

# Some French pastellists in Spain<sup>1</sup>

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WHILE RESEARCHING THE WORK of Jean-Baptiste Perronneau one might be excused for not looking in the reserves of a museum in Lisbon (where I found the curious work I described a year ago in this [post](#)), or for not examining unpublished material in Bedford Archives where he isn't even named. But it was there that I recently came across this further clue to the pastellist's activities in Spain – in the correspondence of Lord Grantham's brother Frederick "Fritz" Robinson to his sister Anne, writing from Madrid on 6 February 1775:

We have a French painter in Crayons lately arrived here, he is much cryd up by the Ambassador, but I have not seen any of his performances, which are a much surer test of a Frenchman's merit than the opinion of his countrymen.

When I first saw this, I assumed the reference might be to Pillement, although Gordon-Smith does not mention him as in Madrid that year. He was there, however, as we learn from a later letter from Fritz to his sister (15 July 1775): "M. Pillement has come to try his fortune in Spain after a year in Portugal"; Fritz added that he may be disappointed, noting however that his landscapes in crayons are beautiful. But Pillement can't be the pastellist who arrived in February, as Fritz had seen none of that artist's work, while he knew Pillement well: in a letter of 18 September 1763 to his brother, he reported that he had seen drawings by Pillement "some sold very cheap."

If the February 1775 letter does indeed refer to Perronneau, it puts him on the scene even earlier than that pastel from last year's blog. The French ambassador in Madrid was Pierre Paul, marquis d'Ossun; his secretary was the French painter Charles de La Traverse (1725–1787), a former pupil of Boucher, who had been in Madrid for some years. It is clear that the Paris–Madrid axis was of considerable interest for artists.

But these links have not always been correctly reported, and my recent review threw up a number of further examples.

I had for some time been suspicious of the curious coincidence that a Spanish [pastellist](#) called Faraona María Magdalena Olivieri (supposedly the daughter of the Italian sculptor working in Madrid Giovan Dominico Olivieri, and wife of the architect Jacques Marquet; she was admitted to the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in 1759) should share exactly the same forenames (Faronne-Marie-Madeleine) as the wife of the painter Michel-Barthélemy Ollivier: I wondered if there was some family connection – until I realised that this was simply a confusion, and that she was not the daughter of G. D. Olivieri at all, despite the multiplicity of recent academic references which asserted this. I wish I could claim credit for this discovery, but actually it had been published by Alisa Luxenberg in an article printed in a 1996 exhibition catalogue that seems to have been completely overlooked. This is a shame, because her work is evidently of considerable quality, as her very French self-portrait in the Madrid Academia demonstrates:

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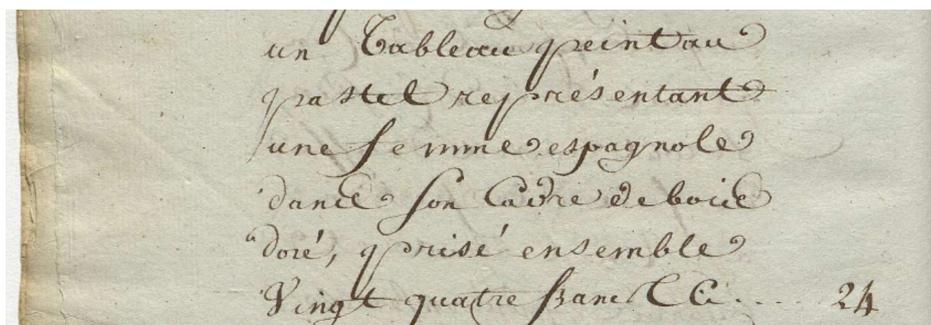
<sup>1</sup> This essay first appeared on my blog, [neiljeffares.wordpress.com](http://neiljeffares.wordpress.com), on 31 August 2016. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, "Some French pastellists in Spain", *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/FrenchPastellistsInSpain.pdf>.



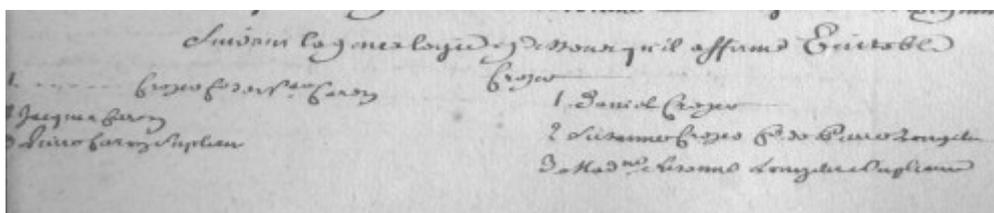
For some of us thinking of Franco-Spanish links brings to mind Philip V or Saint-Simon's embassy. Others perhaps will think of the Barber of Seville and Beaumarchais. I won't reproduce the pastel said to be of him, as it surely isn't, and anyway Nattier's painting is so much better. You will of course know that he was a clockmaker, and you may even know that his family name was Caron ("Beaumarchais" was made up, not purchased like most French names): but you may not know (unless you are a specialist) that he went to Spain to protect the honour of one of his sisters, Lisette, who was jilted not once, but thrice by a Spanish official named José Clavijo y Fajardo. The story is far too complicated to summarise (you can read Goethe's 1774 play if you have an appetite for that sort of thing, but it's not historically accurate): but the girl had gone to Spain in the first place as companion to her elder sister, Marie-Josèphe.

