

MERCIER, Claude

fl. France 1755–62

The few known pastels of Claude Mercier have hitherto been assumed to be by Charlotte Mercier (1738–1762), the daughter and pupil of the successful painter Philippe Mercier (*q.v.*), who lived in London. Little is known about her life, although a 1738 baptism record, identifying her parents as Philip and Dorothy Mercier, leaves no room for confusion about her age. Apart from the putative pastels, she is also supposed to have had a set of *Four ages* engraved by Ravenet, and an oil painting of Lord Derby (London, Christie's, 3.XII.1910, Lot 16 n.r.) was tentatively attributed to a "C. Mercier". Charlotte is said to have turned to vice, and, despite an appeal from her mother read to the Society of Artists in 1761, she died in the St James's workhouse in Westminster aged 23.

But the teenage English girl is not author of these very accomplished, rather suave pastels. The pendant pastels of a magistrate from Brittany in Washington would have been executed in France; they are both dated 1757, although Le Gonidec seems to have died two years previously. The form of the signature is identical to that of the portrait of the Jeune dame au chien. The Mapledurham pastel, evidently by the same hand, is clearly signed "Claude Mercier 1755". That did not prevent it being exhibited as the work of Charlotte Mercier in 1969, and although Ingamells and Raines (1978) noted that it cannot be by her, Ingamells (1995) retained the attribution. The subject of the pastel cannot be Joseph Blount (1752–1792) as traditionally believed; however, as he lived in France for much of his life, he may well have acquired it there.

The author of these works, with compositions echoing the works of Louis Vigée (but executed to a higher finish than he ever achieved), sophisticated modelling of the faces in the manner of Allais, and angular light reflections on the draperies reminiscent of Glain, must have been trained in Paris, and was probably associated with the Académie de Saint-Luc. It is here suggested that he, rather than Philippe, was the "Mercier" who made a copy (medium unknown) of La Tour's pastel of Prince Charles Edward Stuart for his follower Colonel John William O'Sullivan when it was engraved by Gilles-Jacques Petit in 1753.

No Claude Mercier of the right period has yet been found in the usual biographical sources or documents. Guiffrey (1884; 1915) lists a Clair-Christophe Mercier, peintre de l'Académie de Saint-Luc and lancier de la grande écurie du roi, who died in 1757, too early for at least one of the signed works (but who could well be the spouse of the "veuve du sieur Mercier, maître peintre", who lodged an opposition against the estate of one Pillet in 1762); Granges de Surgères corrects the name to Merciez(Mersiez also appears in a document, identifying his widow as Catherine Delacroix; she appears again, as veuve de Christophe Clair Mercier, peintre et doreur à Paris, in 1784), and provides a baptismal certificate from 1707. Another Mercier, peintre, was *reçu* in 1760. A M. Le Mercier was a professeur and exhibitor of genre

pictures at the Académie de Saint-Luc in 1753 and 1756, from the rue du Gindre, Faubourg Saint-Germain; his first name is given in Bénézit as Clément; genealogies indicate that he was married to a Marie-Antoinette Berthier in 1742. From the couple of oil paintings he left, however, one would be reluctant to make the association. Bénézit also lists a Lemerrier active as a portraitist in Angers and La Flèche between 1737 and 1779, but the remarkable portraits of ladies mentioned are lost. A C. A. Mercier was active as a printmaker engraving Marillier's frontispiece for *Les Nuits d'Young* of 1769. Charles-André Mercier, an associate of the dealer Paillet, was too young to be the pastellist.

A Charles-Bernard Mercier, maître peintre, is mentioned in Chatelus 1991 (p. 92); his marriage, aged 30, took place 26.XI.1725 at Saint-Germain Vaux (Fichier Laborde), making him too old. At the death of his wife, née Marie-Marguerite Antheaume, in 1743 (AN Y4613^B, 16.VII.1743), he left three children: Jean Charles, 16, Marie-Madeleine, 14, and Claude-Charles, 9; the tutors appointed included their uncle, Charles-François Mercier, maître peintre and another painter, Pierre Contat. If the signature on J.5314.104 has been correctly read, the most likely candidate is the Claude-Charles Mercier born c.1734. But although born into a family of painters, there is no further information to support the identification.

