

The Feminine Dynamic in English Art, 1485–1603

Women as Consumers, Patrons and Painters



SUSAN E. JAMES

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THE FEMININE DYNAMIC IN ENGLISH ART, 1485–1603

For Bobbe, Royal and Linda
'Mischief Managed'

and for Peter
'Zindagi kaise hai paheli hi'

List of Figures

1 Patronage and Consumption

1.1 Drawing of the memorial to Sir Thomas and Lady Maud Parr, St. Anne's Church, Blackfriars (commissioned 1517–18). *Source*: British Library Board. All rights reserved, Add 45,131, fo. 109b

1.2 Drawing of the Rutland-Clifford memorial, St. Leonard's Church, Shoreditch. *Source*: John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, London, 1795, vol. II, pt i, 44 and pl. xii. Photograph: The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

1.3 Anne Boleyn (by Hans Holbein). *Source*: The British Museum

1.4 Princess Elizabeth, aged about 13 (attr. Guillam Scrots), c.1545–46. *Source*: By gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

1.5 Lady Katherine Grey (by the Master of the Marchioness of Dorset), 1550s. *Source*: V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London, P.10-1979

1.6 Lady Anne Clifford's *Great Picture* triptych (attr. Jan van Belcamp), 1646. *Source*: Reproduced with the

permission of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria, and the Lakeland Arts Trust

1.7 Mary Rose Tudor, Queen of France (later Duchess of Suffolk), as Mary Magdalene (attr. Jean Perreal), c.1515. *Source*: National Gallery, London, NG 2615

1.8 Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox, 1568 or later. *Source*: By gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

1.9 Katherine Knyvett, Lady Paget, 1560–62. *Source*: Plas Newydd (by kind permission of the Marquess of Anglesey and The National Trust). Photograph: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art

1.10 The family of William Brooke, 10th Lord Cobham (by A.W., Master of the Countess of Warwick). *Source*: Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire

2 Painting as Presentation

2.1 Anne Browne, Lady Petre (attr. Steven van der Meulen).

Source: Private collection. Photograph: Courtauld Institute of Art

2.2 Elizabeth I's double portrait ring, mid-1570s. *Source:* By kind permission of the Chequers Trust. Photograph: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich

2.3 Frances Sidney, Countess of Sussex, early 1570s. *Source:* By kind permission of the College Council of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge

2.4 Elizabeth Cornwallis, Lady Kytson (by George Gower), 1573. *Source:* Tate, London, 2008

2.5 Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury (attr. Rowland Lockey). *Source:* Hardwick Hall, The Cavendish Collection (The National Trust). Photograph: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art

2.6 Anne Boleyn (by Hans Holbein). *Source:* The British Museum

2.7 Anne Boleyn (by Gheraert Horenboul). *Source:* Collection of the Trustees of the 9th Duke of Buccleuch's Chattels Fund

2.8 Mary Tudor and Charles Brandon, Duke and Duchess of Suffolk (attr. Jan Gossaert), c.1518–20. *Source:* By kind permission of His Grace the Duke of Bedford and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates

2.9 Mary Tudor, Duchess of Suffolk (attr. John Hoskins). *Source:* Collection of the Trustees of the 9th Duke of Buccleuch's Chattels Fund

2.10 Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton, c.1595–98. *Source:* Boughton House, Collection of the

Trustees of the 9th Duke of Buccleuch's Chattels Fund

3 Painting as Propaganda

3.1 Kateryn Parr (attr. Master John), c.1543–44. *Source:* National Portrait Gallery, London

3.2 Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Milan (by Hans Holbein). *Source:* National Gallery, London, NG 2475

3.3 Mary Neville, Lady Dacre (by Hans Eworth), c.1555. *Source:* National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

3.4 Mary I (by Antonis Mor), 1554. *Source:* Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY/Museo del Prado, Madrid

3.5 Mary Neville, Lady Dacre, and her son, Gregory, Lord Dacre of the South (by Hans Eworth), 1559. *Source:* Private collection, on loan to the National Portrait Gallery, London

3.6 The Lennox family memorial portrait (by Livinus de Vogelaere). *Source:* Holyrood House, by gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

3.7 Katherine Grey, Countess of Hertford, and her son, Edward, Lord Beauchamp. *Source:* By kind permission of The Lord Egremont. Photograph: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art

3.8 Lady Arbella Stuart, aged 13 (attr. Rowland Lockey), 1589. *Source:* Hardwick Hall, The Cavendish Collection (The National Trust). Photograph: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art

