COLSON, Jean-Baptiste Gilles, dit

Verdun bpt 11.IX.1685 – Paris 22.IX.1762

The artist was the eldest son of Sébastien Gille, a maître taillandier in Verdun-sur-Meuse, and Anne Colson, who married on 9.I.1685 (aged 33 and 27 respectively); in 1685 (not 1686 as in most sources until corrected here in 2024) he was baptised simply Jean Gille after his uncle Jean Gille, also a maître taillandier in the town; his marraine was the wife of another uncle, François Colson, a tailleur d'habits. The artist adopted his mother's family name (and it seems the additional forename Baptiste) to avoid the ridicule attached to the *commedia dell'arte* name of Gilles (or Gille), followed the advice of his relative, the maréchal de Vauban, to pursue an artistic career in the face of his father's opposition. He went to Paris, where he studied with Joseph Christophe and became a miniaturist. He was commissioned by the duc de Tresmes to produce a series of miniatures of Louis XV intended as diplomatic presents, but this work ceased after a row with cardinal de Fleury. He seems then to have switched to pastel. On 29.VI.1720 he married Marthe, daughter of the portrait engraver Gaspard Duchange (her sister married Nicolas Dupuis, another important engraver). They had at least three sons, including the artist Jean-François (*q.v.*) and the celebrated actor Jean-Claude, known as Bellecour. On 13.V.1720 Colson took on an apprentice for five years, for a premium of 120 livres, one Jacques Lemire, aged 17, the nephew of an ostler (AN MC/XXXVIII/202). An obligation (AN MC/XVIII/512) records "Jean-Baptiste Gilles de Colson, peintre en miniature de Saint-Luc, demeurant rue Saint-Jean-de-Beauvais" on 18.III.1727. Colson died in the Vieille rue du petit lion, chez "Mr Mazieres", aged 77, as certified by two sons (a certified copy of the Saint-Sulpice burial entry was obtained in 1765 for an unknown purpose). "Marthe Duchange, veuve de Jean Baptist Gille dit Colson, peintre" died, rue du Petit Bourbon aged 80, and was also buried at Saint-Sulpice, on 20.III.1778.

According to the article in Fontenai's *Dictionnaire* (1776), written by Colson fils (whose portrait of his father is in Dijon, mBA), Colson's own lists included more than 4000 pastels, executed over 24 years of travels in the provinces of France (Avignon, Lyon, Dijon, Grenoble, Toulouse, Marseille). Of these few are now known for certain: only the Dumay couple, portrayed in Dijon in 1754 are signed. The attribution of the portrait of the comte de Toulouse-Lautrec seems plausible, and a group of pastels all showing the same characteristics has now emerged. (Other pastels which have been attributed to him do not share these.)

Apparently he worked fast, the head taking less than two hours and the portraits completed in three sittings. "Ses têtes étoient d'une ressemblance parfaite; elles étoient gracieuses, et ne sentoient nullement le travail et la peine." Some, possibly many, were executed on parchment (support are rarely reliably reported). He copied the work of Van Loo, Parrocel, Grimou and Noël-Nicolas Coypel (possibly including those in the collection of the Regent, with whom Colson seems to have enjoyed good relations), and used these compositions as a basis to which he applied the heads of his sitters.

Colson was appointed (with Noël-Nicolas Coypel) to adjudicate a dispute over the resemblance and value of a pastel by Pierre Duval (*q.v.*), in a dispute of 1732 (AN Y4479[B]); it is perhaps significant that Coypel was selected by Duval, while Colson was chosen by the unhappy client who may have thought his prices were more reasonable.

A number (at least 18) of the pastels here attributed to Colson stylistically appear in a distinctive highly burnished gilt Régence frame, with corners of sunflowers and fanned lambrequins. These must have been supplied by the artist.

An obcure artist, Jean Jonveaux (*q.v.*), also born at around the same time in Verdun, seems to have had a similar style to judge from the single surviving example. They may have shared some training before Colson went to Paris.

