Neil Jeffares, *Maurice-Quentin de La Tour*  

*Dictionary of pastellists before 1800* – online edition

**LA TOUR, Maurice-Quentin de**

Saint-Quentin 5.IX.1704–16/17.II.1788

NB: The principal La Tour fascicles in the online Dictionary are the following pdfs:  
- Essay  
- Part I: Autoportraits  
- Part II: Named sitters A-D  
- Part III: Named sitters E–J  
- Part IV: Named sitters M–Q  
- Part V: Named sitters R–Z  
- Part VI: Unidentified sitters  
- Chronological table of documents relating to La Tour  
- Contemporary biographies of La Tour  
- Tropes in La Tour biographies  
- Besnard & Wildenstein concordance  
- Genealogy

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1 The phrase is Charles Palissot de Montenoy’s, in a gloss on a letter of Voltaire of 11.IX.1765 in his 1792 edition.

2 Essentially written by Georges Wildenstein with a short introduction by Albert Besnard, whose name nevertheless appears on the title page as co-author.

**MAURICE-QUENTIN DE LA TOUR** was the most important pastellist of the eighteenth century. “Célèbre par son talent & par son esprit” – known as an eccentric and wit as well as a genius (stories abound concerning his exorbitant fees, his impatience if kept waiting and his repartee with Louis XV), La Tour had a keen sense of the importance of the great artist in society which would shock no one today. But in terms of sheer technical bravura, it is difficult to envisage anything to match the enormous pastels of the président de Rieux or of Mme de Pompadour. The former, exhibited in the Salon of 1741, stunned the critics with its achievement: this was, after all, “just” a pastel, but the miracle planted La Tour firmly centre stage, where he was to remain for thirty years, with a stream of commissions from the royal family, the old nobility, the noblesse de robe and the nouveaux riches – the most powerful, the wealthiest, the most famous and the best informed sitters of ancien régime France – not to mention the artists and intellectuals he numbered among his friends, and among whom he was perhaps at his best as a portraitist.

This virtuosity was not achieved without struggle: La Tour was a precursor of the tortured artist of the nineteenth century, agonising over so-called préparations in which he attempted to capture the soul of his sitter, and continuing to work for decades on portraits that did not satisfy him, often to their detriment. Unsurprisingly a good number of his works are self-portraits where the sitter’s patience was not an issue. That quest for perfection may have developed into the madness which took over the last years of his life.

His œuvre consists almost entirely of pastel portraits, both final works and associated préparations in chalk, occasionally with some pastel; he did not work in oil or miniature, draw other than in chalk, nor make prints. He exhibited more pastels (and more portraits) at the official Paris salons than any other artist during the eighteenth century – although, even allowing for losses, he was far less productive than some other pastellists. He spent virtually his entire career in Paris, unlike rivals such as Perronneau and Liotard who travelled widely to secure business and establish their reputation.

La Tour’s fame throughout Europe in his lifetime was enormous. His importance has since inevitably made him the subject of much scholarly attention. This has yielded limited information about some of the most interesting questions. The apparent wealth of salon criticism turns out to be largely repetitive, although this has not prevented it (and some of the better known portraits) being overanalysed from fashionable academic slants. The biographical details of a handful of more or less contemporary sources have been endlessly repeated and embellished, and inferences from casual observations developed beyond sense.

The basic biographical facts were largely consolidated in Georges Wildenstein’s 1928 monograph (“B&W”),
together with a body of work which, through the range of its subjects and the skill of its execution, dominates the field. By no means all of the 990 entries in Wildenstein’s catalogue are by La Tour – but there are a great many omissions and confusions about the status of repetitions. The extent of the book’s errors and omissions may be gleaned from our B&W Concordance, which includes numerous pastels reattributed here to artists from Vivien to Vigée Le Brun.3

B&W has not yet been superseded in scope, despite the more accurate and far better illustrated works by Christine Debrie and Xavier Salmon and the discoveries presented in the 2004 exhibition at Versailles.4 The challenge of securely establishing the full œuvre has nevertheless largely been ignored, with scholars, daunted by the virtual impossibility of establishing a reliable chronology,5 showing little interest in this task, concentrating instead on analysing a small number of well-known works. While scientific investigations offer some promise of deeper insight into La Tour’s technique, the main tool for establishing authenticity remains connoisseurship, and the primary resource the body of information we gather in the catalogue and in our expanded and updated version of B&W’s chronological table of DOCUMENTS (documents that can be found there are referenced below by date alone to avoid a plethora of footnotes). They constitute the only accurate biography of the sitter.