3.9 Lady Arbella Stuart (attr. Robert Peake), 1605. *Source*: National Portrait Gallery, Scotland

4 Painting as Power

4.1 Sir Anthony Mildmay (by Nicholas Hilliard), c.1590. *Source*: The Cleveland Museum of Art

4.2 Sir Walter Raleigh (by Nicholas Hilliard). *Source*: National Portrait Gallery, London

4.3 Sir John Pakington. *Source*: By kind permission of The Lord Hampden. Photograph: Country Life

4.4 François, Duc d'Alençon. *Source*: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

4.5 Unknown lady (by Nicholas Hilliard). *Source*: V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London, P.2-1974

4.6 Elizabeth I, the Hampden-Hobart portrait, c.1567–72. *Source*: Courtesy of the Philip Mould Gallery, London

4.7 Elizabeth I, the Armada portrait, c.1588. *Source*: Collection of the Duke of Bedford, Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire. Photograph: Snark/Art Resource, NY

6 The Art of Susanna Horenboul

6.1 François I, detail (by Jean Clouet II). *Source*: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY/Louvre, Paris

6.2 Christian II of Denmark (by Gheraert Horenboul?), c.1521. *Source*: The Museum of National History at Frederiksborg Castle

6.3 Henry VIII (by Susanna Horenboul), c.1525–26. *Source*: By gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

6.4 Henry VIII (by Lucas Horenboul). *Source*: By gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

6.5 Henry VIII (by Susanna Horenboul). *Source*: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY/Louvre, Paris

6.6 Illumination of the Forster letters patent (by Susanna Horenboul), 1524. *Source*: V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London

7 The Queen's Painter: Lievine Teerlinc

7.1 Michaelmas 1553 Coram Rege roll, illumination of capital letter (by Lievine Teerlinc). *Source*: National Archives, London

7.2 Iberian genealogical tree for Dom Fernando of Portugal (by Simon Binnick and Antonio de Holanda), 1530–34. *Source*: British Library Board. All rights reserved, Add. 12531, fo. 4

7.3 Detail of the 1553 Coram Rege roll, Mary I enthroned (by Lievine Teerlinc). *Source*: National Archives, London

7.4 Elizabeth I, the Coronation miniature (by Lievine Teerlinc), 1558. *Source*: Private collection

7.5 St. John on Patmos, from the *Hennessey Hours* (by Simon Binnick). *Source*: Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels

- 7.6 Margaret Wotton, Marchioness of Dorset (copy by Lievine Teerlinc of Holbein's original), early 1570s. *Source*: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
- 7.7 Elizabeth I, the Roses miniature (by Lievine Teerlinc), 1572. *Source*: National Portrait Gallery, London
- 7.8 Elizabeth I, the Lute miniature (by Lievine Teerlinc), c.1574–76. *Source*: Berkeley Castle Will Trust. Photograph: Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art
- 7.9 Elizabeth I, the Black and White miniature (by Lievine Teerlinc). *Source*: Private collection
- 7.10 Elizabeth I, the Pelican portrait (by Lievine Teerlinc). *Source*: Walker Art Gallery, National Museums, Liverpool
- 7.11 Elizabeth I, the Phoenix portrait (by Lievine Teerlinc). *Source*: Tate, London, 2008

