

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

WILLISON, George

Edinburgh 1741–1797

Portrait painter. After studies in Edinburgh (1756–58) and Rome (1760–67, with Mengs), Willison was in London from 1767, exhibiting at the Society of Artists (1767–70) and at the Royal Academy in 1771 and 1772. His pastels show the influence of Cotes. An oil of Nancy Parsons in Turkish dress (Yale Center for British Art) is evidently inspired by Liotard's so-called Lady Coventry. His paintings at this stage were described by Edwards as “flat and feeble in the drawing, but have some attempt at colouring”. He travelled to India between 1774 and 1780 (supported by his uncle, a director of the East India Company), working for Muhammad Ali Khan, Nawab of Arcot. This lucrative patronage enabled him to return to England in 1780–81 with a reported £15,000 (some sources suggest £30,000). He encountered Ozias Humphry (*q.v.*) in London in 1784 before retiring to Scotland around 1784. He worked in oil and, according to Sée, continued to use pastel up to his death.

Bibliography

Archer 1979; Bénézit; Edwards 1808; Ingamells 1997; Oxford DNB; Roettgen 2003; Sée 1911; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

Pastels

J.799.101 Mrs George WILLISON, 74x58 ov., c.1760 (Mrs Scott 1911. André Seligmann, Paris, acqu. by ERR; ERR inv. Sel. 130 H.-C.; Louvre; German Embassy; Louvre .XI.1940; Munich CCP, Mü-Nr 436/2; repatriated 19.IX.1946; restituted). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 159. Lit.: Sée 1911, repr. p. 355 ◊

