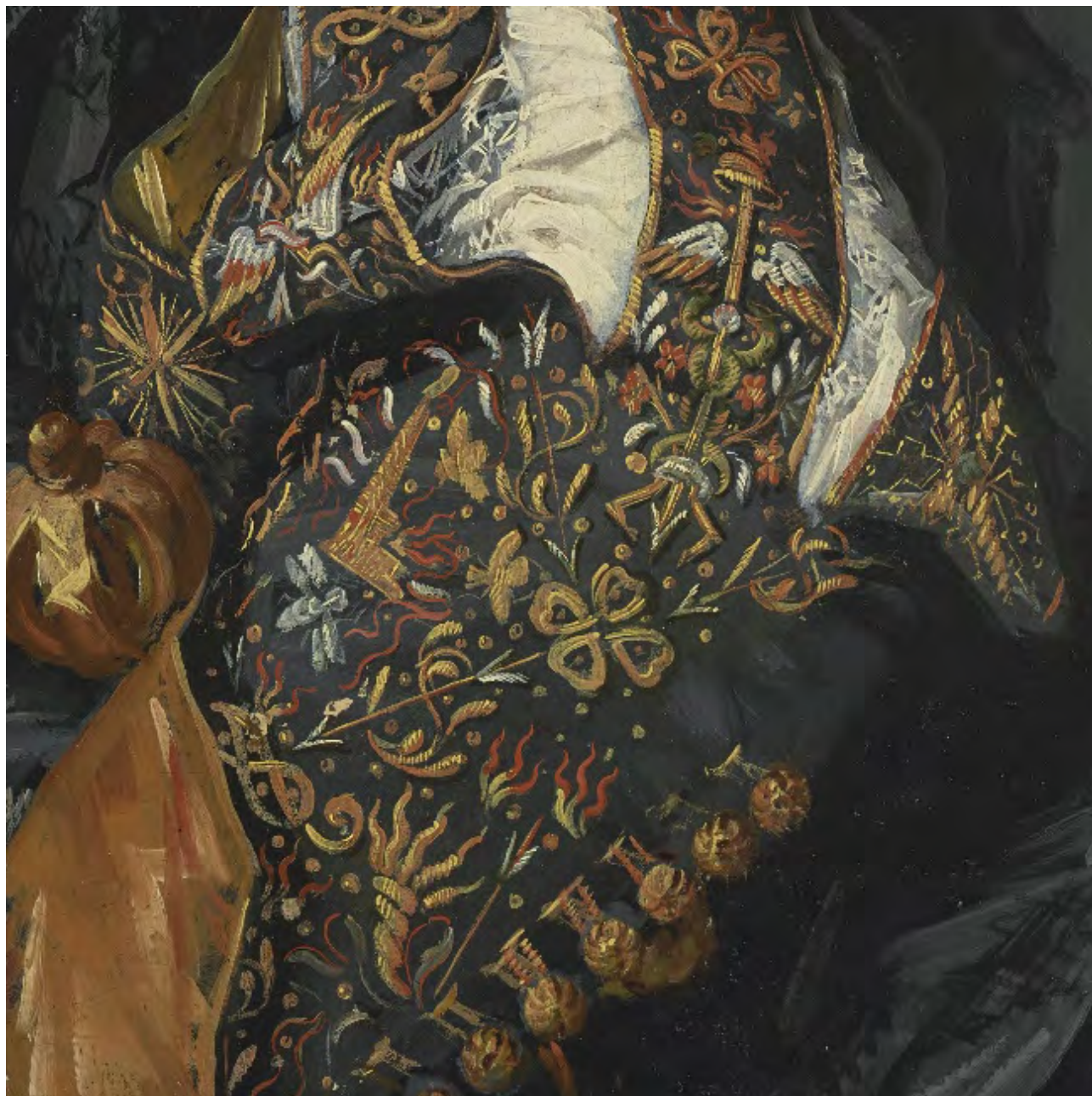
**TITLE** The Laughing Cavalier  
**DATE** 1624  
**SIZE** 83 x 67.3 cm  
**MATERIALS** Oil on canvas

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**ARTIST** Frans Hals  
**DATES** 1582/3-1666  
**PLACE** The Netherlands

# THE LAUGHING CAVALIER

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



## IN DETAIL



# THE LAUGHING CAVALIER

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



## IN DETAIL



## THE PORTRAIT

This portrait is uplifting and pleasing to the eye, just as intended. It shows a young man, dressed in luxurious fashions, in a confident pose, a hand on his hip, looking down slightly towards the viewer. His face is framed by a large wide-brimmed black hat and a white lace collar. He has smiling eyes, shiny pink cheeks and a faint smile on his face. His upturned moustache enhances his enigmatic smile even further. He appears to be both friendly and slightly mysterious at the same time.

