

Online edition

**DOMPIERRE DE FONTAINE,
Mme, née Marie-Élisabeth Mignot**

Paris 1715 – château d’Hornoy 1771

Voltaire’s niece, and younger sister of Mme Denis. She married first (1738) Nicolas-Joseph de Dompierre de Fontaine, who died in 1756, then (1762) Philippe-Antoine de Claris, marquis de Florian, uncle of the writer. Voltaire refers to her as “une Rosalba” (letter of 20.I.1754; his letter to her sister of 4.XII.1753 uses the same metaphor; both refer to her chronic ill-health. In a letter to her of 2.VII.1755 Voltaire wrote:

Je vous écris, ma très chère nièce, en faisant clouer au chevet de mon lit votre portrait et celui de votre fils. En vérité, voilà trois chefs-d’œuvre de votre façon qui me sont bien chers, vous, le petit d’Hornoy, et son pastel. Vous ne pouviez faire ni un plus joli enfant ni un plus joli portrait. Le vôtre est parfaitement ressemblant. Vous êtes un excellent peintre...

Her self-portrait (quite possibly but not necessarily in pastel) is lost; it may perhaps relate to an unsigned oil portrait of her attributed to Drouais (formerly at the château d’Hornoy, it was exhibited in 1906 by Duveen and in Paris 1909b when it belonged to Sigismond Reitlinger; it is known from two versions, c.32x24, which fit the Duveen description precisely): the painting, not reproduced, shows her seated holding a drawing crayon in her right hand, a portfolio in the left. The pastel of her son (to whom the abbé Pommyer was appointed guardian on his father’s death in 1756) has been assumed to be the “petit Savoyard” now at Ferney, but that is evidently one of a number of pastel copies of a painting in the Louvre by F.-H. Drouais (*q.v.*). Some months later Voltaire wrote again (16.XII.1755): “Vous êtes déjà admirée à Genève, et vous l’emportez sur Liotard”, and he subsequently corresponded with her concerning his own portraits by Liotard and de Wyl (*q.v.*). Her fragile health is alluded to (8.I.1756): “Aimez-vous toujours à peindre de beaux corps tout nus, en attendant que le docteur Tronchin rétablisse et engraisse le vôtre”, but it seems that his niece preferred to copy engravings rather than attend to the ageing philosophe’s lubricious fantasies.

It also seems that Dr Théodore Tronchin owned two of her pastels: on 9.X.1764 Karl Graf Zinzendorf visited Tronchin, apparently with Liotard (with whom he had spent the previous day with Voltaire), to see “quelques tableaux de Liotard”. After two pastels by him, Zinzendorf mentions “Deux dormeuses de Melle Fontaine, nièce de M. de Voltaire, qui ont l’air de morts qui ont mis du rouge, tant la chair est verte...”. They are presumably by rather than of Voltaire’s niece (although by that stage she was properly Mme Claris de Florian), and quite probably copies of Boucher’s pendant *Dormeuse* and *Voluptueuse*.

A pastel possibly of her sister, now in Geneva, is copied from an oil which was attributed to Carle Van Loo when it too belonged to Duveen (exhibited 1906, no. 8) but subsequently reattributed to Drouais; it probably belonged to the pastellist.

Bibliography

Eugène de la Gournerie, “Voltaire, sa famille et ses amis”, *Revue de Bretagne*, XXIV, 1868, pp. 431–49; Loche 1996; R&L p. 706; Zinzendorf 1764 [ed. H. Watzlawick & G. Klingenstein, forthcoming]

GENEALOGIES [Voltaire](#)

Pastels

J.2782.101 AUTO PORTRAIT, m/u (don: Voltaire 1755)

J.2782.102 [P]Mme Nicolas-Charles DENIS, née Marie-Louise Mignot (1712–1790), pstl/pchm, 48.5x38.2 (Geneva, mAH, inv. 1878-4. Voltaire; don: Marc-Samuel Constant de Rebecque; don: musée Rath, 15.V.1830, no. 232, as by Mad. Fontaine). Lit.: Musée Rath, cats. 1870, no. 21; 1882, xxxi; 1897, no. 390; 1904, no. 487; 1906, no. 450; Deonna 1929, p. 45; Paris 1994b, *s.no.* 183; Jean Goulemot & al., *Inventaire Voltaire*, Paris, 1995, p. 382 repr.; Loche 1996, no. 121 repr.; Graffigny 2006, x, p. 375 n.r., as anon., a/r Van Loo. *Olím* as of Mme Marc-Samuel Constant de Rebecque, née Françoise-Charlotte Pictet (1734–1766), attr. chevalier de Boufflers φδσ



~pnt., half length, seated at a table with a brochure, 72.7x59 ov. [*olim* rect.], inscr. *verso* (château de Dompierre. Duveen, exhibited 1906, no. 8; James and C. C. Stillman; New York, 3.II.1927. Lot 19 repr., as Mme Denis by Carle van Loo; P. Rosenberg & Co.; Clara M. Blum; legs: Edith Blum; don 1966: Shelburne Museum, Vermont, inv. 1966-30; New York, Sotheby’s, 30.I.1997, Lot 170 repr., as by François-Hubert Drouais, b/i; New York, Sotheby’s, 8.I.1998, Lot 71 repr., as by Drouais, inconnue). Exh.: Paris 1994b, no. 183 repr. Lit.: Muller 1976, fig. 36, as by Carle van Loo; Graffigny 2006, x, p. 370 repr.

J.2782.106 Alexandre-Marie-François-de-Paule de DOMPIERRE D’HORNOY (1742–1828), petit-neveu de Voltaire, pstl (don: Voltaire 1755)

??*Alexandre* DOMPIERRE D’HORNOY (*Ferney*) [*v. F.-H. Drouais*]

J.2782.107 VOLTAIRE, pstl, 1736 (Voltaire; don: Marc-Samuel Constant de Rebecque; don: musée Rath, 15.V.1830, no. 231, as by Mad. Fontaine). Lit.: Loche 1996, p. 428 n.r. [confusion with other portrait in mAH?]

J.2782.108 Deux dormeuses, m/u, ? a/r Boucher (Dr Théodore Tronchin 1764). Lit.: Zinzendorf 1764