

## = Portrait of a Young Girl ( Christus ) =

Portrait of a Young Girl is a small oil @-@ on @-@ oak panel painting by the Early Netherlandish painter Petrus Christus . It was completed towards the end of his life , between 1465 and 1470 , and is held in the Gemäldegalerie , Berlin . It marks a major stylistic advance in contemporary portraiture ; the girl is set in an airy , three @-@ dimensional , realistic setting , and stares out at the viewer with a complicated expression that is reserved , yet intelligent and alert .

It is widely regarded as one of the most exquisite portraits of the Northern Renaissance . Art historian Joel Upton described the sitter as resembling " a polished pearl , almost opalescent , lying on a cushion of black velvet . " The panel builds on the work of Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden , and was highly influential in the decades after its completion . Its appeal lies in part in her intriguing stare , accentuated by the slight misalignment of her eyes , while the eyebrows are faintly skewed .

## = = Description = =

Christus frames his sitter in a rigid and balanced architectural setting . She is positioned within a narrow rectangular space , before a wainscotted wall . The image is divided by the horizontal parallel lines of her wainscot and blouse , which join at the inverted triangle formed by the neckline of her dress . The rendering of the background departs somewhat from contemporary conventions in portraiture : Christus sets the girl against a dark brown wall with little detail , in contrast to the elaborate interiors of Jan van Eyck , who is often regarded as Christus ' master . It is defined entirely by its material , a wooden dado rail along the top and the wainscot that forms the lower portion . The wall sets her in a realistic interior , perhaps intended to represent a space within her home .

Light falls on the pictorial space from the left , creating shadows against the back wall , the strongest cast by the girl 's hennin . The depth of space provided by the back wall gives room for this detailing , which Charles Sterling believes is indebted to van Eyck . The light throws a murky but curved shadow on the wall behind the girl and acts as a counterpoint to the contour of her cheek and hairline .

The girl has pale skin , almond and slightly oriental eyes and a petulant mouth . She reflects the Gothic ideal of elongated facial features , narrow shoulders , tightly pinned hair and an almost unnaturally long forehead , achieved through tightly pulled @-@ back hair which has been plucked at the top . She is dressed in expensive clothing and jewellery and seems to be uncommonly elegant . She looks out of the canvas in an oblique but self @-@ aware and penetrating manner that some art historians have described as unnerving . Joanna Woods @-@ Marsden remarks that a sitter acknowledging her audience in this way was virtually unprecedented even in Italian portrait painting . Her acknowledgment is accentuated by the painting 's crop , which focuses the viewer 's gaze in a near @-@ invasive manner that seems to question the relationship between artist , model , patron and viewer .

The headdress is a variant of the truncated or bee @-@ hive hennin , then fashionable at the Burgundian court . A very similar style , with no tail , is seen on the older of two girls in the donor panels of Presentation of Christ by the Master of the Prado Adoration of the Magi , a pupil of Rogier van der Weyden . The black band under the chin is rarely found in other images from the period , and has been interpreted as a style borrowed from the male chaperon hat , which always has a long tailing tail or cornette , sometimes worn wrapped under the chin in this way .

The influence of van Eyck can be seen in the delicate rendering of the textures and details of the dress , trimmings and adornments . Her pale skin and strong bone structure is strongly van Eyckian , and recalls the male sitter in his Arnolfini Portrait . But in other ways Christus abandons the developments made by van Eyck and Robert Campin . He reduces the emphasis on volume of those artists , in favour of an elongation of form ; the narrow , slight upper body and head are , according to the art historian Robert Suckale , " heightened by the V @-@ shaped neckline of the ermine and the cylindrical hat . " Further , while the first generation of Early Netherlandish painters benefited from the patronage of the newly emerging middle class , secularising portraiture , and

removing it from the preserve of royalty , Christus renders the girl as aristocratic , haughty , sophisticated , and exquisitely dressed .

= = Identity of the sitter = =

In a letter dated 1824 or 1825 Gustav Waagen , later Director of the Berlin Museums , gave his interpretation of Latin inscriptions he had seen on the original frame of the portrait , which was subsequently lost . As well as a Christus signature , he found an identification of the sitter as " a niece of the famous Talbots " ( eine Nichte des berühmten Talbots ) . His research led to a consensus that the sitter was a member of the leading English family , the Talbots , then headed by the Earl of Shrewsbury . In 1863 George Scharf suggested the panel was intended as the right @-@ hand wing to a diptych with the 1446 Portrait of Edward Grimston ( or " Grymston " ) in the National Gallery , London , leading to speculation that the girl might be Grimston 's first wife , Alice . This was rejected by Grete Ring in 1913 , on the basis that neither the dimensions nor background of the panels match , and that the Berlin panel was most probably completed some 20 ? 30 years after the Grimston portrait .