Art historians are unsure about the identity of the sitter or the exact purpose of this portrait. However, the emblems embroidered on the sitter's doublet provide us with some clues: the arrows, bees, flaming cornucopiae (curved horns or similarly shaped receptacles), and lovers' knots, were symbolic of the pleasures and pains of love. It is therefore believed that this may be a courtship painting – not a painting about marriage, but a portrait that acted as an invitation to marriage. We are unaware of who was being invited to be married, nor do we know whether the painting was successful in securing the desired marriage. We can, however, be sure that the sitter was aiming to please and wanted to show himself in his best light, as a wealthy, fashionable and splendidly confident man.

### How did the image get its new 'incorrect' title?

This portrait, whilst being the most well-known artwork in the Wallace Collection, is curious as not only is the sitter unknown but the title is incorrect. The image does not depict a cavalier, a gentleman trained in arms and horsemanship, nor does it show us a man that is laughing. The previous title of this painting was simply *Portrait of a Man*.

The Victorian art collector Richard Seymour-Conway, 4th Marquess of Hertford, bought this previously uncelebrated portrait at auction in 1865. Despite the fact that the artist Frans Hals had become overlooked in the 18th and 19th centuries, a bidding war took place and the artwork was bought for what was an enormous sum of 51,000 francs (about £2,040). This event brought attention to the painting and renewed focus to Frans Hals' reputation as an artist again. At the Royal Academy exhibition of 1888, the painting was exhibited with the title *The Laughing Cavalier*, which has now become synonymous with this world-famous portrait.

## WHO IS THE SITTER?

The identity of the sitter in this portrait is a mystery. We know that he was aged twenty-six in 1624, from the inscription on the upper right-hand corner of the painting. There is, however, no further information about the identity of this man. We can be sure that he was wealthy enough to commission such a prominent artist. The luxurious and fashionable clothes he wears also speak of his taste and that he followed current trends. Other than that, we are left wondering about the portrait's mysteries. Who is this handsome man? What did he do for a living? Who was the intended recipient of this portrait? If this was indeed a courtship portrait, why might he want to marry the person in question? Did they ever receive the portrait? What might the outcome of his proposal have been...did he end up getting married?

## WHO IS THE ARTIST?

Frans Hals (1582-1666) was an artist during a period in which Dutch trade, science, and art were among the most acclaimed in the world. He lived and worked in Haarlem in the Netherlands. Hals was especially known for his portraits of wealthy citizens and was considered one of the finest portrait artists of his day. He introduced a lively style of painting, with loose brush strokes that were intentionally visible on the canvas. His sitters were portrayed in a unique exuberant style: smiling and positioned in jaunty, animated poses. He was renowned for capturing a sense of movement in his work, presenting the personality of its subjects with vitality and joy.

## DISCUSS

**How might we best promote ourselves when looking for love?  
What qualities might we want to show?**

# MARIE DE RAET AND PHILIPPE LE ROY

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



**TITLES** Marie de Raet  
Philippe Le Roy  
**DATES** 1631  
1630  
**SIZE** 213.3 x 114.5 cm  
**MATERIALS** Oil on canvas

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**ARTIST** Anthony van Dyck  
**DATES** 1599-1641  
**PLACE** Southern Netherlands

# PHILIPPE LE ROY

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



## IN DETAIL





# PHILIPPE LE ROY

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



## IN DETAIL



# PHILIPPE LE ROY

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



## IN DETAIL



## THE PORTRAITS

These two striking large-scale portraits, over two metres tall, are meant to be seen together as a pair and are commemorating a marriage. They show Philippe Le Roy and his sixteen-year-old wife Marie de Raet, full length, dressed in their splendid finery, displaying the wealth and taste of the 17th century nobility. They wear the latest fashions and are dressed in rich black fabrics and white lace, which were very expensive. Black fabrics were extremely costly to make (black dyes would often fade and a good quality black fabric would cost a fortune).