Here is a guide to the various documents relating to La Tour on this site. Much of the most important information is contained in the essays on specific works, summaries of which are embedded in the work catalogue (divided into six fascicles), and is not duplicated in this essay.

### I. BIOGRAPHICAL THEMES

#### The name

A somewhat pointless debate (often based on category confusions between printing conventions, particles indicating nobility and post-Napoleonic legal controls on names) over the proper spelling of his name (de La Tour, de Latour, Delatour etc.) has already taken too much space (see Jeffares 2017x); the “Delatour” which appears in some contemporary documents may be more strictly accurate, but “de La Tour” is accepted so widely that the solecism, if such it be, is followed here. An entirely typical document is the 20.IX.1770 contract to purchase the house at Auteuil:  

There is little doubt that the artist’s preference was for this form, invariably with a capital T and usually with some small degree of space around the la.6 However, the manuscript “DelaTour” than there is to print Delavalette (private expert report, found again in the codicil to his will, on the Académic register, 27.VI.1778, and on a great many more documents. There is little doubt that the artist’s preference was for this form, invariably with a capital T and usually with some small degree of space around the la.6 La Tour’s brother Charles also signed De_La_Tour in a document of 12.IX.1761 which provides a representative example of the artist’s signature (the pastellist’s below his brother’s):

[Image of signature]

One should note that the flexibilities of handwriting allowed subtleties such as the discernible gaps between the nevertheless cursive De_la_tour seen in a letter to Belle de Zuylen, or the distinct capital in DelaTour on his 29.XI.1774 expert report, found again in the codicil to his will, on the Académic register, 27.VI.1778, and on a great many more documents. There is little doubt that the artist’s preference was for this form, invariably with a capital T and usually with some small degree of space around the la.6 La Tour’s brother Charles also signed De_La_Tour in a document of 12.IX.1761 which provides a representative example of the artist’s signature (the pastellist’s below his brother’s):

A similar progression may be seen in his father’s increasingly elaborate penmanship: by the time (28.III.1726) of the baptism of the pastellist’s half-brother Jean-François, his father was clearly separating the particle from “La Tour”, as did his own father Jean de La Tour, a maître maçon. Jean’s signature is found in numerous parish registers, usually accompanied by his monogram (which may also be his mason’s mark), JLT in a circle.

As to whether a hyphen should appear between the artist’s forenames, that too is a matter of modern printing convention rather than historical fact ascertainable from documents. In this work we hyphenate all French forenames to distinguish them from family names, irrespective of whether they are compound names: this is in line with

#### Notes

1. The BnF and Getty ULAN.

2. The only book published in English, by Adrian Bury, is of very limited value (it even reproduces a work by a different artist on the cover).

3. As Debrie 1991, p. 20, rightly observed, “il est hasardeux, voire impossible, de décéler dans la production de La Tour une œuvre de ses débuts d’une œuvre plus tardive.”


5. Debat 1991 and Debrie & Salmon 2000, as well as the major retrospective La Tour 2004; he is indexed under L. in all standard art historical dictionaries, the BnF and Getty ULAN.

6. Conard 1735. The envelope but not the letter is in the New York Public Library; see DOCUMENTS, 1735.

7. One exception may be noted: the label on the verso of Coventry:46.1565, which I now believe to be autograph, idiosyncratically has “Maurice Q Delatour”.

