

An aerial photograph of a coastal area. The top portion shows a deep blue sea meeting a sandy beach. Below the beach is a red-tiled roof, likely of a building. The foreground is a mix of light brown sand and some sparse vegetation. The text 'A UNIQUE MASTER' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

A UNIQUE MASTER

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Nicholas Hilliard is one of the greatest miniature painters in the world. He is a person who is considered to be unique in the direction of art.



Portrait of English queen Elizabeth I,
nearby 1590, Walker Art Gallery,
Liverpool



George Klifford's portrait, the column of
Cumberland, nearby 1590, London, a
national sea museum

Nicholas Hilliard was an English goldsmith and a limner best known for his portrait miniatures of members of the courts of Elizabeth I and James I of England. He mostly painted small oval miniatures, but also some larger cabinet miniatures, up to about ten inches tall, and at least two famous half-length panel portraits of Elizabeth.



He enjoyed continuing success as an artist. His paintings give the visual image of Elizabethan England, very different from that of most of Europe in the late sixteenth century.

Portrait of the young man among roses, nearby 1588,
Victoria and Albert's London museum



Portrait of English queen Elizabeth I, nearby 1590,
Victoria and Albert's London museum

Technically he was very conservative according to European standards, but his paintings are superbly executed and have freshness and charm that has ensured his continuing reputation as "the central artistic figure of the Elizabethian age, the only English painter whose work reflects, in its delicate microcosm, the world of Shakespeare's earlier plays".

Nicholas Hilliard was born in 1547 at Exeter, southern England in a family of a jeweler. His father taught him and he also studied at the royal jeweler's for some time. He was a self-educated person as in those days very few artists were engaged in such direction in painting. He is considered to be the first miniature painter in England.



Richard Hilliard's portrait, the father of the artist, 1577, Victoria and Albert's London museum

In contrast to the other masters of his time he painted without using any preparatory drawings.

Nicholas Hilliard was the court miniature painter of queen Elizabeth.



Nicholas Hilliard's workshop, queen Elizabeth I
(a portrait in Herdvice, 1599)

The artist painted portraits on small pieces of paper or parchment. In his works he used gentle tones of water colours that gave special tenderness and grace to his miniatures.



Portrait of the unknown person holding a female hand, 1588, London, National gallery of England

From the end of 1580 he made experiments and connected the principles of drawing a miniature and a court picture. He also supplemented his works of art with emblems and calligraphical mottoes.

The subtlety of performance of Hilliard's works admires. He was able to reproduce thin laces of a collar or a shining jewel.



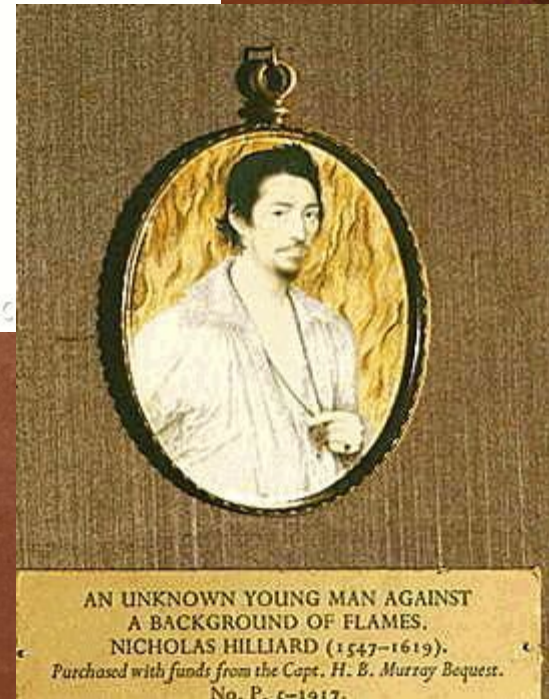
Portrait of the unknown person, 1602, London, Victoria and Albert's museum

Magnificent hairdresses of ladies are covered by gold ornaments, magnificent suits are decorated and sparkle as if strange plumage of paradise birds. And even Shakespeare in the masterpieces appreciated Nicolas Hilliard's creativity.



Portrait of English queen Elizabeth I, 1587, London, National portrait gallery

A lot of his pictures are in Victoria and Albert's museum now. But you really need a magnifier to observe them.



Sources:

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Portrait Alisy Brand, wives of the artist, 1578, Victoria and Albert's London museum