The portraits have been painted in the 'Grand Style': large-scale, life-size representations with idealised backgrounds and visual cues that signified the wealth and class of the sitter. They have been painted in a vivid and naturalistic way. A dog sits beside each sitter, a symbol of faithfulness and fidelity. Philippe appears proud and confident in the swagger of his stance, with one hand resting on his sword, the other patting the elegant dog which obediently looks up at him. He stands next to hollyhock flowers, a symbol of ambition,

fertility, and fruitfulness. Marie is wearing pearls, a symbol of purity, and holds a feather fan in her hand. Marie's facial expression, in contrast to that of her husband, seems to show her innocence and vulnerability.

Just as today we document marriage with official photography, in the 17th century portraits were commissioned to commemorate this important union. Unlike today, however, it was typical at this time for the new husband and wife to appear separately, framed in a pair of paintings. Le Roy's portrait was painted, probably to celebrate his betrothal, in 1630 and Marie's was painted a year later after their marriage had taken place.

## WHO ARE THE SITTERS?

Philippe Le Roy was the illegitimate grandson of a successful Antwerp manufacturer. Through his own financial ingenuity, he acquired lands and the rights to become 'Lord of Ravels'. He was a Flemish diplomat who helped end the Thirty Years' War in 1648. He advanced his status and was given the rank of knight from Emperor Ferdinand III and achieved further advancements, giving him an official coat of arms.

Philippe Le Roy's aspirations are captured in this picture which has been painted in the 'Grand Style', intended to reflect the good taste, sophistication and learning of the sitter. Philippe Le Roy's wealth and status is also demonstrated in the act of commissioning Van Dyck, the most famous portrait artist of the age, to document his marriage.

Le Roy periodically had the coat of arms in the top corner of this portrait repainted to reflect each new nuance of his social advancement. They were not painted by Van Dyck himself as Philippe had no official coat of arms to show off in 1630 when his portrait was painted.

## WHO IS THE ARTIST?

Van Dyck (1599–1641) was one of the most influential painters working in the 17th century. Flemish by birth, he worked across a number of European countries. He is best known for his portraits of the aristocracy. He eventually made England his home in 1632 when he secured the patronage of King Charles I who liked his dynamic, fluid, shimmering style of painting that would influence British portraiture up until the early years of the 20th century. These two portraits in the Wallace Collection demonstrate his ability to capture not only his sitters' likenesses, but their aspirations as well.

## DISCUSS

A marriage is the union of two distinct individuals. Is it therefore better that each has their own separate portrait?

## COMPARE



- Look at other representations of married couples in art. What similarities and differences are there in the way they have been portrayed? What does the scale and medium of the portraits tell us about their relationships and the purpose of the imagery?



Unknown, *Portrait of a Gentleman & Portrait of a Lady*  
Early 17th Century  
Wax, painted and gilded, silk, wood, glass  
Size: 15.2 x 10.8 cm



Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*,  
1434

©The National Gallery, London

# MRS MARY ROBINSON (PERDITA)

PORTRAITURE  
LOVE, MARRIAGE AND LOYALTY



**TITLE** Mrs Mary Robinson (Perdita)  
**DATE** 1781  
**SIZE** 233.7 x 153 cm  
**MATERIALS** Oil on canvas

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**ARTIST** Thomas Gainsborough  
**DATES** 1727-1788  
**PLACE** England

# MRS MARY ROBINSON (PERDITA)



## IN DETAIL



## THE PORTRAIT

Actress Mary Robinson, dressed in rich contemporary fashion, is shown sitting in the countryside with a faithful dog by her side. She is holding a miniature portrait of her ex-lover, the Prince of Wales (later to be George IV).

Mary Robinson made her name when playing 'Perdita' in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Perdita's character in the play is a princess lost in the countryside who falls in love with a disguised prince. This role seemed to mirror events in Mary's own life as she too fell in love with a prince, becoming the Prince of Wales' mistress in a brief affair. This picture and its title highlight the parallels between her life and that of Shakespeare's heroine whose role made her famous.

