

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BRÉHAN, Bihi-Almaric de Bréhan de Plélo, comte de

Saint-Bihi, Bretagne 1734 – Paris 1808

Bréhan was an amateur artist who made copies in pastel and oil of masters such as Fragonard and Hallé. All printed sources (including this *Dictionary*) wrongly identified the amateur pastellist as his elder brother, Jean-Almaric, marquis de Bréhan until Blumenfeld 2013, analysing their inventaires après décès, corrected the confusion – as well as that of the spelling of the name given to many members of the family, Almaric (not Amalric, which appears in most genealogical *usuels*).

Jean-Almaric, marquis de Bréhan became heir to the titles of this ancient Breton family (he was noble of the 15th degree) after the death of his half-brother Louis-Robert, comte de Plélo who was killed at the siege of Danzig in 1734 (he had married a sister of the duc de La Vrillière, but they were survived only by daughters, one of whom became the duchesse d'Aiguillon). A capitaine de dragons de la reine and a chevalier de Saint-Louis, Jean-Almaric married Anne-Flore Millet (1749–1826), daughter of a receveur général du Bourbonnais, in 1766; she was made dame du palais de la reine and he received the honneurs de la Cour in 1768. The confusion about the identity of the pastellist may have been exacerbated by the fact that the marquise herself painted (“un ravissant talent de peinture” according to the duchesse d’Abrantès), leaving a well-known portrait of Marie-Antoinette à la Conciergerie (Paris, musée Carnavalet). She made miniature portraits (in the style of cameos made fashionable by Jacques-Joseph de Gault) of Washington on her trip to the USA in 1788–89 as companion of the comte de Moustier, the French minister to the United States of America (a relationship which “offended American manners” according to Madison). The couple had a son, Amand-Louis-Fidèle (1770–1828), baron de l’Empire in 1810; he was the heir of his uncle’s estate.

That uncle and younger brother, Bihi-Almaric, comte de Bréhan, was also a soldier. He was capitaine aux dragons de la Reine, and a chevalier de Saint-Louis. On 10.IX.1757 he was appointed chambellan du roi Stanislaw, at the instigation of Marie Leszczyńska who had been moved by his brother’s valour at Danzig in the vain campaign to restore her father to the throne of Poland (she also arranged for the comte de Plélo’s grandson, the last duc d’Aiguillon, to be made colonel of the Royal-Pologne regiment). He was mestre de camp when he retired from the service with the rank of colonel.

He settled in Paris and devoted himself to his hobbies, including music, poetry and the fine arts. In 1771 he married Marie-Louise Bellanger; their daughter died aged 9. In 1781, after writing to Pierre, he was elected honoraire-associé libre of the Académie royale to fill the vacancy left by Turgot, and was promoted to honoraire amateur in 1787. He attended the sessions assiduously. During the Revolution he did not emigrate, but settled in Ruelle with his books and pictures.

He returned to the house he rented in the rue Cadet, no. 34, where, as his inv. p.m. reveals, he had a cabinet serving as an “atelier de peinture”, equipped with “un petit mannequin, deux boetes à couleurs & un assortiment de couleurs, pinceaux, tablettes, godets et autres instruments propres à peindre” (Fr40). Among the numerous (anonymous, but no doubt by the deceased) pictures listed in various rooms were “quatre portraits en pastelle & peint sur toile dans leur bordures de bois doré”; “douze tableaux aux pastel aux Gouahce et deux portraits aussi au pastel sous verre dans leur bordure de bois doré” “onze tableaux dont...sept pastels...”; each of the pictures was valued at a few francs.

Bibliography

Blanc 2002, p. 43; Blumenfeld 2013, pp. 54, 75 n.123; Chaix d’Est-Ange; Feller, *Biographie universelle*; Fragonard 1987, p. 286; Frank 2000; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Prosper Jean Levot, *Biographie bretonne*, Vannes, 1852, I, p. 180; Michaud, LIX, pp. 211–212; *Procès-verbaux*, IX, pp. 59–64, 307; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Réau, “L’influence de Fragonard”, *La Renaissance*, I.–II.1935, no. 1–2, p. 4, fig. 7; Wildenstein 1960; Wœlmont 1923–27, III

GENEALOGIES Bréhan

Pastels

Jean-Claude Richard, abbé de SAINT-NON (1727–1791), *pstl*, a/r Fragonard [confusion with Aeteur]

J.18.101 Acteur en manteau bleu, s’appuyant sur un balcon, *pstl*, a/r Fragonard, 80x61, sd 1773 (Collette de Baudicour. E. M. Hodgkins; London, Christie’s, 29.VI.1934, Lot 1 with pendant, 20 gns; Percy Moore Turner; Cailleux 1935). Lit.: Réau 1935, p. 4 n.r., as of Saint-Non; Ratouis de Limay 1946, p. 164 n.r.; Fragonard 1987, s.no. 133, n.r.; Wildenstein 1960, s.no. 245

J.18.102 ~pendant: Actrice ou cantatrice en robe gris-ardoise, tenant un cahier de musique, *pstl*, a/r Fragonard, sd v 1773 (Collette de Baudicour. E. M. Hodgkins; London, Christie’s, 29.VI.1934, Lot 1 with pendant, 20 gns; Percy Moore Turner; Cailleux 1935). Lit.: Réau 1935, p. 4 n.r.; Fragonard 1987, no. 138, fig. 1; Wildenstein 1960, s.no. 246 ☐



Photo courtesy Christie’s

J.18.105 Tête de vieillard barbu taillant sa plume, a/r Fragonard, *pstl*, 52x52 rnd, sd v

“Bréhan/1773”, inscr. v M. Le Brun (?Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun. Paris PC; Paris, Drouot, Maigret, 23.III.2007, Lot 19 repr., est. €2–3000; Paris, Drouot, Boisgirard, 1.VII.2011, Lot 128 repr., est. €1000–1200) ☐



J.18.107 Buste de vieillard à la tocque, *pstl*, 55x47, sd 1778 (Georges Bourgarel; Paris, 13–15.XI.1922, Lot 69 repr.). Lit.: Réau 1935, p. 4 n.r.; Fragonard 1987, no. 98. A/r Fragonard pnt. (Paris, musée Jacquemart-André) ☐



J.18.109 Vieillard aux cheveux blancs, ?Saint Pierre, *pstl*, ov. (Mme Meunié). Lit.: Jacques Wilhelm, *Fragonard*, inéd., n.r., attr. A/r Fragonard pnt. (Nice, musée Chéret). Exh.: Fragonard 1987, no. 99 repr.

J.18.11 Frau mit Kind und Hausrat auf einem Pferd reitend an ruhenden Hirten und Schafen und Kühen vorbei, *pstl*, 78.5x61.5, sd “Cte de Bréhan 1775” (Möbel-Aktion Bilder, seized ERR, inv. MA-B 283; Jeu de Paume .IX.1942; Nikolsburg 15.XI.1943, not restituted) ☐