Historians of art and literature seem to have failed to connect this sister with the "Doña María Josefa Carrón" who was appointed académica de mérito at the Academia de San Fernando in 1761, just two years after Faronne Ollivier; her *morceau de réception* was a pastel of an architect and professor at the academy. Born in 1725 (seven years before her famous brother), [Marie-Josèphe Caron](#) married a French architect, Louis Guilbert, in Paris in 1748. They settled in Madrid when he was appointed *architecte du roi d'Espagne*. While her younger sister was getting into trouble, she was running a fashion shop. Her husband however went mad and died. In 1772 she returned to Paris, penniless, and relied upon her brother for support until her death in 1784.

We don't know if perhaps she was the author of any of the pastels included in Beaumarchais's posthumous inventory. A group of eight prints and pastels were noted "pour mémoire", as *portraits de famille*, while two more pastels were noted, one undescribed, the other "représentant une femme espagnole":



Beaumarchais, you will recall, acquired a reputation for supporting the underdog, just like Voltaire. Indeed you will probably know of Beaumarchais's project to publish Voltaire's complete works. But you won't I think know of a more obscure connection which I discovered recently while delving through the archives but which I think has eluded Beaumarchais and Voltaire scholars hitherto. Among the dustier files that are now accessible for those with the patience to decipher the writing are the wonderfully curious "dispenses de consanguinité" granted when people wanted to marry their cousins. This happened in 1733 when a certain Pierre Caron, orfèvre, lapidaire-joaillier, quai des Morfondus was granted the dispensation necessary to marry his second cousin, Madeleine-Suzanne Longelet. From the brief pedigree recorded by the notary on the document:



it is possible to connect up the various parts of the Caron genealogy, which you can find [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), on my site. Madeleine-Suzanne Longelet's great-uncle was Isaac Thuret, horloger du roi (see my article on the [Vivien pastel](#)), while Pierre was a first cousin of Beaumarchais's father André-Charles Caron (who converted to Catholicism: the family had been Protestant, which almost certainly explains the difficulty in reassembling their genealogy). Pierre's business included several boutiques on the quai des Morfondus or de l'Horloge (its alternative name).

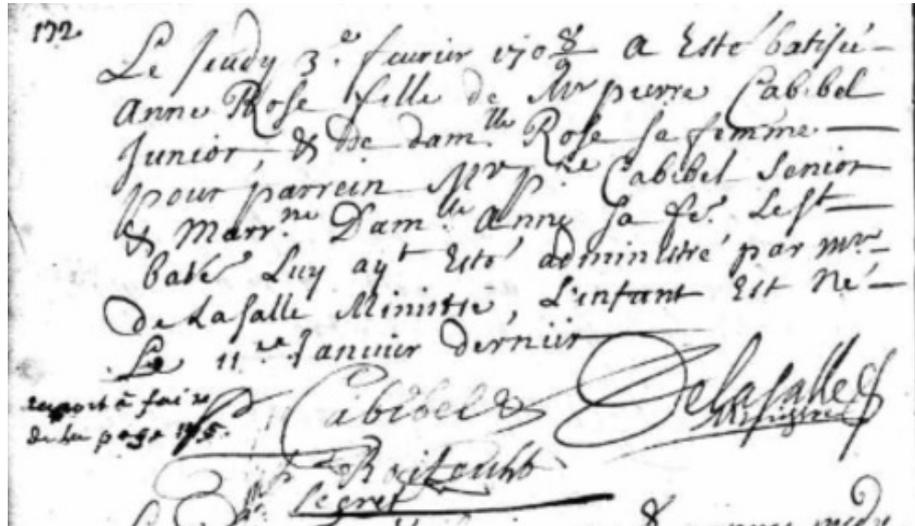
This address is the key to two remaining pieces in the jigsaw puzzle. One is a second Caron pastellist: Marie-Josèphe's cousin, [Susanne Caron](#). She is mentioned in an article in Mme de Beaumer's *Journal des dames* (t. III, .XI.1761, p. 191):

**Mademoiselle Caron, Quai des Morfondus, ne doit pas être oubliée dans la liste de nos femmes Peintres. Elle est attachée à la peinture en pastel où elle se distingue. Nos Connoisseurs lui promettent du succès.**

That success, it must be admitted, was modest: she went on to The Netherlands, where she copied Liotard, and is best known for a chalk portrait of Pasquale Paoli, the Corsican patriot who inspired James Boswell and has a memorial in Westminster Abbey.

At the time that that Mme de Beaumer was writing, the address of "chez M. Caron, quai des Morfondus" was also that of the unfortunate and impecunious Mme Calas (née Anne Rose Cabibel), widow of the executed Protestant cloth merchant falsely accused of murdering their

son in Toulouse; she had come to Paris to seek justice with the support of Voltaire. Every aspect of the Calas affair has been rehearsed time and again, but here I think is one more footnote. In even smaller print I can add her age (nowhere given in the extensive literature, at least as far as I could see): she was in fact born in London, on 11 January 1708/9, and baptised in the French church in Spitalfields three weeks later:



If there is name dropping in this post, it is perhaps a reminder that, whatever the limitations on physical transport at the time, the eighteenth century was a small world in which paths from London to Corsica, from Madrid to The Hague crossed in ways that can still surprise and inspire our researches. But it must be conceded that religious intolerance contributed as much to this as Enlightenment values.

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