This painting was commissioned by the prince after their affair had ended, and once their relationship was on friendlier terms again. The miniature of the prince that Mary holds represents a miniature that the prince gave to her during their brief affair. The gifting of miniature portraits as a love token was a popular fashion led by the prince himself.

The inclusion of the miniature in the image shows the progression of their relationship from past lovers to the cordial friendship that the commissioning of this larger portrait represented. The inclusion of the dog sitting by Mary's side is also a symbol of friendship and trust. This portrait was criticised for not conveying an exact physical likeness of the sitter, and was not deemed as good as portraits of the same sitter by Reynolds and Romney.

## WHO IS THE SITTER?

Mrs Mary Robinson was a renowned actress, poet and feminist writer. She was best known for her role as 'Perdita' in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. During a performance of this play in 1779, a young Prince of Wales (later George IV) became infatuated with her and she became his first public mistress. Her relationship with the prince meant she had to give up her financially successful career. The relationship was brief and she was rejected in December 1780, when the prince's interests moved elsewhere. Mary's relationship with the prince pushed her into the limelight even more than her acting career had. Mary Robinson was painted by all three of the leading portrait artists at the time (Gainsborough, Reynolds and Romney) and her affair with the prince was lampooned in many satirical political cartoons.

When the affair ended, Mary was left without the income that the prince had promised her. She threatened to publish the prince's letters and, in exchange for returning them, was rewarded with a small regular income from the prince. Might this portrait therefore also represent Mary's strength in pursuing blackmail? Can we read this image as her 'holding control' of her past relationship in order to get what she wants?

Mary Robinson subsequently earned her living through writing and publishing poems. Today, Mary is better remembered for her brief affair with the Prince of Wales than for her other achievements, which might speak to the power of this portrait in shaping and maintaining her reputation over time.

## WHO IS THE ARTIST?

Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) was, with Joshua Reynolds (his main rival), a leading portrait painter in England in the later 18th century. He was a founding member of the Royal Academy in 1768 and was always willing to experiment and try new ideas and techniques. Whilst finding success and fame as one of the most brilliant portrait artists of his time, he personally preferred and longed to paint landscapes.

Gainsborough didn't believe in the academic tradition and found the fashion for history painting ridiculous. He preferred to avoid references to Italian Renaissance art or antiquity. This allowed him to innovate and experiment, finding new interpretations of what a portrait could be. He instead came to show his sitters in fashionable contemporary dress, set against a loosely painted landscape. He was a favourite painter of King George III and Queen Charlotte.

## DISCUSS

**How might this portrait show multiple sides of Mary Robinson's personality?**

**How might an artist show the act of blackmail in a portrait?**



# MRS MARY ROBINSON (PERDITA)

## COMPARE



- Compare Gainsborough's portrait of Mary Robinson with other portraits of her in the Wallace Collection created around the same time. What different aspects of her personality have been portrayed?



John Hazlitt, *Mrs 'Perdita' Robinson, after Reynolds*, c. 1790-1830



Joshua Reynolds, *Mrs Mary Robinson*, 1783-1784



George Romney, *Mrs Mary Robinson*, 1780-1781

## COMPARE



- Look at this satirical print of 'Perdita' and the Prince of Wales. What different aspects of their relationship does this portrait show?



Satirical Print published by B Pownall,  
*Florizel and Perdita*, 1783

© The Trustees of the British Museum

## MINIATURES

Portrait miniatures, tiny portraits that can fit into the palm of the hand, had been around since Tudor times mounted on brooches, lockets or pendants and were a popular fashion accessory. They were used by royalty as they were small enough to be given personally as a sign of a monarch's favour. They could in turn be carried and worn to show a sign of loyalty.

By the 18th century miniatures were being exchanged as love tokens, a fashion that was led by the Prince of Wales (to become George IV). He commissioned Richard Cosway to paint tiny portrait miniatures of himself so that he could send them to the latest object of his desire.

There are over 300 portrait miniatures in the Wallace Collection.

## KING GEORGE IV MINIATURE

This miniature of the Prince of Wales (to become George IV), in the National Portrait Gallery, London, is just under 10 cm high and is connected to a key work in the Wallace Collection. It shows the Prince of Wales as a dashing, fashionable young man in a black hat and bright red jacket with the order of the garter pinned to his chest, set against a background of blue sky.