Bibliography

Bellier de La Chavignerie & Auvray; Bénézit; Chabeuf 1916; Jal 1867; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Ratouis de Limay 1929e; Fontenai 1776; Sanchez 2004; Saur; Schidlof 1964–65; Tourneux 1898; Voreaux 1998

Pastels

J.234.021 Mme Charles de BARRÈME DE CHATEAUFORT (∞ Arles 1723), née Marie-Renée de Damian-Vinsargues (c.1694–1776), pstl, 66x57, inscr. *verso* "Renée de Damian-Vinsargues mariée en 1723 à Charles de Barrème de Chateaufort, Sgr de St Véran grand oncle de Madame de Barrème née de Chateaufort, mère de Madame de Reginel", c.1723 (Galerie Jacques Briau, Suresnes, 2020) [new attr.] φv

J.234.051 [François] BESSIÉ DE LA GROLIÈRE, inscr. *verso* "Bessié de la Grolière, oncle de Nicolas Ponthus Bessie"; & pendant: J.234.052 épouse, pstl, 46.5x38.5 (, 2.III.20121, Lot 419 repr., éc. fr., est. €400–600) [new attr.] φv

J.234.091 [*olim* J.9.1274] Antoine CANCLAUX en habit puce, gilet or, pstl, 44.5x37, étiquette *verso* "MONSIEUR ANTOINE CANCLAUX TIRE EN 1735/A PERPIGNAN" (Toulouse, Marc Labarbe, 3.VII.2020, Lot 269 repr., éc. fr., est. €200–400). Lit.: *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 10.I.1888, 472, col. 15 n.r. ?La Tour [new attr. 2020] φαν

J.234.097 Pierre-Joseph-Louis de Ribeiron, marquis de CHABESTAN D'ALAUZON (1713–1757); & pendant: épouse (∞ Carpentras 1737), née Jacqueline Tulle de Villefranche (1716–), pstl/ppr, 52x41 (Paris, Drouot, Delon, Hoebanx, 25.VI.2025, Lot 34 repr., éc. fr. ; Paris, Drouot, Delon, Hoebanx, 18.II.2026, Lot 22 repr., éc. fr., est. €300–500) [new attr. 2025] φv

J.234.097 [*olim* J.9.148] La comtesse de DENNEVAL, femme de Pierre-Joseph Leroux, née Madeleine Anquetil (–1764), pstl/ppr, 44.5x36.5 (Dijon, Hôpital général) [new attr. 2021] φν

J.234.101 René DUMAY, écuyer, seigneur de Musseau, pstl, 45.5x46.5, sd *verso* "René Dumay / Colson Pinxit anno 1754"; & pendant: J.234.102 épouse (∞ Dijon 1750), née Anne-Bénigne Gautier de Breuvand (1727–1771), pstl, 45.5x46.5, sd *verso* "Anne Bénigne Gautier Dumay / Epouse de Rene Dumay Colson pinxit / anno 1754" (Paris, Drouot, Ader, Nordmann, 15.IV.2015, Lot 133, est. €800–1200) φ

J.234.1048 André, comte FOGASSE DE LA BASTIE (1705–1791), colonel général de l'artillerie du pape à Avignon, pstl, 45x37, inscr. *verso* (Paris, Thierry de Maigret, 20.III.2024, Lot 30 repr., éc. fr. XVIII^{e}, est. €250–400)[new attr., ?] φαν

J.234.103 M. GOUTEFREY avec manteau puce, pstl, 47x39, étiquette *verso* (Tours, Giraudeau, 14.III.2020, Lot 13 repr., éc. fr., est. €600–800)[new attr.] φαν

J.234.1032 Blaise-François de LARROQUE, sgr de Molas, conseiller à la chambre des requêtes du parlement de Toulouse en 1736, pstl/pchm, 48x38.8 (Le Cabinet de Mercure, antiquaire, Rabestens, 2025; Albi, Amigues, 24.X.2025, Lot 162 repr., éc. fr., est. €500–600) [new attr.] φν

Jean-Ignace de LA VILLE (1690–1774), de l'Académie française, évêque de Tricomie (PC 2019). Exh.: Versailles 2019, no. 44 repr., attr. [v. Éc. fr., J.9.20113]

