Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was trained in Florence in the workshop of the sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio and appeared as a member of the Compagnia di S Luca in Florence as early as 1472. His reputation grew quickly as he produced all sorts of artworks including paintings and drawings but also sculptures, architectural constructions, military and civil devices. He sojourned in Milan, Rome and France where he died in 1519. Leonardo had many pupils that included Andrea Solario (ca. 1465-1524), Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480-ca. 1532), Cesare da Sesto (1477-1523), Francesco Melzi (1491/93-ca.1570), Ambrogio de Predis (ca. 1455-after 1508) and Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (1466/67-1516).

This painting may be a 17th-century copy of a lost original which was probably painted by Leonardo or one of his many followers. It shows a female profile portrait wearing a late 15th-century Florentine costume and holding a carnation and an apple, which are usually interpreted as nuptial attributes.

**Historical context note**

In his major work, Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta, commonly known as Canoniciere, the Florentine poet Petrarch (1304-1374) wrote of his lost love Laura, whose (lost) portrait by Simone Martini (ca. 1284-1344) is mentioned in two poems. Petrarch's description became a primary justification for female portraiture, and is frequently alluded to in late fifteenth and sixteenth century Italian sources.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was trained in Florence, in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, and was a member of the Compagnia di S Luca in Florence as early as 1472. His reputation grew rapidly and he produced paintings and numerous drawings, including designs for sculptures, architecture and military and civil engineering, as well as studies of anatomy and the natural sciences. He was in Milan from ca. 1482 to 1499, returning to Florence in 1500, where he remained until 1508. He returned to Milan from 1508-13, and was then in Rome, where
he worked for Giuliano de' Medici, Duc de Nemours. Some time between 1516-17, Leonardo travelled to France and entered the service of Francis I at Clos-Lucé, Amboise, where he died in 1519. Leonardo had a considerable influence on the art of his time. His pupils included Andrea Solario (ca. 1465-1524), Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480-ca. 1532), Cesare da Sesto (1477-1523), Francesco Melzi (1491/93-ca.1570), Ambrogio de Predis (ca. 1455-after 1508) and Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (1466/67-1516). His reputation as an artist and universal thinker is immense.

In his encyclopaedic Historia Naturalis, the ancient Roman author Pliny the Elder described the origins of painting as emerging from the outlining of a man's projected shadow in profile. In the ancient period, profile portraits were found primarily on imperial coins. With the rediscovery, and increasing interest, in the Antique during the early Renaissance, artists and craftsmen looked back to this ancient tradition to create medals depicting profile portraits on the obverse, with personal devise on the reverse, in order to commemorate and celebrate the sitter. Over time these profile portraits were depicted on panels and canvas, progressively evolving towards three-quarter, and eventually frontal, portraits. These portraits especially aimed to represent an idealised image.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O131753/petrarchs-laura-oil-painting-da-vinci-leonardo/