The miniature is believed to have been commissioned as a gift for the prince's first official mistress, the actress Mary 'Perdita' Robinson. It is this portrait miniature that is thought to be depicted being held in Mary Robinson's hand in the Wallace Collection's portrait *Mrs Mary Robinson (Perdita)* by Thomas Gainsborough. It was one of the first miniatures artist Richard Cosway made for George.



**TITLE** King George IV  
**DATE** c. 1780-1782  
**SIZE** 9.8 x 7.33 cm  
**MATERIALS** Watercolour on ivory

**ARTIST** Richard Cosway  
**DATES** 1742-1821  
**PLACE** England

© National Portrait Gallery,  
London



**TITLE** Maria Cosway  
**DATE** c. 1785-90  
**SIZE** 7.1 x 5.8 cm  
**MATERIALS** Painted on ivory

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**ARTIST** Richard Cosway  
**DATES** 1742-1821  
**PLACE** England

## THE PORTRAIT

This portrait miniature from the Wallace Collection is regarded as one of Richard Cosway's greatest masterpieces. It is just 7 cm high and depicts an elegant woman with blue eyes, wearing a white dress and headscarf. Her face, which is framed by her wavy hair and ringlets, is set against a background of blue sky.

An inscription at the back identifies the sitter as Mrs Fitzherbert (Maria Smythe), the mistress and illegal wife of the Prince of Wales. However, documented portraits prove that this identification is not correct. The features of the woman are different from Fitzherbert's, whose eyes are brown as depicted in another miniature by Cosway that is genuinely of her. It is suggested that the sitter might be Cosway's wife Maria, and comparisons with other portraits of her support this. This miniature therefore might have personal and intimate meaning to the artist.

The previous identification of the sitter as Mrs Fitzherbert probably made the miniature of particular interest to the Hertford family as she was like a second mother to the 4th Marquess.

## WHO IS THE SITTER?

Maria Hadfield (1760-1838) was an Italian-English painter of portrait miniatures, an accomplished musician and, together with her husband, Richard Cosway, who was twenty years older than her, was the centre of a highly fashionable circle.

Their marriage contributed to their carefully-organised joint social and business success. The Cosways were celebrities of their day. Famous both as artists and as social figures, they had great influence on London's fashionable elite and the art world. Their stormy and tumultuous relationship and affairs added to the public's interest in them.

## WHO IS THE ARTIST?

Richard Cosway (1742-1821) was the leading and most fashionable portrait miniaturist of the Regency era. He painted his first portrait of George IV in 1780 and was appointed 'Painter to the Prince of Wales' in 1785. Cosway worked with the prince for thirty years and had substantial influence over his official image, painting his portrait many times. The prince put a great deal of trust in the artist and some of the miniature portraits commissioned from Cosway helped fuel George's romantic liaisons, his illegal secret marriage, and other more formal affairs.

The artist was extremely successful due to his skill in flattering his sitters, depicting them as elegant and beautiful. He was a prolific artist, able to paint over ten portraits in a single day, keeping up with the high demand for his popular work. He collaborated with engravers to reproduce his work for a wider public.

## EYE MINIATURES

A curious form of portraiture that developed out of the miniature and became popular to exchange as a love token was the eye miniature - a lover's eye - a fashion which started in the 1780s. Whilst the Wallace Collection does not hold any eye miniatures, these unusual items are linked to key works in the Collection and are interesting to explore in relation to the role of portraits in love.

## MRS FITZHERBERT'S EYE

This portrait is of the right eye of a female sitter. The single brown eye, framed by its eyebrow, floats in the centre of a skin-coloured background. Slight shading indicates the bridge of the nose and a hazy light grey colour suggests how a hairline might frame the face. These are the only details of the portrait; the rest of the features have been omitted. A watchful eye looks out of the locket at the viewer.