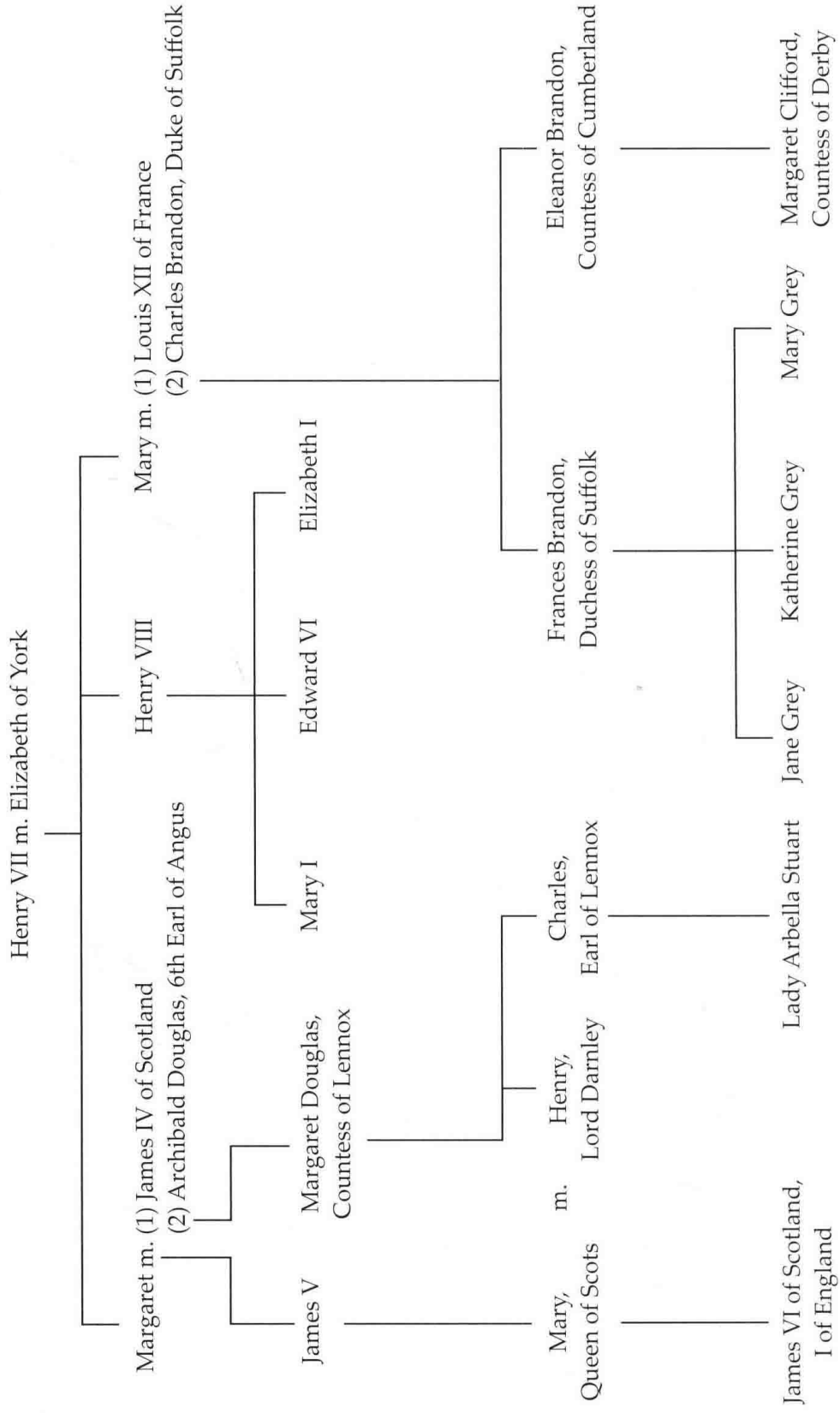
List of Abbreviations

APC	Acts of the Privy Council
BL	British Library
Bodleian	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CPHH	Cecil Papers, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire
CPR	Calendar of Patent Rolls
CSP	Calendar of State Papers
CUL	University Library, Cambridge
CW2	Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, New Series
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
L&P	Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII
NA	National Archives
NG	National Gallery
NPG	National Portrait Gallery
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
SP	State Papers
STC	<i>Short Title Catalogue</i>
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
VCH	Victoria County Histories

