

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

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CARRIERA, Rosalba

Venice 1673–1757

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Carriera developed from painting miniatures for boxes into a consummate artist whose reputation spread beyond her native Venice. Born in 1673 (two years earlier than usually reported), baptised Rosalba Zuanna, she was the daughter of a Venetian lawyer from an artistic family. There were two sisters, one confusingly also with the same names but known as Giovanna (1675–1737), reputed to have worked as an artist, the other Anzola Cecilia (1677–1757) who married the painter G. A. Pellegrini.

Rosalba's early training is uncertain (she may have studied with Antonio Lazzari, Giuseppe Diamantini and Federico Bencovich, and the evidence of her connections with Antonio Balestra includes copies she made of his work), but she must have been inspired by Benedetto Luti, the great master of pastel head studies in Italy. Her earliest recorded pastel is of Zanetti, which the subject presented to comte Tessin. She was admitted – on merit, rather than as the *accademica d'onore* title normally given to women artists – to the Accademia di San Luca in Rome in 1705, as a “*pittrice e miniatrice veneziana*”. Around 1708, perhaps under the influence of her friend, the British diplomat Christian Cole (*q.v.*), she devoted herself particularly to pastel, a medium which allowed her to capture the rococo spirit to perfection. Of some 440 works accepted in Sani 2007, three-quarters are in pastel; some 82 miniatures in tempera on ivory have survived, about a dozen drawings, and one oil painting which seems unconvincing.

In the 1710s she came into contact with Vleughels, Mariette and Crozat, leading to her famous visit to Paris in 1720–21 with her sister and brother-in-law Pellegrini, whose influence on her work was considerable. She was admitted to the Académie royale in .X.1720 (the same year as her admission to the academy in Bologna). Venetian art in general and Carriera in particular filled a vacuum in French art that occurred during the Régence. Her diary indicates that she executed about fifty portraits on this trip, and her lists are of great interest. Works such as the *Jeune fille à la colombe* (now in Dijon) inspired copies by artists ranging from Lundberg and Coypel to Greuze and La Tour (as may be expected, confusions abound). Mariette retained certain reservations, noting that her female heads were derived from those of Pietro Liberi (*q.v.*), while much better coloured, although this tended to disguise the faults in her drawing. Of the two pendants in the Tallard sale, Mariette (manuscript note) criticised the colour (less brilliant than her normal style), while the unhappy compositions relied on her brother-in-law Pellegrini; “avec un peu moins de modestie,

elle auroit pu faire quelque chose de plus agréable”.

In 1723 Rosalba spent some five months in Modena. Back in Venice, she continued to correspond with her contacts in Paris, among them Crozat, whose letter to her of 12.III.1728 concerning the pastel now in Dijon summarises the continued interest in her work in France: “La belle tête (demi-grandeur) que M. le comte de Morville a reçue tout récemment de vous, fait l’admiration non-seulement des amateurs des beaux-arts, mais encore de nos plus excellent peintres, qui, bon gré mal gré, sont forcés de vous louer. Ils vous comparent au Corrège, et quelques-uns vous placent au-dessus de ce maître.... M. Charles Coypel vous adresse un aveu sincère de tout ce qu’il pense sur votre talent, en reconnoissant que vous [vous] êtes surpassée vous-même”. Four years later (12.XII.1732) Crozat was delighted to report to the artist that the pastel, now with its pendant, had been acquired by Jean de Boullongne: “Tous les amateurs et curieux en font des compliments, ce qui décore infiniment son cabinet qui est très fréquenté le jour qu’il donne les audiences.” The British consul Joseph Smith was a patron (as well as his notary Carlo Gabrieli, the artist’s godfather), amassing a large collection of her work which was later acquired by George III. Her popularity in England (she told Vleughels in 1721 that she had been “attaqué par des Angles”) was no doubt enhanced by the numerous repetitions and copies, particularly of sets (complete or not) of the Four Seasons, but also by the numerous portraits which British aristocrats brought back from the Grand Tour. She travelled to Modena in 1723 to make several portraits of the princess Enrichetta Anna Sofia, intended for prospective husbands. In a trip to Gorizia in 1728 she made portraits of three princes (Schwarzenberg, Diedrichstein and Paar, all lost).