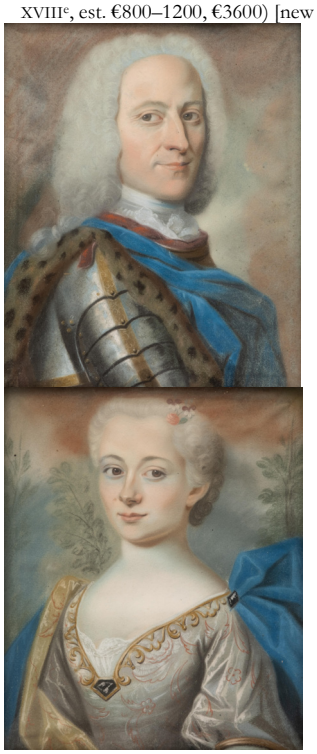
J.234.1033 Mme Jean-François LE MAITRE DE BEAUMONT (∞ 1743), née Anne-Elisabeth de Gantel-Guitton de Mazargues, pstl, 56x44 (Marseille, Mazzella, 30.I.2026, Lot 391 repr., éc. fr. XVIII^{e}, est. €500–600) [new attr. 2026] φν

J.234.1034 ?Charles-Guillaume LE TELLIER DE LOUVOIS, pstl, 63x52 ov., 1712 (Versailles, Hôtel Rameau, Blache, 13.X.1968, Ir750)

J.234.1036 M. & pendant: J.234.1037 Mme LETOURNEUR, pstl, 45.5x37, inscr. *verso* 1750 (Avignon, Hôtel des ventes, 26.IV.2025, Lot 20 repr., éc. fr. XVIII^{e}, est. €400–600) [new attr. 2025] φν

J.234.104 [*olim* J.9.2378] M. PARDIAC, médecin, pstl, 43.5x36, 1745 (Paris, Drouot, Beaussant-Lefèvre, 27.X.2009, Lot 23 repr., éc. fr. XVIII^{e}, est. €500–600, €650) [new attr. 2021] φν

J.234.1045 [??]Jules-François de ROBINEAU DE VILLEMONT (1738–1806) [ou plutôt son père], commis des guerres à Marseille; & pendant: son épouse, pstl/ppr, 44x36 (Den Haag, Venduehuis, 28.III.2023, Lot 60 repr., éc. fr. XVIII^e, est. €800–1200, €3600) [new attr.] φδν



J.234.105 Mme Joachim de SURIAN (∞ 1734), née Jeanne Sauvaire (1710–1782), épouse d'un armateur, premier échevin de Marseille, pstl, 47.5x38.5, inscr. *verso* (Marseille, Leclerc, 24.V.2019, Lot 57 repr., éc. fr. XIX^e, est. €600–800)[new attr., ?] φαν

J.234.106 Alexandre II, comte de TOULOUSE-Lautrec, vicomte de Montfa (1696–1762), pstl, 56x40, c.1730 (PC Toulouse 2004). Attr. Φα

Photo courtesy www Lugar do Olhar Feliz

J.234.1063 Jean-Joseph de VENEL (1724–1791), capitaine de vaisseaux, pstl, 48.5x39.5, inscr. *verso* (Milan, Marcopolo Auctions, 28.V.2026, Lot 430 repr., éc. fr. XIX^e, est. €600–800)[new attr., ?] φαν

J.234.1065 [*olim* J.9.2991] Homme en habit gris, cuirasse, pstl (Montpellier, confrérie des Pénitents Bleus) [new attr. 2025, ?]Φαν

Photo courtesy Royale et Dévôte Compagnie des Pénitents Bleus de Montpellier, © Hélène Palouzié

J.234.107 [*olim* J.92.186] Eleganter Herr im Brustportrait, pstl, 43x38 (Berlin, Auktionshaus Reiner Dannenberg, 25.III.2006, Lot 837 repr., est. €200, €360) [new att., ?] φαν

J.234.108 [*olim* J.9.3515] Homme au gilet jaune, pstl, 45x37 (Maurice Aicardi; Paris, Drouot, Pecheteau-Badin, 26.XI.2007, Lot 87 n.r., mauvais état, anon., est. €300–400) [new attr. 2021] φ

J.234.1082 [*olim* J.9.373] Homme en buste coiffé d'une perruque, pstl, 45x37.2 (Paris, Rossini, 8.XII.2011, Lot 74 repr., as genre du XVIII^e, est. €400–600) [new attr. 2021] φ

J.234.1084 [*olim* J.9.3845] Homme en cuirasse, pstl, 44.5x37 (Versailles, Perrin, Royère, Lajeunesse, 23.III.2014, Lot 26 repr., est. €400–500) [new attr. 2021, ?] φα