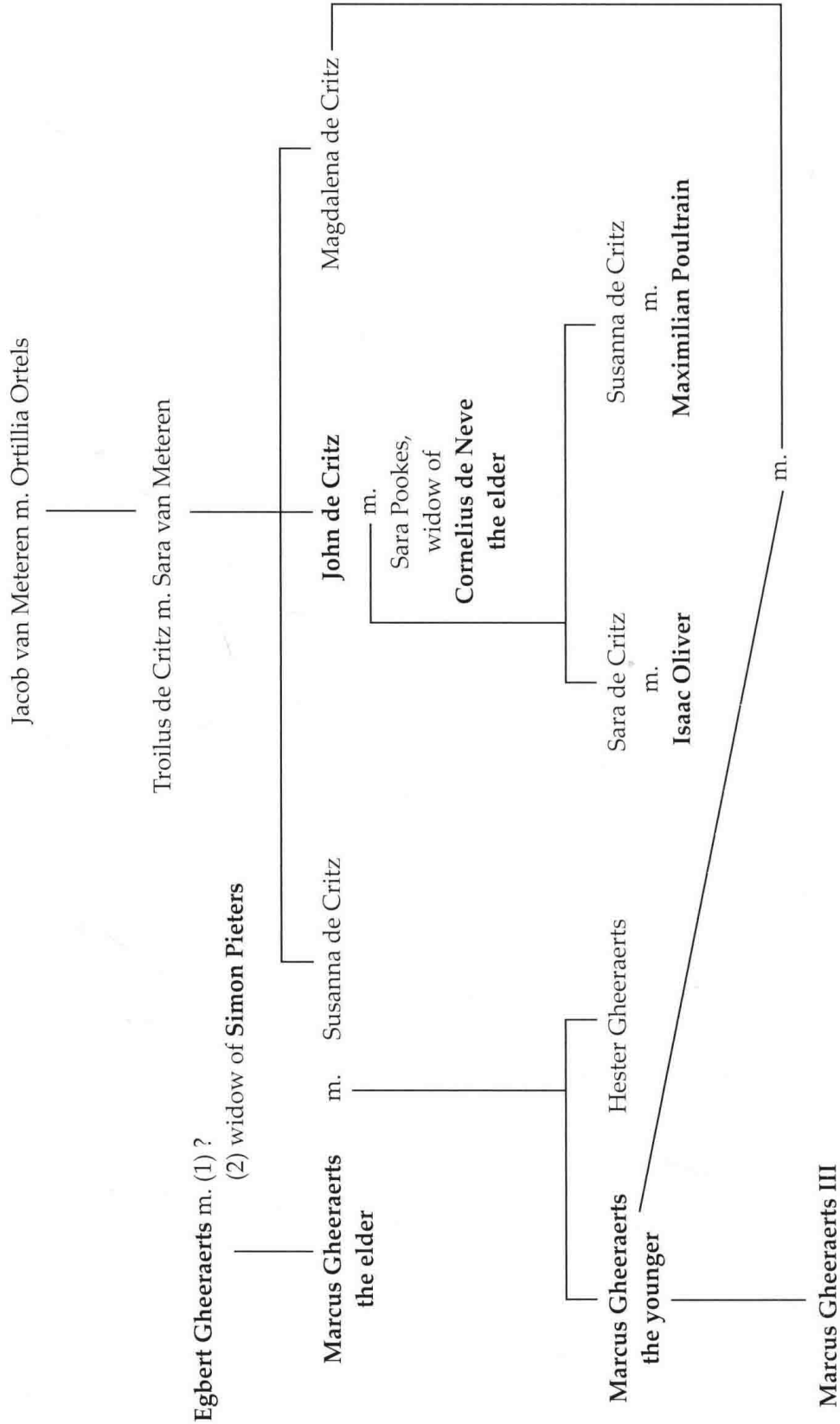
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Descendants of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York



Connections Between the Gheeraerts and de Critz Families



Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Descendants of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Connections Between the Gheeraerts and de Critz Families</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Introduction	1
1 Patronage and Consumption	7
'With My Picture in Alabaster Stone ...'	10
Patronage and the Royal Wives	22
Patronage and the Aristocrats	32
Patronage and the Provincials	45
Reciprocity and Continuity	54
2 Painting as Presentation	79
'A Book of Gold ...'	82
Embroideries, Tapestries, Wall Hangings, Carpets and Needlework	87
'Clocks, Watches and Dials ...'	98
'And All My Jewels ...'	101
Religious Imagery and Patterns of Ownership	110
English Portrait Patterns for Women	113
Portrait Patterns of Co-Opted Queens	123
Erotica	128
3 Painting as Propaganda	141
The Battle of the Portraits	142
Let Justice Be Served	151
She Who Wears the Crown	167
4 Painting as Power	187
Courtly Love and the Feminization of Elizabethan Portraiture	196
Elizabeth's Official Portraiture	211

5	Painting as Production and the Family Business	229
	The Flemish Workshop Model	229
	Anglo-Flemish Trade and Immigration Patterns	232
	Connected Clans and the Family Business	233
	The English Workshop Model	236
	Susanna Horenbout	242
6	The Art of Susanna Horenbout	263
	Miniatures at the English Court	263
	The Miniatures of Susanna Horenbout	270
	The Horenbout Workshop under Margaret Holsewyther	279
7	The Queen's Painter: Lievine Teerlinc	287
	<i>A Very Proper Treatise ... for the Arte of Limming</i>	293
	Mary I and the Coram Rege Rolls	297
	Teerlinc and Elizabeth I	304
	Correspondence with Giulio Clovio	306
	New Year's Gifts and the Royal Artist	309
	Lievine Teerlinc, Panel Painter?	321
	<i>Bibliography</i>	335
	<i>Index</i>	351