**TITLE** Mrs Fitzherbert's Eye  
**DATE** 1786  
**MATERIALS** Watercolour on ivory  
  
**ARTIST** Richard Cosway  
**DATES** 1742-1821  
**PLACE** England

Private Collection  
Image: The Courtauld

## WHO WAS THE SITTER?

One of the earliest eye miniatures was made for the Prince Regent (to become George IV) to give to his lover and mistress, Maria Anne Fitzherbert. In 1784 the prince met and fell madly in love with Maria Fitzherbert, but the laws at the time forbade him from marrying a catholic who had been twice widowed. After his initial proposal Maria had fled the country to avoid controversy. In pursuit of his romantic interest, he commissioned miniaturist Richard Cosway to make a tiny image but only depicting the Prince's right eye. The image was encased in a gold locket and sent to Maria accompanied by a note.

*'I send you ... an Eye ... If you have not totally forgotten the whole countenance. I think the likeness will strike you.'*

We can assume that the eye miniature was received favourably as, on 15 December 1785, they wed secretly and illegally. In exchange, Maria Fitzherbert's eye was captured in the miniature eye portrait above, which the prince was said to wear about his person at all times.

A fashion was initiated for the exchange of eye miniatures between lovers, especially those separated by distance or societal disapproval. The single watchful eye could symbolise the watchful gaze of a jealous partner who feared that his or her lover might stray. They appear on rings, snuff boxes, lockets, brooches and pendants. The inscriptions on the back of many eye miniatures show that they were also worn in memory of deceased loved ones.

These trinkets often have a compartment to hold a piece of the lover's hair. Queen Victoria revived eye miniatures temporarily in the mid 1800's when she ordered eye portraits of her children, friends, and relatives.



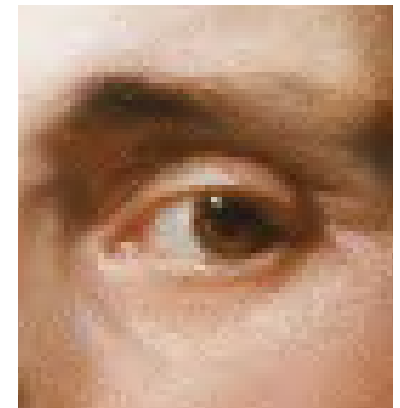
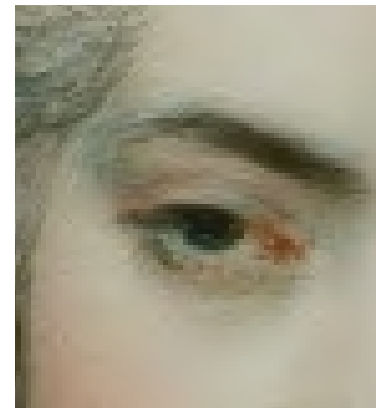
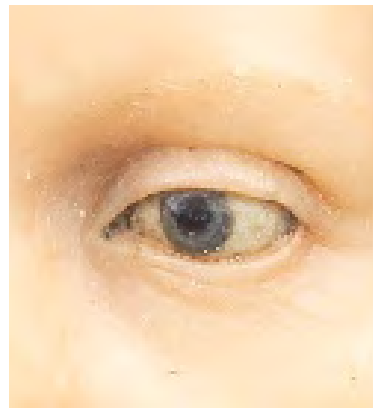
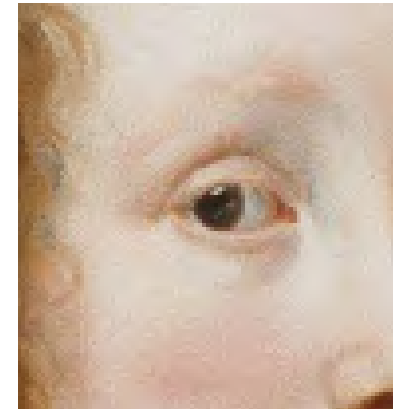
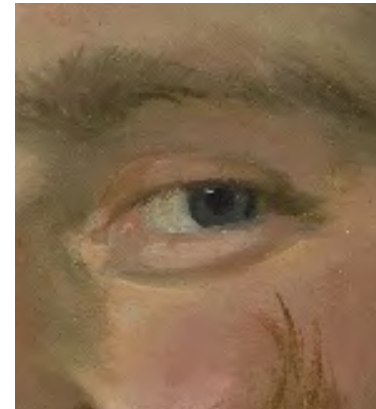
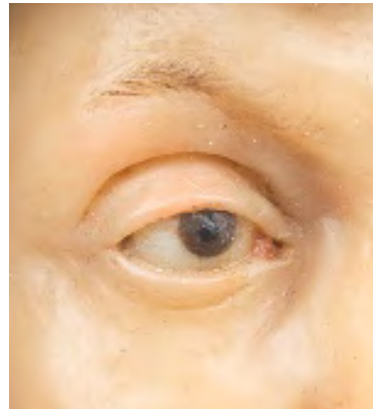
Attributed to Sir William Ross, *Eye miniature of Victoria, Princess Royal, 1857*