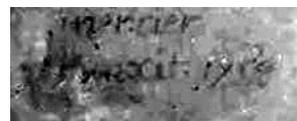
It is tempting to think that the young artist of 1758, whose signature cannot be read, is a self-portrait. The composition anticipates the celebrated portrait of Laurent Cars by Perronneau.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Granges de Surgères 1893; Greer 2001, *s.n.* Charlotte Mercier; Ingamells 1995; Ingamells & Raines 1969; Ingamells & Raines 1978; Oxford DNB; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Redgrave 1874, p. 278; Waterhouse 1981

Pastels

J.5314.101 ?AUTOPORTRAIT, artiste tenant un porte-crayon, pstl, 46.5x37.5, sd ← "Mercier/pinxit 1758" (Paris, Drouot salle 10, 14.IX.1961, Lot 53 repr., as by Charlotte Mercier. Maurice Aicardi; Paris, Drouot, Pescheteau-Badin, 26.XI.2007, Lot 119 repr., est. €3–4000, €7000. Paris, Drouot, Beaussant Lefèvre, 1.IV.2020, postponed to 9.VI.2020, Lot 117 repr., est. €3–5000) φδν



J.5314.104 ??Joseph BLOUNT (1752–1792), pstl, 63.5x52, sd "Claude/Mercier 1755" (Mapledurham House. Exh.: Mercier 1969, no. 70 n.r., as by Charlotte Mercier φδν

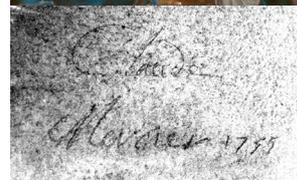


Photo courtesy Mapledurham House Collection

J.5314.108 François-Martial, comte de CHOISEUL-BEAUPRÉ (1717–1792), lieutenant-général des armées, menin de feu M. le Dauphin, inspecteur général de l'infanterie, pstl, 68.5x55.5, sd \ "Mercier px 1702" [P1762] (Möbel-Aktion Bilder; seized ERR, MA-B 1027, as by Philippe Mercier; Jeu de Paume .V.1943; Nikolsburg 15.XI.1943; not restituted) [new attr.] φν



J.5314.11 Olivier-Joseph LE GONIDEC, sgr de Traissan et de Toulborzo (1702–1755), conseiller au parlement de Bretagne en 1731, pstl 59.5x48.7, sd "C. Mercier px/1757"; & pendant: J.5314.111 épouse, née Madeleine-Marie-Agathe-Renée de La Bigotière de Perchambault (1714–1820 [sic]), pstl 59.5x48.7, sd "C. Mercier/px 1757" (Washington, National Museum of Women in the Arts. New York, Sotheby's, 21.XI.1980, Lot 43 repr., as by Charlotte Mercier, est. \$20–30,000, \$18,000; Wallace & Wilhelmina Holladay; don 1983) φν



C. Mercier p.x.
1777



C. Mercier
p.x. 1757



C. Mercier
p.x. 1757

Photos courtesy National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington

J.5314.117 Cardinal de l'ordre du Saint Esprit [?Paul d'Albert, cardinal de Luynes (1703–1788)], pstl, 65x54, s → “C.Mercier/pinxit”, etiquette *verso* “chanoine de Chalert/chanoine à Tarascon” (Joseph de Chabert, prêtre docteur en Saint Théologie, chanoine sacristain du chapitre royal de Tarascon, selon l'étiquette, *verso*. Fontainebleau, Osenat, 27.III.2016, Lot 130 repr., as by Charlotte Mercier, est. €1000–1500) [new attr.]



J.5314.119 Jeune femme en corsage blanc, avec bouquet de fleurs, un petit chien près d'elle, sd “C. Mercier/p.x. 1757” (M. C.; Paris, Charpentier, 22.V.1923, Lot 1 repr.) Φ