CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH ZINCKE (German, 1683/85–1767)

Portrait of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, 1715. 1949.549

Portrait of a Man, c. 1735. 1940.1221

CHRISTIAN FRIEDRICH ZINCKE was born in Dresden, Germany, where he apprenticed with his goldsmith father.[1] At the invitation of the master enamelist Charles Boit (1663–1727), Zincke traveled to England in 1706, became Boit's pupil, and later established the most successful enamel-painting studio in England. Several generations of British monarchs patronized Zincke, including Queen Anne, King George I, and particularly King George II, a great lover of enamels. During the early years of his practice, Zincke charged under 7 guineas for a portrait, and although inflation remained steady, he was able to command up to 30 guineas by the end of his career. This substantial increase not only indicates the artist's rise in popularity, but it also speaks to his deteriorating vision, as the larger fees were implemented to limit the number of commissions taxing Zincke's failing eyesight, which forced him to give up painting professionally in the mid-1740s.

The enameling techniques utilized in portrait miniatures were developed during the early seventeenth century, but the first half of the eighteenth century was the heyday of enamel painting in Britain. The art form was prized for its resilience and brilliant colors, though the complicated and labor-intensive process of individually firing multiple layers of colored metal oxide made it more difficult to create a faithful likeness. Zincke executed portraits from life as well as copied older portraits in oil from artists including Peter Lely (1618–1680) and Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723). Always willing to flatter his sitters, Zincke was known to make some of his sitters appear more youthful and to work from earlier portraits. In spite of the fact that many miniatures by Zincke are signed on the counter-enamel, attribution is complicated by the fact that he kept an industrious studio populated with students and assistants of varying talents. He began to teach over a decade after his eyesight failed, and among his better-known students were William Prewett (active 1733–c. 1750) and Jeremias Majer (1735–1789), whose work is also in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

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1 Daphne Foskett, *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club, 1987; repr., 2000), pp. 169–173.

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