Introduction

Organized study of the history of art in sixteenth-century England is a relatively new subject. Less than a hundred years have passed since it was first systematically addressed in the writings of Lionel Cust and others, and the majority of the literature in the field dates from the last fifty years. One aspect of the field that has not been dealt with fully is the pre-eminence of women in the devising, development, manufacture, distribution and consumption of art during this period. For many women, this was more than a choice of decoration, more than an act of personal vanity, more than a professional means to an income, more than an act of policy between governments. It was a strategy of social communication for a population group that found a voice through the visual arts and exploited it in surprising and unexpected ways.

Never before in English history, and arguably never again to such a degree, were women responsible for the shaping of English art as they were under the Tudors. During the latter half of the century this was due in part to the fact that two women sat successively on England's throne. For fifty years, from 1553 to 1603, the primary patron of the nation was female. Mary I's response to this opportunity was not especially enthusiastic. She continued to employ Flemish painter Lievine Teerlinc as her official court artist and commissioned portraits from Hans Eworth. She sat, at her father-in-law's request, for his painter Antonis Mor. Yet her appetite for art was never great. Handicapped by myopia, the brevity of her rule, the failure of her marriage and the intensity of her religious zealotry, Mary's reign can hardly be called a golden age. After her death, when the mantle of official patronage fell on Elizabeth, the new queen maintained an unswerving support for the production of miniatures and fostered an innovative employment of their use in the exercise of diplomacy. Paradoxically perhaps, Elizabeth also demonstrated a steadfast indifference to panel painters, the bulk of commissions for royal panel portraits falling to the queen's courtiers as an act of homage rather than to the queen herself. This indifference on the part of England's principal patron led to an exodus of the foreign artists who might have claimed an official position at court and, despite government

protests, helped create a free-for-all across England in the production of the queen's portrait by artists skilled and unskilled, Londoners and provincials alike. Such trends gave encouragement to native English artists, painters like Alice Heron, George Gower and Nicholas Hilliard, who were not forced to compete at court with continental favorites. It also established Elizabeth as the first English monarch whose plethora of portraits – painted, pounced, printed, drawn, molded, carved and stamped – became both an emblem of English identity and an economic commodity in the marketplace. The rise of the so-called English school of art has been traditionally accepted as the result of a conscious and proactive policy on the part of the crown. It was, in fact, just the opposite, the product of Elizabeth's more or less benign neglect.

The varied roles that women played in the development of sixteenth-century English art embraced all aspects of the field. Despite legal and social prejudices, women were not crushed by the challenges of competition but found ways to use the system to their own advantage. They came trained as painters from Flanders like Susanna Horenbout and Lievine Teerlinc or were trained in workshops in London like Margaret Holsewyther. They painted in oils like Katlijne Maynart, carved in stone like Margaret van Torne, ran provincial workshops like Alice Gammedge, or worked as unofficial associate serjeant painters like Anne Gulliver and Alice Heron. They acted as entrepreneurs, running color pigment manufactories like Annis Wright or shops on the Exchange like Audrey Beene. They were skilled in painting with needle and silk like Gertrude Blount, Alice Judde or Dorothy Lake and Blanche Parry whose work hung in various parish churches. They practiced as professional artists in family workshops and as virtuoso amateur embroiderers in family parlors. Their work was sold to the public, presented at court or simply hung on the family wall but their creative zeal is abundantly documented. Some held salaried positions at court; some, like Katlijne Maynart, Jane Hylles and Margaret van Torne, plied their trade in the city, while others like Agnes Reede and Alice Gammedge ran workshops in the provinces. From the accession of Henry VII in 1485 to the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, they were the daughters who learned painterly skills from their fathers (and mothers), the wives who assisted their husbands with commissions, the widows who ran the workshops and marketed their products. As artists women found active roles to play and two of their number, Susanna Horenbout and Lievine Teerlinc, were seminal in developing and popularizing the principal English art form of the century, the miniature.

One caveat must be made regarding the nomenclature used for works of art in England during this period. While it may have been obvious to that century's citizens that a table used for eating and a table used as a surface for painting were different objects, it is not always easy to differentiate between these meanings in contemporary documents. There were also carved tables used as altarpieces or hung like pictures on the wall and as most sculpture