

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

LUCAN, Countess of, née

Margaret Smith

1740 – London 1814

The daughter of James Smith, MP, of Cannons Leigh, Devon (her date and place of birth are uncertain), she married in 1760 Sir Charles Bingham, Bt (1736–1799), who was created Baron (1776), then Earl of Lucan (1795). Their daughter Lavinia married Earl Spencer. Margaret was an amateur poet, illustrator and miniaturist, noted by Mrs Delany and others for her copies of works by Cooper, Hoskins and the Olivers, as well as for her five-volume compilation of drawings related to Shakespeare. Walpole thought her crayon paintings “very ill”, on account of her never having seen any good pictures; nevertheless she improved when, in 1773, Walpole lent her all his finest miniatures and enamels, of which she copied more than 40 (presumably in watercolour). When she took up oil painting Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann (9.v.1779) deploring her new enthusiasm “for before, she painted in crayons and as ill as any fine lady in England”. By 1787 reported seeing some 356 miniatures which she had made (in addition to those she had given away). Reynolds expressed his scepticism about her painting to the Earl of Rutland, “I question her success in an historical picture.” An example from 1777, of the Countess of Carnarvon and her son, appears to be in gouache, in the style of Gardner.

Lady Lucan, “milady aimable, aimant les arts, peignant” visited France several times: in 1776 Mme du Deffand reported to Walpole (letter, 18.VIII.1776) that Marie-Antoinette had gone to see her at Watelet’s country house, le Moulin-Joli, and Lady Lucan gave her two miniatures; Greuze among others was astonished by her skill. In 1783 she leased (having been introduced by Watelet) Desfriches’s country house at Cartaudière just outside Orléans for the summer in 1783. A landscape drawing by Desfriches was given by him to “Milady Luca d’Orléans le 23 mars 1783” (Paris, Christie’s, 7.III.2017, Lot 42). She was portrayed by Angelica Kauffman, and, in pastel, by H. D. Hamilton (formerly in Walpole’s collection) and a T. Gravier.

Bibliography

Cockayne 1959, VIII, p. 238; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008, p. 98; Ratouis de Limay 1907; Walpole 1828, p. xvi; Walpole 1937, p. 234f

GENEALOGIES [Bingham](#)