

Online edition

GÜNTHER, Johann Georg Christoph

Ernsbach 1729 – Nürnberg 6.IX.1777

Von Meusel has Johann Georg Christoph von Günther; only “Georg Christoph Günther, Pastellmahler und Kupferstecher” appears on the title page of his book, a *Praktische Anweisung zur Pastellmalerey* in Nürnberg (1762). A further (posthumous) edition in 1792, perhaps reissued by his homonymous nephew, Georg Christoph II. Günther (1771–1851, also an engraver, painter and colourman, recorded at Schildgasse 10, Nürnberg in 1798). The nephew was the son of his brother Johann Georg Andreas Günther, born 1736, whom von Murr credits as developing pastel and whose year and possibly place (Öhringen, found also in von Meusel) of birth have long been erroneously given to the pastellist.

A group of pastels by Günther survive in the Schloß Weikersheim, published by Valentin 2019. The inscription on the back of the self-portrait (“Joh. Georg Christoph Günther, aus Ernsbach, Mahler u. Kupferstecher in Nürnberg”), dedicated to his patron Carl Ludwig Graf von Hohenlohe-Weikersheim, provides an earlier date of birth than previously reported, and records his training as an engraver in Nürnberg. He may also have learned to use pastel there, perhaps under the painter Georg Martin Preisler (1700–1754), head of the school from 1737 (Preisler’s own self-portrait also shows him holding a porte-crayon); but it is also possible that he learned about the technique through another Nürnberg engraver, Johann Christoph von Reinsperger, who engraved a number of pictures by Liotard. A 1747 letter from Günther to the theologian Johann Philipp Fresenius also mentions his training as a draughtsman and mapmaker. Many of his associates (e.g. Lowitz, Mayer *qq.v.*) were associated with the Nürnberg mapmaking workshop established by Johann Homann and then run by Johann Michael Franz.

The Weikersheim pastels all display an unusual finish, with a glossy appearance characteristic of the incorporation of wax into the material; this has permitted the minute hatching (perhaps borrowed from mapmaking) visible on the passementerie. They were presumably made with a precursor to the method described below.

Accounts in Weikersheim record payments for four further pastels in 1753 to “Kunstmaller Günter und seyne Jungfer Schwester”, suggesting that his sister Susanna Margaretha Günther (*q.v.*) may also have worked in pastel (Valentin 2019 and private communication).

A practical manual for amateur and professional artists, *Praktische Anweisung zur Pastellmalerey* (also dedicated to Carl Ludwig) was evidently written by a practitioner (indeed the title page proclaims him as “Pastellmahler und Kupferstecher”). Among the innovations in the treatise are two pigment charts printed in colour with numbered indicators; much of the rest of the work prescribes which colour to use for which part of the drawing using these numbers. The author describes the development of a new green pigment, with advice from his

pupil, the amateur (and distinguished mathematician) Professor Lowitz (*q.v.*) whom he met during a six-year residence in Göttingen. Likewise he gives a description of the wax crayons invented by another Göttingen mathematician, Tobias Mayer (*q.v.*). A description of these is found both in his treatise and in a handwritten letter to Caroline Luise von Baden of 13.VII.1765, from Kirchberg an der Jagst, half-way between Karlsruhe and Nürnberg, in which he refers to the work of the comte de Caylus and mentions the arduous work required to produce a portrait of [Friedrich III.] Markgraf von Brandenburg-Culmbach which he made after an oil painting by Johann Georg Reis (presumably that in Schloß Birken, Bayreuth). The description fails to explain how, using nothing but wax and pigment, he produced a picture on wood that could be washed with water and polished again as required.

Lichtenberg, writing about Mayer’s colour theories (which may have been the inspiration for Günther’s numbering), refers to “Veruntamen pro perdita censenda non erit, quum filius inuentoris tanto patre dignus, et praetor eum *Cl. Gunther* Pictor Norimbergensis, quo *Mayerus* familiariter vsus est, sint superstites, quibus huius artis praecipua saltem momenta nota esse scimus”. A note adds: “vid. illius libellus, quem de arte siccis pigmentis pingendi A. 1762 edidit, p. 130”. However the invention Lichtenberg then cites involves a rather bizarre attempt to reproduce Guido Reni’s *Erigone* using a mosaic of slices from prisms filled with coloured wax, offering only a little more information than Günther vouchsafed to Caroline Luise.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Manfred H. Grieb, ed., *Nürnberger Künstlerlexikon*, Munich, 2007, p. 526; Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, “Opera inedita Tobiae Mayeri”, 1775, in *Observationes: die lateinischen Schriften*, ed. Nikolaus Hasse, Göttingen, 1997, p. 118; Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, *Beschreibung der vornehmsten Merkwürdigkeiten in der Reichsstadt Nürnberg*, 1801, p. 631; R&L; Simonini 2025; Sulzer 1798, III, p. 719; Valentin 2019; **TREATISES**; Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe FA 5 A Corr 96, 14

Pastels

J.3674.101 SELBSTPORTRÄT, pstl, 55.8x42.8 (Schloß Weikersheim, Staatl. Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, inv. W 11-131). Lit.: Valentin 2019, fig. 2 φ



J.3674.121 CARL LUDWIG Graf von Hohenlohe und Gleichen (1674–1756); & pendant: J.3674.131 Gräfin, née Elisabeth Friederike Sophie Prinzessin von Oettingen-Oettingen (1691–1758), pstl, 62x48.5, 1753 (Schloß Weikersheim, Staatl. Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, inv. W 11-141/142). Lit.: Valentin 2019, fig. 4/5 φ



J.3674.141 SOPHIE LOUISE von Oettingen-Oettingen, née von Hessen-Darmstadt (1670–1758), pstl, 42.8x31.5 (Schloß Weikersheim, Staatl. Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, inv. W 11-107). Lit.: Valentin 2019, fig. 6 φ



J.3674.151 Eine Prinzessin, pstl/ppr, 37.6x26.8
(Schloß Weikersheim, Staatl. Schlösser und
Gärten Baden-Württemberg, inv. W 11-122).
Lit.: Valentin 2019, p. 252, n.27 n.r.