At this stage (1728) her diary, which she had kept on after the Paris trip, comes to an end. Its perfunctory and misspelled entries give a tantalising glimpse of her work. Some of the records themselves are of “un Inglese” or even just una “incognita”; but we can see that she charged 22 zecchini for her portraits for much of the period, rising to 25 towards the end of the period (but she charged 240 zecchini for the ever-popular sets of the Quattro Stagioni); and that she seems to have completed, and received payment for, many of these pastels within a week (no doubt constrained by her foreign sitters’ itineraries). The sizes occasionally quoted (e.g. “pastel de quatre-trois”) are in a system which has not been decoded, and the medium is only occasionally specified (as well as pastels and miniatures, some portraits are described as “in picciolo”, but are not necessarily miniatures on ivory, as others are “in picciolo di pastelle”).

In 1730 she was briefly attached to the court at Vienna, and portrayed the empress. There seems no foundation for Pasquin’s claim that she visited Ireland. From the death of her sister in 1737, her output declined, and by 1745 she had become blind (as recorded by Katherine Read, *q.v.*, who visited her in 1753). Despite her broad influence (and the enormous demand for

repetitions of her work particularly following her Paris trip), she seems to have had few pupils who carried on pastel portraiture: no work is known by either of her sisters Angela and Giovanna, while the gifted Felicità Sartori (*q.v.*) was better known as a miniaturist. The works of other pastellists, including Marianna Carlevarij and Margherita Terzi (*qq.v.*), no doubt survive today in many collections with attributions to Carriera. Among other pupils, the writer Luisa Bergalli is mentioned (and is the subject of a Rosalba portrait), but it is unlikely that in her brief time she produced work likely to be confused with Rosalba. Other artists with little or no connection may have claimed to be her pupils; for example, the Swiss enamelist Andreas Massard who made this claim in an advertisement issued in 1751 on his arrival in London (Vertue).

Of the greatest importance is the magnificent collection in Dresden, which at one stage held 157 pastels by her, and was regarded as one of the marvels of Europe. Her pastel self-portrait, made for the grand-ducal collection in the Uffizi in Florence, is close in style to Vivien, and some of her later work gains an intensity of expression lacking in the endless repetitions of her allegorical figures; she may indeed have been the victim of her celebrity.

The distinctive vaporous style by which she is known uses a delicate and light palette, and her works are suffused by a gentle, if uniform, light. The sfumato is Italian, and contrary to legend there is little trace of her influence on the French school in terms of handling pastel. Colour and texture outweigh the deficiencies of drawing and characterisation of which she was guilty. Among her hallmark techniques is the use of the flat side of a chalk dragged over a contrasting colour to depict lace effectively rather than accurately. She was interested in the technical aspects of her art (while recognising that the material features were secondary), and explained to Casotti in 1719 that she used tailor’s chalk and ground shells to bind her pigments rather than the more common gum. Having tried pastels made in Flanders and Rome, she preferred those made in Paris (although she also sourced some materials locally, for example from a Sig. Pietro, *Diarii*, 28.III.1725). All her pastels seem to show a consistent lighting, invariably from the left (although the catchlights in the eyes of the celebrated Nympe de la suite d’Apollon are confusingly from the right). The exceptions in Sani seem to have been printed in reverse where they are not misattributions.

Her work in pastel seems never to be signed and is seldom dated, but a huge number of copies, pastiches and outright forgeries have been produced. The dating of her work on stylistic grounds alone is hazardous, as there seems to have been limited technical development after the first few known works. Some of the earliest pastels resemble her tempera miniatures, with the luminous faces standing out from the surfaces; in the last phase (examples are the allegorical series executed for August III. in 1744–47), distinctive poses develop familiar baroque torsions into rococo compositions with freely floating bodies, heads

and eyes. Many of her subjects are no longer identified; most wear costumes that are somewhat timeless, and a great many of the works, especially those of young women, are more genre pieces than individuated portraits. While her female portraits are invariably chic, they are seldom erotic in the post-Boucher manner that is found in some copies or pastiches.

