

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BABU, Charles-Nicolas-Michel

fl. France 1743–; London 1765–90

A miniaturist hitherto known only from the submissions to the Society of Artists in 1765 (from Mr Stephen's, bookseller, between the Temple Gates), two crayons and two miniatures, and the Free Society (from Mr Steven's, perfumer, Little Queen Street), two miniatures. He was Charles-Nicolas-Michel Babu of Jermyn Street, a hydraulic engineer whose patent for a new pump and fire engine was granted in England in 1766. According to the *Public advertiser* of 28.VII.1769, the patentee could supply machines ready made from 3 Cushion Court, Old Broad Street. From a notice in the *English chronicle* of 25.V.1790 it appears that Mr Babu invented an oar, and offered Lord Stanhope a challenge (perhaps against the steamer paddles in the form of ducks' feet developed by Stanhope). A further notice, in the *World*, 22.VII.1790, announced Mr Babu's new-invented apparatus for navigating becalmed ships, exhibited in the Grand Saloon at the Lyceum, Strand:

At the same place will be exhibited, 280 Pieces of British Fruits, painted from Nature, by Mr. Babu; many of them in Wax, after the manner of the Ancients.

Plainly the inventor is the miniaturist, pastellist and encaustic painter. He was also recorded in Paris: a notice in *L'Avant-Coureur* (21.III.1768, pp. 179f) advertised his "Paraflasses", fire-fighting machines (designed to protect buildings from fires in adjacent premises), which he sold at 1200 livres for 15 pairs from his workshop chez M. Thibault, ancienne cour des coches, Faubourg Saint-Honoré. An earlier note in the *Journal oeconomique* (.VII.1767, p. 303) noted that Babu was already known for his discovery of triremes, which it seems he had built at Dunkerque to the approval of the Académie royale des sciences (28.VII.1762). His English patent had attracted the attention of General Conway and of diplomats in Paris.

Probably the same Babu was active as a pastellist in Paris in 1743 (earlier mistranscribed here as Badu here). All that we know of this artist, a pastellist working in the rue du Colombier, Paris, is that he was sued by René-Salomon Liger de La Chataignerais (1702–1766), conseiller du roi, auditeur aux Comptes de Bretagne, on the grounds that his pastel portrait of the litigant's son (aged 13 – he was born in Nantes 15.XI.1730) was a poor resemblance. The experts (Procès-verbal, 8.II.1744) were Louis Vigée and Louis de Vernansal, peintre du roi; they disagreed with the plaintiff, and valued the pastel at 96 livres.

A Louis-Nicolas Babu, peintre was admitted to the school at the Académie royale under Belangé in .VII.1765, aged 18½, from "Charenton, paroisse de Conflans". He was evidently the son of Mathieu Babu, postillon à la poste, baptised there 30.I.1747.

Bibliography

Wildenstein 1921, pp. 35f

Pastels

- J.1184.051 [*olim* J.1208.101] René de LIGER (1730–),
pstl, 1743 (comm. père du sujet; 96 livres)
J.1184.101 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1765,
no. 2
J.1184.102 Lady, crayons, Free Society 1765, no. 3