

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

CHINNERY, George

London 1774 – Macau 1852

Confusion concerning Chinnery's dates (Tipperary 1748 – Macao 1847 according to Bénézit) is compounded by the fact that George's father and grandfather were both named William. It was William, Jr (*q.v.*) who exhibited as a miniature painter from Gough Square at the Free Society in 1764, sending a crayon portrait in 1766. George, born in Gough Square in 1774, entered the Royal Academy Schools in 1792 and was represented at the Royal Academy until 1846. He moved to Dublin in 1795 and became a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1798. He married his landlord's daughter, Marianne Vigne, in 1799. His pastels date to this period.

In the early nineteenth century, having returned initially to London, he travelled to Calcutta, but debts of over £40,000 in 1825 forced him to flee to China. George's elder brother William Basset Chinnery (1766–1827) was chief clerk in the Treasury and a noted patron of the arts before being convicted of fraud in 1812. His wife, née Margaret Treslian (1764–1840), was a noted salonnière, receiving royal dukes as well as her friends Viotti and Mme Vigée Le Brun.

Chinnery worked in a variety of media, being chiefly known for his oil paintings. The group of early portraits, mainly of ladies, executed in gouache, wash and pastel with extraordinary freedom are completely different from his later work, and despite some of them being signed, their attribution has been disputed. Sée (1919c) gives a helpful technical description: Chinnery laid down a general outline in watercolour before applying his gouache impasto, made from Chinese white, white lead and crushed pastel sticks; chemical analysis reveals the presence of both alcohol and turpentine, used for softening, but explaining also the yellow discolouration and the cracking normally only found in oil painting. Their vigorous compositions have dark backgrounds, often red or green, while the subjects, often dressed in light colours, have a strong light on the face. Vermilion touches to lips, ears and fingers were a hallmark. A critic of the 1801 Dublin exhibition noted that Chinnery's work "possesses a peculiarity which would enable one anywhere to distinguish his work. They have a strong expression of original genius, bold, but always either palpably unfinished or with as little finish as possible."

To add to the confusion with his father, it seems that George inscribed some of his works in Gurney shorthand, a system which his father cannot have known as it was invented by a rival after his death in 1803.

Mnographic exhibitions

Chinnery 2011: *The flamboyant Mr Chinnery: an English artist in India and China*, Asia House, London, 4.XI.2011–21.I.2012

Bibliography

Archer 1979; Baetjer 2009; Bénézit; Berry-Hill 1963; Brieger 1921; Conner 1993; Dublin 1969; Foster 1931, p. 14; Grove 1996; Hofstetter

2008; Lambourne & Hamilton 1980; New Haven 1979; Ormond 1968; Ormond 1970; Ormond 1974; Saur; Sée 1911; Sée 1919c; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

v. Genealogy, Chinnery

Pastels

George Gordon, Lord BYRON (1788–1824), poet, as a child, pstl (London, Sotheby's, 27–28.VI.1922, £1)

Colonel Valentine BLACKER [(1778–1826), lieutenant colonel in the East India Company, surveyor-general of India], crayons, [p.1800]. Lit.: Foster 1931, p. 14 n.r.

Lady GRANT (HSBC Bank)

Miss JACKSON. Lit.: *Connoisseur*, c.1940, repr. Φ



Miss O'DWYER, in a green and white dress with an orange sash, pstl, 73.5x61.5 (London, Christie's, 19.VI.1979, Lot 78 repr., £480) Φ



Miss O'NEILL. Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr. Φ



Mrs O'REILLY, pstl, gch., 76x63.5 (Martyn Gregory 1987). Exh.: London 1987b, no. 15 repr. Lit.: Sée 1919c, p. 133 repr. Φ



Photo courtesy Martyn Gregory Gallery, London

Man, pstl, 1798. Lit.: Ormond 1970, pl. 5; Archer 1979, p. 358 n.r.

Lady, gch. (Épinal, musée départemental d'Art ancien et contemporain)

An Irish lady, gch., lavis, pstl, 54x45, s ← (Mrs O'Neill 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 9. Lit.: Sée 1911, repr. p. 295 Φ



Lady, gch., lavis, pstl, 80x63, s → (Mr O'Connor 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 10. Lit.: Sée 1911, p. 303; Brieger 1921, repr. Φ



Fillette au chien, pstl (Paris, 8.XI.1928, H3450)

Lady, gch., pstl, 53x41, c.1793 (O. Moreau-Neret 1963). Lit.: Berry-Hill 1963, pl. 5