We have departed from our normal sequencing conventions by including separate categories for allegorical subjects; named subjects, even in mythological guise, appear first; mythological categories follow (some allocations are inevitably arbitrary, for example in distinguishing a Spring from a Flora from a portrait of a girl with flowers in her hair); unidentified or unclassifiable items follow, with the usual subdivisions. There have been numerous studies of Rosalba's work, among them the eulogy read by Girolamo Zanetti (1713–1781) to the academy in Padua the day before he died. Dott.ssa Sani's monograph, now in its second edition (2007), is the definitive work, although it omits rejected items and provenance and other details; it also makes no attempt to list the works known only from the artist's diaries or correspondence or from old inventories (the entries from the diaries, omitted from Jeffares 2006, are however set out below). These sources contain many riches, even if the references that appear below inevitably include duplications, omissions and misattributions.

Monographic exhibitions

- Carriera 1975: *Rosalba Carriera 1675–1757. Ausstellung zum 300. Geburtstag der venezianischen Malerin*, Staatlichen Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, 1.X.–16.XI.1975. Cat. Heide Grape-Albers
- Carriera 1994: *Rosalba Carriera pittrice veneziana in Europa (Venezia 1675–1757)*. Ritratti, Treviso, Museum Civico Luigi Bailo, 1994
- Carriera 1997: *Omaggio a Rosalba Carriera. Miniature e pastelli nella collezione private*, Venice, 1997. Cat. Annalise Scarpa
- Carriera 2007a: *La donna nell'arte. Intorno a Rosalba Carriera, pastelli dalle collezioni di Palazzo Reale*, Venice, Palazzo Ducale, 8.III.–9.IV.2007
- Carriera 2007b: *Rosalba Carriera "prima pittrice de l'Europa"*, Venice, Galleria di Palazzo Cini, 1.IX.–28.X.2007. Cat. Giuseppe Pavanello

Bibliography

- Barcham 2009; Basso 2009; Benedetti 2009; Bénézit; Bionda 1993; Evangeline Wilbour Blashfield, *Portraits and backgrounds*, 1971; Briganti 1990; Bruijn Kops 1988; Burns 1992; Burns 2002; Burns 2007; Carriera, *Diari*, in Sani 1985; Carriera, *Maniere diverse per formare i colori*, ed. Manlio Brusatin & Vittorio Mandelli, Milan, 2005; Crookshank & Glin 2002; Del Negro 1999; Dukelskaya & Moore 2002, p. 308ff; Falconi 2009; Florence 1911; Gabburri, *Vite di pittori*, p. 2220-IV-C242V; Gatto 1971; Giacometti 1997; Greer 2001; Henning 2009; Henning & Marx 2007; Hoerschelmann 1908; Hofstetter 2008; Ingamells 1997; Micaela Jary, *Die Pastellkönigin. Historischer Roman*, Munich, 2005; Anna Jameson, *Visits and sketches*, 1834, I, p. 217f n.r.; Jeffares 2004; Johns 2003; Kantor-Gukovskaya 2009; Lehninger 1782; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Llewellyn 2009; London 1994; Los Angeles 1976b, pp. 38ff; Malamani 1910; Malamani 1928; Mantz 1854; Mariacher 1969; Mariette 1851–60; Marinelli 2009; Martini 1964; Marx 1992; Mazza Boccazzi 2009; Mehler 2006; Mehler 2009; Monnier 1983; Morgan 2004; Nagler 1835–52; Nepi Scirè 2009; Pallucchini 1960, pp. 44–48; Pappé & al. 2008; Pasquin

1796c; Pavanello 2009; Filippo Pedrocchi, in Turin 2003; Perissa Torrini 2009; Posse 1920; Posse 1929; Redford 1996; Rosenberg 2002–03; Russell 1989; Sanchez 2004; Sani 1985; Sani 1987; Sani 1988; Sani 1991; Bernardina Sani, in Grove 1996; Sani 2007; Sani 2009; Saur; Sensier 1865; Strickland 1913; Tarabra 2008, pp. 240f; Tormen 2009; Torti 1977; Toutain 2003; van Veen 1984; Venice 1969; Walther 1972–75; Weiner 1916; West 1999; Whistler 2009; Zampetti 1971; Zanetti 1781; Zava Boccazzi 1981a; Zava Boccazzi 1981b; Zava Boccazzi 1996; Zava Boccazzi 2009

Salon critiques

Anon., sans titre, *Mercure de France*, IX.1745, pp. 135: Dans le portrait d'une jeune personne qui rit, M. de la Tour a atteint les graces de *la Rosa Alba*. dans tous les autres il a la force du Titien, ce qui est prodigieux pour le Pastel.

