After an interval of a dozen years the Museum’s collection of miniatures is now on permanent display. The room in which they are shown opened last November with the galleries of European decorative arts. To the original collection new additions have been made; among these is a magnificent pair of miniatures by Holbein of William Roper and his wife, Margaret. Paintings of this quality do not often come on the market, and a matched pair of a husband and wife are even more rare, possibly unique.

Aside from the beauty of the painting these miniatures are of great interest because of the lives of the people portrayed. Margaret Roper was the favorite daughter of Sir Thomas More, statesman and author of *Utopia*. She was familiar with the classics from childhood and shared in the life and conversations of her father and his friends. When she was very young Erasmus lived in the More household for three years, returning later for several visits. He always sent messages to Margaret in his letters. It was during his long stay that he wrote the *Encomium Moriae—The Praise of Folly*—a satire on the weaknesses of churchmen and the worship of relics, written with a light touch and yet in bitter earnest. When he left England in 1511 he took the manuscript with him, and it was published in Paris.

*The Praise of Folly* went through several editions, the one in 1515 by Froben in Basel being of interest to this story. Oswald Myconius, a schoolmaster of Basel, owned a copy of the work which he used in his teaching. This copy was embellished with enchanting marginal drawings by Hans Holbein, then only about seventeen years old. Myconius showed the drawings to Froben and Erasmus and introduced the artist to them. As a result, Holbein designed some title pages for Froben, and his friendship with Erasmus produced the most famous of the portraits of the humanist, the first one, dated 1523.

When Holbein went to England in the fall of 1526 he took with him letters to Sir Thomas
More and other English friends of Erasmus. By Christmas he was working on an ambitious painting of More surrounded by his family and retainers, and also on portraits of Sir Thomas and Lady More. Unfortunately the large painting did not survive the perils of More’s life, but seven chalk drawings for single heads exist. There is also a detailed drawing of the composition that Holbein made for Erasmus, on which are noted the names of the individuals. Margaret is seated on a low stool in front of her father, with an open book in her hands. She is a happy young woman, safe in the circle of her family. William Roper does not appear in the group, although he and Margaret are said to have married the year before. Their miniatures were painted during a subsequent visit, more than a decade later.

The comfortable and happy days when Sir Thomas More was Lord Chancellor and a trusted friend and adviser of Henry VIII faded when the king set himself against the pope in his fight to get rid of his queen. No one was safe who expressed himself against the king’s will, and More would not give in. Margaret was steadfastly for her father when others advised moderation. Although he knew what the end would be, More had the stubbornness of many sweet and gentle people who know themselves to be right. Margaret visited her father in the Tower during the long trial, and his last letter was written to her. The story goes that some time after his execution she and her husband went out at night onto London Bridge and took More’s head down from the pike on which it had been stuck. She put it in a small leather box and asked to have it buried with her when she died. She was buried in Chelsea Church in 1544, but her request does not appear to have been followed. However, her husband, who lived till 1578, must have had it placed in the Roper chancel in St. Dunstan’s, Canterbury, for when the vault was opened in June 1824 an ancient leather box containing a head was found.

Holbein has portrayed the anguish and sorrow this woman had gone through in the shadowy eyes and drawn face. According to the inscription she is only thirty, but she looks older. There is a book in her hands with her thumb holding her place, but her eyes have a faraway look as though her thoughts were not on her reading.

William Roper is shown as a prosperous, bearded gentleman holding his fur-lined cloak together with both hands. He was twelve years older than his wife and must have had a difficult time being loyal to her and yet holding his position in court. He was not always in sympathy with More, being something of a freethinker, yet he admired him greatly and wrote his biography under the title of The Life, Arraignment, and Death of that Mirrour of all true Honour and Vertue, Sir Thomas More. Roper inherited from his father the estates of Eltham and St. Dunstan’s, Canterbury, and the office of Prothonotary of the Court of King’s Bench.

There is no record of the miniatures between the Roper family and Baron Alfred de Rothschild, who owned them early in this century. He bequeathed them to Almina, Lady Carnarvon, from whom they were bought by Lord Duveen, and later given to Henry Goldman. Mrs. Goldman gave them back after her husband’s death in 1948.

In the same case as the Holbeins is a pair of Dutch miniatures of a man and a woman, whose
painter was unknown until the frames were opened for cleaning. The following inscription was found on the back of the man's portrait: *geschildert/ by Bodrignyn/ in den iaare/ 1627*. The artist has been tentatively identified by Dr. H. Gerson of the Netherlands Institute for Art History at The Hague as David Baudringhien, who lived from about 1581 to 1650. He was a portrait painter, recorded as having painted some miniatures, though few are now known.

Miniatures drawn in plumbago were very popular in England at the end of the seventeenth century. Plumbago was a particularly fine grade of graphite mined in Cumberland, capable of taking a very sharp point. The Museum has six remarkable drawings, formerly in the J. P. Morgan collection, by David Loggan, Robert White, and Thomas Forster, with dates from 1680 to 1705. The sitters are unknown, which is a pity; it would have been fun to know who these gorgeous gentlemen with long curled wigs and elegant lace jabots were, and the rather more homely ladies, and whether any were related to each other.

Certain miniatures in the collection have now been recognized as the work of known painters by Leo Schidlof, the London expert and collector. We have a pair by John Barry, painted in gray tones; a pert young girl by the Irishman Sampson Towgood Roch; and a lucid portrait of a lady by Richard Crosse. A pair of small portraits signed TB, lent by Mrs. Breckenridge Long, had been thought to be American. They now turn out to be by John Bogle.

In one case are shown works by painters who had French or English training and who came to America in the early years of the nineteenth century. Some worked for a number of years and went back; others stayed. We have labeled them American in the same possessive way that the English claim Whistler and Sargent. One of these miniaturests is George Lethbridge Saunders, who painted exquisitely sensitive portraits. He has the misfortune to be confused with two other painters of similar name, one of whom also came to America. Saunders was born in Bristol about 1807. He was very successful in London, exhibiting at the Royal Academy portraits of notable people such as the Duke of Cumberland, Prince Nicolo Esterhazy, and members of the Villiers family. His final entry, in 1851, was the "Hon. Daniel Webster."

There were two periods when Saunders did not exhibit at the Academy. One was from 1840 to 1850, and we know that he was in America between 1841 and 1849—there are miniatures by him dated during these years of members of Baltimore, Boston, Georgetown, Savannah, and Richmond families.

John Ridgely of Baltimore had four members of his family painted. About fifty miniatures by Saunders are listed at the Frick Library, mostly undated. Some of these could belong to the earlier period when he did not exhibit at the Academy, from 1831 to 1838, but it is impossible to date them precisely, even by the styles of dress or hair of the time. The pretty fashion of curls around the forehead, as in the portrait shown here, extended over two decades.

The Museum's collection of miniatures has grown in the past thirty years so that now it is probably the best public collection in the United States. For those who enjoy exquisite paintings in small size it well repays careful study.