

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

DES FOSSEZ, Charles-Henri, vicomte, comte de Villeneuve

Saint-Vaast-de-Longmont, Oise 7.II.1764 –
Paris 9.III.1851

The chevalier Desfossés, or des Fossés etc., was an officier au corps royal d'artillerie, according to the legend on a print engraved by Duclos, published by Basan and advertised in the *Journal de Paris* (15.VI.1779) with a prospectus which identifies the various personages. The incident depicted concerns Antoine-Denis Dubois de Bellegarde, a fellow officer in the artist's regiment, who was convicted of fraudulently selling arms to American revolutionaries but later pardoned by the queen, after the advocate Linguet took up his case. A second portrait by the chevalier des Fossés portrayed an orphan adopted by Marie-Antoinette when he threw himself under the wheels of her carriage; des Fossés's work (almost certainly a miniature rather than a pastel) was in the queen's case which she kept in the Temple.

Although very young at the time of the Duclos print, it seems clear that the pastellist can be identified with the miniaturist Charles-Henri, vicomte Desfosses, later comte de Villeneuve. His homonymous father was comte de Villeneuve, chevalier de Saint-Louis and a capitaine de dragons. Admitted to the Écoles militaires in 1774, the amateur studied art while he was still in the army, but resigned his commission as capitaine de cavalerie in 1791. His teachers are known to have included Augustin, Hall and Greuze, but also Hoin, as Portalis 1900 (p. 12) mentions a drawing after Van Loo signed "Dessiné sous la conduite de M. Hoin de Melingne, professeur à l'École Royale Militaire, 1779, par Desfossés, cadet-gentilhomme".

He was reputedly charged by the duchesse d'Angoulême to make miniatures of Louis XVI, the queen and dauphin in the Temple. After his father's death in 1802 he retired to Cappy, near Verbery, where he became mayor. In 1805 he was appointed secrétaire de commandements to the duc de Plaisance and followed him to Italy, where the baron de Reuilly made him secrétaire général de la préfecture de l'Arno. He became a member of the Florence academy in 1808 and that of Val d'Arno in 1809, returning to France in 1815. Correspondence from his old friend Béranger as late as 1848 ("on m'a dit que vous vous occupiez toujours de peinture" in 1844) confirms that he remained active in retirement at Cappy. He returned to Paris after his wife's death c.1850. Apart from the lost pastels and a handful of miniatures, des Fosses also made at least one oil painting, a copy of a group portrait by Mignard of the artist with Racine and three other figures including des Fosses's ancestor (exhibited Paris 1878).

Bibliography

AKL; Bénézit; Pierre-Jean de Béranger, *Correspondance*, Paris, 1860, III, p. 44f; 61f, 297f, 420f; Chaix d'Est-Ange; Gabet 1831; Jougla; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Lemoine-Bouchard, *La Lettre de la miniature*, 2, 2010, pp. 3–5; Iada Nikolenko, *Pierre Mignard, the portrait painter of the*

Grand Siècle, 1983, p. 125; Antonio Renzi, "Notice sur M. le vicomte Des Fosse, membre de l'Institut historique", *L'Investigateur, journal de l'Institut historique*, XIX, 1852, pp. 61–63; Schidlof 1964

Pastels

J.2698.101 François-Michel GAGNE, dit Petit Jacques ou le pauvre Armand (c.1785–1836), orphelin (Marie-Antoinette. Paris, Drouot, 22.VI.1912, Lot 3, F7200). Lit.: *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, LXV, 1912, 829f, n.r., as "pstl" [??]
= ?min. (PC 1970). Lit.: Huisman & Jallut 1970, p. 79 repr., as 1778

J.2698.102 La reine annonçant à Mme de Bellegarde, des Juges, et la liberté de son mari, en mai 1777; la reine est accompagné de Joseph II., des comtes et comtesses de Province et d'Artois, de Mmes de Chimay, de Mailly et de Gramont; Mme de Bellegarde est accompagnée de son fils, à genoux, de Mrs de la Garde, d'Agoult, Monlezon etc., officiers du corps royal d'artillerie, pstl, 35.5x46.3, 1778 (cabinet du roi)
~grav. Antoine-Jean Duclos, 1779 (M. Groseuvre; Paris, Drouot, Ader, 16–18.IV.1934, Lot 496). Lit.: Roux & al. 1930, VII, p. 445f

