

ROSALBA CARRIERA  
(Venice 1675-1757)

Daughter of a lawyer and amateur painter, Rosalba was successively the pupil of Lazzari, Diamantini, and Bulestra. However, her earliest efforts were devoted to the painting of "fondelli" - miniatures on ivory let into the bottom of snuff boxes - a mode that had just been introduced into Venice by the French painter Jean Steve. Her first portrait in pastel, a medium to which she was introduced by the dilettante and secretary to the English consul Joseph Smith, Christopher Cole, only dates from 1703. Her pastel portraits soon won her considerable renown, particularly amongst French, German and English tourists in Venice, and in 1720 she was invited to accompany her brother-in-law Pellegrini to Paris. She spent a year there (keeping a succinct diary of her visit) painting numerous sitters, from Louis XV to Watteau, and crowning her success with her exceptional election (as a woman) to the Académie Royale de Peinture. (She had already been elected to those of Rome in 1705 and Bologna in 1720). But the most lasting effect of her stay was the fresh impulse it gave to pastel portraiture in France, in the hands of La Tour and Perronneau. The journey to Paris increased her renown in Italy, and in 1723 she was invited to Modena to paint the Este princesses, and in 1720 to Vienna to paint the Emperor and his court. In 1746 she was struck blind, and after an operation recovering her sight in 1749, lost it again in 1751; despair at this is ultimately supposed to have driven her mad. In addition to her portraits in pastel, Rosalba executed a limited number of religious works (best represented in Dresden), and a number of sets of allegories, such as the Seasons at Windsor.

Portrait of Contessa Miari

Pastel on paper laid down on panel

52 x 40 cm.

In a particularly fine carved period frame.

No satisfactory chronology of Rosalba's portraits has ever been established, so that, other than observing that this notably fine specimen dates from the artist's maturity, it is impossible to date it more closely on stylistic grounds. The fact that the sitter comes from a noble family of Belluno could indicate that the picture was painted on one of Rosalba's rare journeys away from Venice - possibly on the way to or from the Emperor Charles VI's coronation in Gorz (Gorizia) in 1728.

Hist: Conti Miari, Belluno (?)

M. Gagnat, Paris (?)

Exhib: Exposition de 100 Pastels du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 1903, no. 6.