J.234.109 Homme en habit puce, pstl (eBay 2016). [new attr.] φαν

J.234.1093 Homme en habit noir, gilet d'or, pstl/ppr, 46x37 (Paris, Drouot, Le Brech, 28.II.2019, Lot 11 repr., anon., est. €200–300)[new attr.] φν

J.234.1094 Homme en habit bleu galonné d'or, uniforme d'un commis de guerre 1750–70, pstl, 57x46 (Paris, Drouot, De Baecq, 27.III.2019, Lot 36 repr., anon., est. €300–400)[new attr., ?] φαν

J.234.1095 Homme en habit violet, manteau bleu, pstl, 55x47 (Sameule Antiquités, Beaucaire)[new attr.] φν

J.234.10951 Homme en habit gris, manteau bleu, pstl, 45x37 (PC Languedoc; Montpellier, Hôtel des ventes, 23.III.2024, Lot 186 repr., anon., est. €400–600; Montpellier, Hôtel des ventes, 10.VII.2024, Lot 320 repr., anon., est. €200–300)[new attr. 2024] φν

J.234.10952 Homme en armure, pstl/ppr, 59x51.5 (Paris, Drouot, Tessier & Sarrou, 18.X.2024, Lot 192 repr., anon., est.)[new attr., ?] φαν

J.234.1097 Dame en Diane, pstl, 48x39 (Paris, Beaussant Lefèvre, 12024, Lot 42 repr., éc. fr., est. €500–600, €300; PC 2024; Versailles, Osenat, 23.XI.2025, Lot 56 repr., as by Colson, est. €600–800; Versailles, Osenat, 25.I.2026, Lot 189 repr., est. €400–600, €435)[new attr. 2024] φν

J.234.1096 [*olim* J.9.7962] Jeune prince en habit gris, manteau bleu, pstl/pchm, 45x37 (Neuilly, Aguttes, 9.XII.2009, Lot 48 repr., est. €1500–2000; Neuilly, Aguttes, 7.VI.2010, Lot 62 repr., est. €1000–1200) [new attr. 2021, ?] φα

J.234.10961 [*olim* J.9.7964] ~?pendant: J.9.7965 Jeune femme en habit rouge, pstl, 45x37 (Neuilly, Aguttes, 9.XII.2009, Lot 57 repr., attr. Vialy, est. €800–1200; Neuilly, Aguttes, 7.VI.2010, Lot 55 repr., attr. Vialy, est. €500–700, €1100) [new attr. 2021, ?] φα

J.234.1101 Homme en habit bleu; & pendant: J.234.1102 dame en robe blanche, manteau bleu, pstl/ppr, 47.5x38 (Marseille, Maison R&C, 28.IV.2018, Lot 36 repr., est. €300–500; Marseille, Maison R&C, 18.IV.2019, Lot 42 repr.) [new attr. 2018] φν

J.234.1103 Homme en habit bleu, gilet jaune; & pendant: J.234.1104 dame en robe bleu clair, manteau bleu, pstl, 45x36.5 (Toulouse, Ivoire Primardeco, 20.IX.2019, Lot 155 repr., est. €500–600) [new attr. 2019] φν

J.234.11043 Magisrat; & pendant: J.234.11044 dame en robe blanche, manteau bleu, pstl, 46x37.5 (Versaills, Palais des Congrès. Martin, 27.III.1977, Lot 40. Bayeux Enchères, 14.VIII.2021, Lot 1007 repr., both as école française, est. €800–1000; Bayeux Enchères, 11.XI.2021, Lot 19 repr., both as école française, est. €400–500) [new attr. 2021] φv

J.234.11045 Homme en habit bleu, gilet blanc bordé d'or; & pendant: J.234.11046 dame manteau bleu, pstl, 46.5x39 (Reims, Collet, Luneau, 19.XI.2023, Lot 213 repr., est. €400–600) [new attr. 2023] φv

J.234.111 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1756, no. 50 (M. Reynis 1756)

J.234.112 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1756, no. 54 (M. Reynis 1756)

J.234.113 Portrait, pstl, Salon de Toulouse 1780, no. 237 (M. Roux 1780)