Joel Upton , supporting Waagen 's analysis , investigated whether the " famous Talbot " was John Talbot , 1st Earl of Shrewsbury , killed at the Battle of Castillon in 1453 . However , John Talbot had only one niece , Ankaret , who died in infancy in 1421 . Lorne Campbell suggests that given the Latin signature , Waagen might have misinterpreted the word " nepos " , which can also mean " grandchild " . Upton concludes that she was more likely a daughter of John Talbot , 2nd Earl of Shrewsbury , either Anne or Margaret . Their parents married between 1444 and 1445 , suggesting that the sitter was under 20 at the time of the portrait . She may have travelled to Bruges to attend the famously lavish wedding in 1468 of Margaret of York , sister of Edward IV of England , to Charles the Bold , Duke of Burgundy .

= = Provenance = =

The earliest extant record of the painting is in a 1492 inventory of the Medici family , where it is described as a small panel bust of a French lady , coloured in oil , the work of Pietro Cresci of Bruges . However , it seems from other works in the collection that the scribe was uninformed and noted any piece of northern art in the collection as " French " . It was highly valued , with an unusually high price of 40 florins , and prominently displayed . The record does not address the matter of the girl 's identity beyond her nationality , indicating that the painting was regarded as of aesthetic rather than historical interest .

In the 20th century Erwin Panofsky was instrumental in furthering Christus ' reputation as a major 15th @-@ century northern painter , described the work as an " enchanting , almost French @-@ looking portrait " , perhaps noting the resemblance to the virgin in Jean Fouquet 's Melun Diptych . Sterling picks up on this , noting the many similarities between the two women , including their tightly pulled @-@ back hair , high cheek bones , slanted eyes and sulky expressions .

The portrait entered the Prussian royal collection with the purchase in 1821 of the Edward Solly collection , from which the then @-@ recently formed Gemäldegalerie , Berlin , was allowed to take its pick . It was positively identified in 1825 as an original by Christus when Waagen identified the lettering on the ( now lost ) frame " PETR XPI " as shorthand for " Petrus Christophori " , which he associated with the " Pietro Christa " mentioned by Giorgio Vasari in the 1568 edition of his " Lives of the Most Excellent Painters , Sculptors , and Architects " . In this way , Waagen also identified Christus ' so @-@ called Saint Eligius panel , now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art , New York ( and seen as just a portrait of a goldsmith ) , marking the painter 's rediscovery after centuries of obscurity .

Before this identification , a number of his paintings had been attributed to Jan van Eyck , but became identified with Christus after Waagen established him as a distinct and separate master . Christus is known to have signed six extant works , sometimes with the text " PETR XPI ME FECIT " ( Petr Xpi made me ) . Over the next century sketches of Christus ' biography were constructed , as

art historians ? notably Panofsky ? slowly disentangled his works from those of van Eyck .

= = Dating = =

The painting was dated c . 1446 by Wolfgang Schöne in the 1930s , mainly by matching the style and fashion of her clothing to contemporary trends . In the early 20th century the dating and authorship of works then attributed to Christus were challenged . Max Friedländer proposed a number of dates and an ordering of works in the 1957 volume of his Early Netherlandish painting , but many of his assumptions were discounted by Otto Pächt just a few years later .

In 1953 , Erwin Panofsky established that Schöne 's dating was at least twenty years too early . In his view , the girl 's dress resembles Burgundian high fashion of the late 1460s to mid @-@ 1470s . He compared the hennin worn by Maria Portinari in a c . 1470 portrait by Hans Memling , and her gown to that worn by a lady in an illumination from around the 1470s Froissart of Louis of Gruuthuse of Bruges . Sterling , placing the work as c . 1465 , remarks that the hennin in the Berlin panel is of a different type to that of the New York painting . The New York headdress is far more extended , and seems to be of a style prevalent a few years after , and moreover lacks the draped and hanging veil . Sterling further notes that the panel has increased depth of field and more intricate detailing of light than Christus ' earlier works . On this basis he believes the work was executed late in the artist 's career .