

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

GAGNERAUX, Bénigne, l'aîné

Dijon 1756 – Florence 1795

Bénigne or Benigne Gagneraux or Gagnereaux; one of the most important of Devosge's pupils at the École de dessin de Dijon; exhibited pastels as well as mythological, religious and genre paintings from 1771 to 1775. He travelled to Rome first at his own expense, returning to Dijon in 1774. In 1776 he won the prix de Rome, newly instituted by the États de Bourgogne, which financed his return to the city for four years. He remained in Rome after the expiry of his scholarship, copying Barocci and Raphael and supporting himself with drawings from the antique for Piranesi. In 1784 he met Gustav III of Sweden, and thereafter spent most of his time on commissions for him, for the Pope and for the Palais des États de Bourgogne in Dijon. Despite having no connection with the official French Académie de Rome of Vien, he was arguably the most fashionable French painter in the city, and his friendship with Sergel, Flaxman and others gave his art a more international flavour.

Strong anti-French feeling in 1793 forced him to leave Rome, and he decided to take up the position of history painter to Gustav III. En route to Stockholm he stayed in Florence, where he was appointed drawing professor at the Accademia in Florence by Ferdinando III. At the same time he joined the household of the Swiss connoisseur Jean de Sellon, whose two daughters he taught for over a year (one of them later married the duc de Clermont-Tonnerre, and was an amateur pastellist, *q.v.*). He is said to have committed suicide by jumping out of a window in Florence.

The only recorded pastels are the lost early works from 1772–73. His own *Liste des tableaux faits à Rome et des dessins principaux*, reprinted in Baudot 1845–46, includes no pastel. Gagneraux was only an occasional portraitist, but his self-portrait in the Uffizi has something of the sweetness of a pastel, as Pierre Rosenberg has observed. Bénigne's younger brother Baptiste (*q.v.*) may also have been a pastellist.

Monographic exhibitions

Gagneraux 1983: *Bénigne Gagneraux (1756-1795): un pittore francese nella Roma di Pio VI*, Rome, Galleria Borghese, .IV.–.VI.1983

Bibliography

Henri Baudot, "Éloge historique de Bénigne Gagnereaux", *Mémoires de l'Académie des sciences, arts et belles-lettres de Dijon*, XLVII, 1845–46, pp. 173ff; Bénézit; Bouvier d'Yvoire 1994; Chabeuf 1914a; Dussieux 1856; Florence 1977, p. 57; Grove 1996; Philadelphia 2000a, pp. 365ff; Sanchez 2002; Sanchez 2004; Warsaw 2009

Pastels

Deux paysages, pstl, Salon de Dijon 1772

Quatre têtes, en médaillon, pstl, Salon de Dijon 1773

Les trois Grâces, pstl, Salon de Dijon de 1773