Abbé Jean-Bernard LE BLANC, *Lettre sur l'exposition des ouvrages de peinture et sculpture de l'année 1747...* à R. D. R., s.l., 1747: Beaucoup de belles choses de la *Rosa Alba* ont déjà péri.

LIEUDÉ DE SEPMANVILLE, *Réflexions nouvelles d'un amateur des Beaux-Arts adressées à M. de *** pour servir de supplément à la Lettre sur l'Exposition des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, etc...., de l'année 1747*, s.l., 1747:

Vous prétendez donc, Madame, que M. Delatour ne gagneroit pas à la comparaison si on plaçoit ses portraits à côté de ceux de l'illustre M. Vivien et de M^{lle} Roza-Alba. Je vois bien que vous avez consulté des Maîtres de l'Art quand vous vous écrivez dans votre lettre en parlant des Portraits de M. Vivien: "Avec quelle facilité ils sont peints, et quelle vigueur dans sa couleur? quelle légèreté dans sa façon de traiter les cheveux que l'air semble agiter. La touche est telle qu'on la demande dans un habile Peintre. Il sçavoit, dites-vous, ajouter l'art à la nature et n'étoit *servile* qu'autant qu'il le croyoit nécessaire..." Pour achever son éloge, je vous observerai que nous avons de lui à Versailles un Portrait de l'Empereur qui est peint avec toute la force et la noblesse qu'on puisse demander dans un pareil Tableau.... Quel contraste de beautés vous me faites remarquer dans la D^{lle} Rosa-Alba! Quelle grâce, quelle légèreté dans ses pastels! La touche en est admirable, moëlleuse et sans dureté; nous avons en France dans plusieurs de ces *Cabinets merveilleux* des ouvrages de cette fille incomparable.

Anon. [Charles LÉOFFROY DE SAINT-YVES], *Observations sur les arts et sur quelques morceaux de Peinture et de sculpture, exposés au Louvre en 1748, où il est parlé de l'utilité des embellissements dans les villes*, Leyde, 1748:

Le pastel peut se fixer, on en convient: M. de La Tour en a le secret, et on le croit. Mais avec cet avantage sur la Rosalba, dont les ouvrages dépérissent tous les jours, les morceaux de M. de La Tour se seront jamais remis sur toile, ni nétoyés, et quelques précautions que l'on prenne pour empêcher la poussière de pénétrer, elle s'insinue et, s'attachant sur la superficie du pastel, elle fait corps avec lui: ce qui est sans remède. Il a de plus les vers à craindre, qui se nichent dans le papier, le rongent. L'idée que les portraits de M. de La Tour n'auront pas la durée qu'ils méritent d'avoir est affligeante pour ceux qui s'intéressent à la gloire des Artistes célèbres.

Louis PETIT DE BACHAUMONT, *Liste des meilleurs peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs et architectes des Académies royales de peinture, sculpture et architecture suivant leur rang à l'Académie*, 1750, p. 33:

Je ne parle point de plusieurs bons artistes en tout genre qui sont de l'Académie, parce qu'ils sont actuellement dans le pays étranger, entre autres M. Smit [Schmidt], excellent graveur pour les portraits, il est à Berlin; M. Lungberg [Lundberg], excellent peintre de portrait au pastel, il est à Stockholm; il peint dans le goût de la Fameuse Rosa Alba Carrera {Rosalba Carrera}, Vénitienne, qui est aussi de l'Académie de Paris, ainsi que Pelegrini, son beau-frère, excellent peintre d'histoire dans le goût italien moderne; il est à Venise avec elle.