Royal Collection Trust  
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2021

## DISCUSS



- What effect does the scale of a portrait have on its meaning? Is bigger always better? For a contemporary artist's take, look at *The Earl of Essex* by Grayson Perry.
- How successfully can one single part of your body represent your identity?
- It is often said that 'the eye is the window to the soul'. How might we be able to understand someone's emotions and thoughts just by looking at their eyes?





## EXPLORE FURTHER



Look at modern and contemporary images of love and marriage. How has the artistic expression of love changed over time?

Consider these examples:

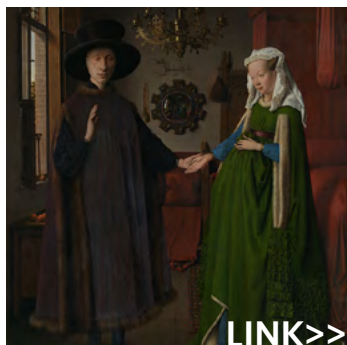
- Misan Harriman, *The Duke and Duchess of Sussex*, 2021
- Annie Leibovitz, *Yoko Ono; John Lennon*, 1980

## ACTIVITIES



- Practice drawing a smiling face. Pay extra attention to how the eyes and cheeks change and show us that someone is smiling.
- Create a portrait of yourself that shows your best qualities. What symbols might you include to act as clues for the viewer to decode?
- Make a miniature eye portrait of someone who has great meaning to you.
- Make a photograph or draw one single part of your body as a portrait to represent a part of your personality (e.g. strength, sensitivity, curiosity).
- Make a portrait and resize it to both miniature and oversized scale. Does the image change its meaning with its scale?
- Create a portrait of a couple, making a separate framed image for each person. Consider how you will show that they are connected emotionally despite being in different images.

# EXTERNAL REFERENCES AND HYPERLINKS



Jan van Eyck,  
*The Arnolfini  
Portrait*, 1434

©The National  
Gallery, London

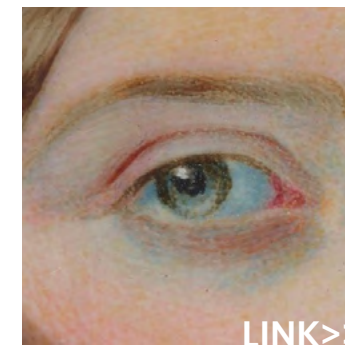
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Richard Cosway,  
*King George IV*,  
c. 1780-1782

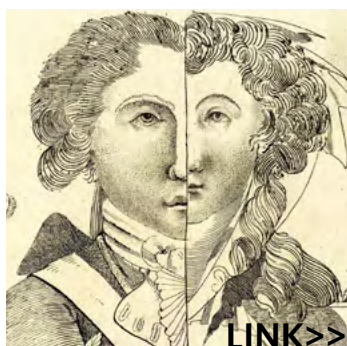
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*Eye miniature of  
Victoria, Princess  
Royal*. probably  
commissioned by  
Queen Victoria,  
1857

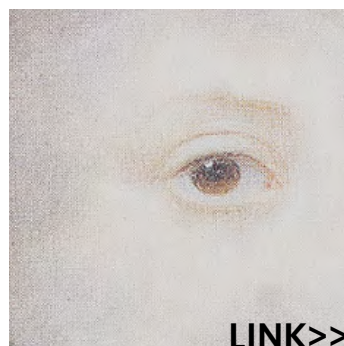
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Satirical Print  
published by B  
Pownall, *Florizel  
and Perdita*, 1783

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Museum

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Richard Cosway,  
*Mrs Fitzherbert's  
Eye*, 1786

Private Collection

Image:  
Witt Library,  
The Courtauld