

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

HOPKINSON, Francis

Philadelphia 21.IX.1737–9.V.1791

Hopkinson, a lawyer by training, was congressman for New Jersey, judge to the US Court in Pennsylvania, and a signatory to the Declaration of Independence. John Adams was struck by his curious personal appearance – “his head is not bigger, than a large Apple” – but thought him a “pretty little, curious, ingenious” man. Apart from politics, he was an accomplished composer and musician, and wrote poems and essays. An indefatigable draughtsman, designer and inventor, Hopkinson made pastel portraits in addition to designs for coins, seals, money and even, he claimed, the American flag.

Hopkinson obtained his pastels in Paris, as we know from correspondence between the Scottish merchant John Ross, and William Temple Franklin, Benjamin’s grandson. Ross, normally resident in Philadelphia, but based in Nantes at the time (where he sourced materials for the American Revolution), wrote to Franklin 1.IV.1780, mentioning a bill of 60 livres with Mr Hopkinson’s orders, to be referred to Benjamin Franklin “& the purchases made agreeable to the direction he gives, who knows the genius of this Rattle-trap, whim friend of our’s.” On 3.V.1780 Ross acknowledges Franklin’s execution of the order, and notes “The package containing the Crayon’s came Safe to hand, & its well I am to expect something Suiteable to the genius of this Gentleman to compleate his order.” The following year, in a letter dated 30.III.1781 from Philadelphia addressed to Franklin in Passy, John Ross asks Franklin to “buy for me four Setts of the best Crayons, Such as you sent me for Mr Hopkinson last year.” One assumes they were again for Hopkinson rather than for his own use. By 13.IX.1781 Ross had still not done so: “I ask Pardon for having neglected hitherto to Purchase the 4 Setts of Crayons you desired But will certainly do it the first time I go to Paris.” By 3.I.1786 he had switched his attention to Thomas Jefferson, who wrote from Paris “I will embrace the first opportunity of sending you the crayons”, and discusses alternative methods of conveyance.

Bibliography

American national biography; Johnson 1928–36; franklinpapers.org

Pastels

J.4034.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, pstl/ppr a/r Robert Edge Pine, 70.2x58, c.1785–91 (Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1891.10. Acqu. 1891)

J.4034.102 ~version, pstl/ppr, 55.8x47, c.1785–91 (Baltimore, Maryland Historical Society, XX.4.198)

J.4034.103 Jacob DUCHÉ (1737/38–1798), pstl/ppr, 44.3x33.9, c.1790 (Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1877.6. Acqu. 1877)

J.4034.104 James HOPKINSON (1769–1775), pstl/ppr, 43.2x33, c.1770 (Baltimore, Maryland Historical Society, XX.4.197)

J.4034.105 Miss KEYS, a famous New Jersey beauty, crayons. Lit.: Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 21.VIII.1776