

Online edition

BASSEPORTE, Madeleine-Françoise

Paris 1701–1780

The daughter of a wine merchant, she was baptised 28.IV.1701 at Saint-Louis-en-l'Isle. Initially a pupil (and it was said “*amie*”) of Robert de Séry, then of Claude Aubriet (1665–1742), she copied pictures in the hôtel de Soubise and the Palais-Royal – among them no doubt works by Rosalba Carriera, whose influence was noted by contemporaries. She was no doubt the person Pierre Crozat refers to in a letter to Carriera in 1727 (Sani 1985, no. 386) explaining that the Venetian’s pastels were being copied by a great many artists, with Coypel at their head: “Il y a une damoiselle, élève de M. Robert, qui commence à y faire quelque progrès.” According to Pallisot, her pastels were made before 1734:

Elle peignoit le pastel et fut bientôt connue par des portraits qu'on mit à côté de ceux de Rosalba; mais la crainte de manquer de l'occupation, l'embaras d'avoir sans cesse de nouvelles connoissances à faire, et d'autres inconvéniens encore, l'engagèrent à prendre le parti de dessiner et de peindre les plantes.

She was particularly associated with the abbé Pluche and his *Spectacle de la nature*, a popular work of natural history for which she provided numerous plates. She was protected also by Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau, the plant physiologist at the Académie des sciences, and like him as suspected of being a Jansenist. In 1734 she received the survivance of peintre des plantes du Jardin du roi from Aubriet, effectively replacing him, and obtaining the position at his death. “Mlle Basseporte, Peintre & Dessinateur” continued to appear in the almanachs royaux until 1780. She taught drawing to the daughters of Louis XV, who “pour jouir plus souvent du plaisir qu’il trouva à sa conversation, la dispensa de toute étiquette”. She may have taught Anne Vallayer-Coster, to whose sister she was godmother. She also practised miniature and mezzotint.

Mme de Genlis (1828) provides a later perspective—

Nous avons vu jadis au Jardin du Roi, mademoiselle Basseporte, pensionnée par le gouvernement pour peindre à la gouache des plantes et des reptiles, s’amuser de temps en temps (à plus de quatre-vingts ans) à faire de petits tableaux en pastel, et qui étaient charmans de fraîcheur et de vérité; elle nous dit qu’elle avait eu ce talent dès sa première jeunesse; mais que depuis plus de trente ans elle le cultivait très-rarement; néanmoins elle l’avait parfaitement conservé.

Rousseau said of her flower painting that “la nature donnait l’existence aux plantes mais Mlle Basseporte la leur conservait”, while Natoire expressed his infinite esteem of her to Marigny in 1757. She enjoyed a royal pension from 1749, increased in 1774 by the new king; but in the last month of her life, her assistant, Mme Aillaud, appealed to Benjamin Franklin (letter, 26.VIII.1780; he had known her since 1767) to support an application to Buffon to increase the amounts.

Ratouis de Limay reports six pictures from the artist’s posthumous inventory of 5.X.1780 (AN MC/RE/XVIII/14/B). As these are

presumably lost, the Rijksmuseum girl (for which there is no evidence to identify it as the lost self-portrait) is the only example from which we can form any idea of her technique. To it Toutain-Quittelier has plausibly proposed to add a stylistically similar anonymous pastel (J.9.6063) as a probable copy of a lost Rosalba (of which there is also a version by Vleughels and other anonymous copies).

Bibliography

Bellier de La Chavignerie & Auvray; Léon Bultingaire, *Les Peintres du Jardin du roi au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1928, III, pp. 29–32; Bourin 1907; *Papiers of Benjamin Franklin*, online; Gault de Saint-Germain 1808, p. 311; Genlis 1828, pp. 46ff; Greer 2001; Guiffrey 1876; Guiffrey 1885, pp. 112–114, doc. CCCXV; Jal 1872; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Los Angeles 1976b, p. 40; Natania Meeker & Antónia Szabari, “Inhabiting flower worlds: the botanical art of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte”, *Arts et savoirs*, 6, 2016 [http://aes.revues.org/757, 12.VII.2016]; Pahin de La Blancherie 1783, p. 72f; Palisot, *Nécrologe des hommes célèbres*, XV, 1780; Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen, “Les planches du *Spectacle de la nature*...”, in *Écrire la nature au XVIII^e siècle: autour de l’abbé Pluche*, ed. Françoise Gevrey & al., Paris, 2006, pp. 142ff; Ratouis de Limay 1910; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Sanchez 2004; Saur

Pastels

- J.1304.101 AUTO PORTRAIT (l’artiste, inv. p.m.)
≠Femme en buste, pstl (London, Christie’s South Kensington, 9.VII.2009, Lot 616 repr., as autoportrait, attr. Mlle Basseporte), v. Rivalz
- J.1304.103 Mme [Jean] BASSEPORTE, [née Madeleine Guyon], mère (l’artiste, inv. p.m.)
- J.1304.104 Bernard de JUSSIEU (1699–1777), directeur du Jardin des plantes et des jardins du Trianon, pstl
~grav. “d’après le portrait au pastel de Mlle Basseporte – Le Kain”, Paris, chest de Constant, rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, 31.I.1824, no. 96



- J.1304.11 Jeune femme, pstl/ppr, 44.5x37, sd verso, “Peinte par Madeline Basseporte 1727” (Rijksmuseum SK-A-2119. Acqu. Roos & Co., Amsterdam, 30.IV.1900, as Carriera). Lit.: Thiel 1976, repr.; outain-Quittelier 2017b, fig. 218, as autoportrait, c.1730 [?autoportrait; ?evidence] Φδσ



- J.1304.112 ~version, pstl, 57x45 (Versailles, Palais des congrès, 24.XI.1968, Lot 117 repr., attr. Carriera, inconnue) Φβν



- J.1304.127 Tête de jeune fille, pstl, 42x29.8 (de Livry, premier commis du duc de La Vrillière; Versailles, 13.I.1772 & seq., Lot 47 part, with pastel by Hallé, 50 livres 1)
- J.1304.131 Deux bustes de femmes avec mains, œuvres originaux, 56.7x45.9 (l’artiste, inv. p.m. 1780)
- J.1304.135 Deux bustes de femmes avec mains, a/r Carriera, 56.7x45.9 (l’artiste, inv. p.m. 1780)
- J.1304.137 [olim J.1396.101] =?Deux très beaux bustes de femmes, pstl, a/r Carriera (Mesnard de Clesle; vente p.m., Paris, rue Saint-Étienne, coin du Boulevard Poissonnière, 1.I.1804 & seq., Lot 13 n.r., Ir4)