NEILSON, Jacques

London 1714 – Paris 1788

Jacques Neilson was born in London to a merchant seaman of Scottish origin; he emigrated early to France, residing in Paris with his uncle, the surgeon and freemason Gilbert Neilson (a specialist in treating hernias, his prospectuses published in the *Mercure* and the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* place him at the Coq d'Or in the rue Dauphine 1736–46, removed to the quai de la Mégisserie from 1749 until his death in 1761). Neilson was attached to the Gobelins by 1728 and was appointed tapissier du roi in 1734. Around 1743 he decided to become a painter, studying with Charles Chastelain, Charles Coypel, Parrocel and finally "...M. de La Tour qui lui a appris le pastel où il réussit si bien...", according to a recommendation from M. d'Isle to Lenormant de Tournehem in 1749, on the basis of which he returned to the Gobelins, giving up painting. He remained close to La Tour and acquired the version of the famous Autoportrait à l'index now in the Louvre.

In 1750 he was given charge of the basse lisse workshop at the Gobelins, and introduced improvements in the method of copying cartoons that allowed this cheaper process to match the quality of the haute lisse workshops. Later (from 1768) he was responsible for dying, and from 1767 he was director of the school or apprentices.

In 1760 Soufflot and Marigny corresponded about Neilson's concern with his alien status, which he believed prevented him from inheriting from his uncle (Neilson printed an invitation to the surgeon's funeral at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, 21.III.1761 – a copy is in the Archives nationales); but under a 1667 edict he was entitled to the rights of a French citizen by virtue of ten years' work at the factory (he had been an entrepreneur for 11 years, and had worked as master for longer).

In 1738 Neilson married Anne-Geneviève Garand, daughter of a merchant, François Garand. She remained in business after their marriage, as a maître marchande-lingère, taking on a younger sister, Geneviève-Marie Garand, as an apprentice in 1751. (Her brothers included Jean-Baptiste Garand, a miniaturist recorded in the rue de la Mégisserie 1774–77, and Jean-François Garand, recorded as an orfèvre apprenti in 1748.) Their son Daniel-Marie (who travelled to England in 1767 to solicit business) died in 1777 (leaving a widow, née Marie-Julie Chipault, who was accorded a pension of 600 livres, 1.I.1780), while the daughter, Marie-Geneviève-Dorothée (1745–1826) in 1771 married a marchand drapier, Michel Curmer (1743–1809), who, under the name Curmer Neilson, received a payment due to Neilson of some 53,563 livres in the Liquidation et remboursement of the state debt of 2.VII.1791.

It is unclear whether Neilson was connected with the family from Haddington, but a group of pictures by "Neilson" recorded at Amisfield in 1792 included two religious paintings, medium unspecified, "a portrait of a French painter" (a copy of La Tour's pastel of Dupouch), as well as a pastel copy of a Rosalba which was in Paris until 1764. These two pastel copies, which we suggest were by Jacques Neilson, reveal a high level of competence. Apart from these, only a portrait (medium unspecified) of a Jesuit priest, père Porée, is known (from a print by Balechou).

Bibliography

Alfred Curmer, *Notice sur Jacques Neilson, entrepreneur et directeur des teintures de la manufacture Royale de tapisseries des Gobelins*, Paris, 1878; London, Christie's, 5.VII.2005, note to Lot 162; Oxford art online; Parker & al. 1964

Pastels

J.5558.101 Claude DUPOUCH (–1747), peintre du roi de Pologne, appuyé sur un fauteuil, pstl, 63.5x52 (Amisfield, inv. 1771, no. 87, as by Neilson; PC 2012, as by or after La Tour). Lit.: Catalogue of pictures at Amisfield, *Archaeologia scotica*, I, 1792, p. 81, no. 87 n.r., as a portrait of a French painter, m/u, by Neilson φ

J.5558.103 One of the Muses [La Poseia, Calliope], pstl, 63.5x52 (Amisfield, inv. 1771, no. 60, as by Neilson; PC 2012, attr. Carriera). Lit.: "Catalogue of pictures at Amisfield", *Archaeologia scotica*, I, 1792, p. 79, no. 60 n.r., as crayons, 65x58.4, by Neilson. A/r Carriera pstl (Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, inv. KH 674) φ

Portraits in other media

J.5558.106 Le père PORÉE, jésuite
~grav. Balechou

J.5558.108 Our Saviour and the Virgin, m/u, 72x90 (Amisfield, inv. 1771, as by Neilson. Not located 2012)

J.5558.109 Saint Andrew on the Cross, m/u (Amisfield, inv. 1771, as by Neilson. Not located 2012)