

COLSON, Jean-Baptiste Gilles, dit

Verdun 1686 – Paris 1762

Colson, who adopted his mother's name to avoid the ridicule attached to the *commedia dell'arte* name of Gilles (or Gille), followed the advice of his relative, the maréchal de Vauban, to pursue an artistic career in the face of his father's opposition. He went to Paris, where he studied with Joseph Christophe and became a miniaturist. He was commissioned by the duc de Tresmes to produce a series of miniatures of Louis XV intended as diplomatic presents, but this work ceased after a row with cardinal de Fleury. He seems then to have switched to pastel. On 29.VI.1720 he married Marthe, daughter of the portrait engraver Gaspard Duchange (her sister married Nicolas Dupuis, another important engraver). They had two sons, the artist Jean-François (*q.v.*) and the celebrated actor Jean-Claude, known as Bellecour. On 13.V.1720 Colson took on an apprentice for five years, for a premium of 120 livres, one Jacques Lemire, aged 17, the nephew of an ostler (AN MC/XXXVIII/202). An obligation (AN MC/XVIII/512) records "Jean-Baptiste Gilles de Colson, peintre en miniature de Saint-Luc, demeurant rue Saint-Jean-de-Beauvais" on 18.III.1727.

According to the article in Fontenai's *Dictionnaire* (1776), written by Colson fils (whose portrait of his father is in Dijon, mBA), Colson's own lists included more than 4000 pastels, executed over 24 years of travels in the provinces of France (Avignon, Lyon, Dijon, Grenoble, Toulouse). Of these few are now known for certain: only the Dumay couple, portrayed in Dijon in 1754 are signed (the attribution of the portrait of the comte de Toulouse-Lautrec seems plausible). He worked fast, the head taking less than two hours and the portraits completed in three sittings. "Ses têtes étoient d'une ressemblance parfaite; elles étoient gracieuses, et ne sentoient nullement le travail et la peine." He copied the work of Van Loo, Parrocel, Grimou and Nicolas Coypel (possibly including those in the collection of the Regent, with whom Colson seems to have enjoyed good relations), and used these compositions as a basis to which he applied the heads of his sitters.

Bibliography

Bellier de La Chavignerie & Auvray; Bénézit; Chabeuf 1916; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Ratouis de Limay 1929e; Fontenai 1776; Sanchez 2004; Saur; Schidlof 1964–65; Tourneux 1898; Voreaux 1998

Pastels

J.234.101 René DUMAY, écuyer, seigneur de Musseau, pstl, 45.5x46.5, sd verso "René Dumay / Colson Pinxit anno 1754"; & pendant: J.234.102 épouse (∞ Dijon 1750), née Anne-Bénigne Gautier de Breuvand (1727–1771), pstl, 45.5x46.5, sd verso "Anne Bénigne Gautier Dumay / Epouse de Rene Dumay Colson pinxit / anno 1754" (Paris, Drouot, Ader, Nordmann, 15.IV.2015, Lot 133, est. €800–1200) φ



J.234.104 ?Charles-Guillaume LE TELLIER DE LOUVOIS, pstl, 63x52 ov., 1712 (Versailles, Hôtel Rameau, Blache, 13.X.1968, fr750)

J.234.106 Alexandre II, comte de TOULOUSE-Lautrec, vicomte de Montfa (1696–1762), pstl, 56x40, c.1730 (PC Toulouse 2004). Attr. Φα



Photo courtesy www.Lagar do Olhar Feliz

J.234.109 Homme en habit puce, pstl (eBay 2016). [new attr.] φαv



J.234.1101 Homme en habit bleu; & pendant: J.234.1102 dame en robe blanche, manteau bleu, pstl/ppr, 47.5x38 (Marseille, Maison R&C, 28.IV.2018, Lot 36 repr., est. €300–500)[new attr.] φv



J.234.111 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1756, no. 50 (M. Reynis 1756)

J.234.112 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1756, no. 54 (M. Reynis 1756)

J.234.113 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1780, no. 237 (M. Roux 1780)