8. As Debrie 1991, p. 20, righty observed, “il est hasardeux, voire impossible, de décéler dans la production de La Tour une œuvre de ses débuts d’une œuvre plus tardive.”
official recommendations. A sensible alternative is to hyphenate no forenames (this is what appears in most period manuscripts – although not in printed genealogical sources). But the increasingly widespread habit of hyphenating only compound forenames (such as Jean-Baptiste) is deployed: it is virtually impossible to apply the rule consistently, as there is no means of ascertaining today which names were regarded as compounding at the time. Rules limiting compounding forms to two names only are also an anachronistic imposition on people living before the Revolution.

Early biographies and sources

Before looking at the artist’s life, it is necessary to review the reliability of previous narratives. The early accounts of La Tour are set out in contempory biographies. Mariette’s sensible account, written in 1772, is the most useful, but is not without error. Duplaquet’s eulogy is overblown and second-hand – written posthumously at the invitation of the administration of the École gratuite de dessin (which the artist had founded in his native Saint-Quentin). He was not the bureau’s first choice of biographer, and it is most likely that he set about his task by talking to those who had known the artist only in his last years, so much of the information may have derived from La Tour’s own stories. While Bucelly d’Estrees adds useful detail, his account is too late to be reliable (he was just 10 years old when La Tour died11), and is not independent of Duplaquet. The volume produced by Dréolle de Nodion (1856) was little more than a scrapbook of second- or third-hand material gathered by a professional journalist during his time at Saint-Quentin.

In a separate article (Jeffares 2014m) I have adopted a phylogenetic approach to analysing the propagation of tropes and errors through these sources, a fundamental step in winding back to the solid facts, if disappointingly thinner than recent monographs might lead us to expect. Even trivial errors are illuminating in this textual approach. For example, La Tour was born in 1704, but Duplaquet’s periphrasis puts this (correctly) as “5e année du siècle”; this is picked up erroneously as 1705 by the journalists who follow. Duplaquet, expanding the limited material available to him, also embellishes: in Diderot’s version of the story of La Tour’s confrontation with Perronneau, the La Tour self-portrait is that with the chapeau clabaud, but Duplaquet substitutes the autoportrait à l’index, so as to add ridicule to Perronneau’s inadequacy. Mariette tells us of La Tour’s intellectual pretensions, and how he studied Bayle’s dictionary before presenting half-digested ideas in intellectual gatherings. Duplaquet has him as “le Peintre mathématicien et bon géomètre”. “Vastes connaissances en littérature, il était bon mathematicien et bon géomètre.”

The conclusion from a detailed examination of these tropes is that all the biographers after Duplaquet relied heavily on him, or on the anonymous review which appeared in the Année littéraire in 1789 on which The Times obituary was closely based, although it does seem that the author of the piece in the Almanach littéraire also went back to Duplaquet directly. None of these three interesting documents seems to have been known to B&W, and while the third was referred to by Méjanes 2002, he quoted only from the shortened version that appeared in Michaud’s Biographie universelle in 1824, the signatory to which was too young to have been the author of the original article.

In contrast there is no linguistic evidence of direct influence from Mariette’s text, which was not published until the 1850s and was probably not seen directly by Duplaquet – although naturally many of the anecdotes, which were probably freely in circulation, reappear in some form.

The stories illustrating La Tour’s awkward character and eccentricities are too numerous and too unreliable to be repeated here. The legends can largely be found in these early biographies; they usually reflect the self-confidence of the autodidact extending himself beyond the sphere of his genius (stories abound of his intellectual pretensions and ridicule), or the genuine concern for talented artists to be recognised (and recompensed) in a society whose hierarchies were based on birth and wealth.

When La Tour told Mme de Graffingy that he had burned his famous pastel of Mme de Pompadour (8.VII.1748), she concluded that he was mad. Mme de Genlis’s story (undated, post 175612) of La Tour’s riddle about how he got from Paris to Passy without walking, swimming or using any horse or carriage (the solution: he jumped into the Seine and held onto a boat that dragged him there) merely shows him to have been tiresome.

Perhaps the most puzzling story comes from three of the earliest, and (one would imagine) most reliable, sources: Diderot’s comments from his Salon de 1763; Mariette’s biography, written in 1772; and Marie Fel’s letter to the chevalier de La Tour, written at the time of the artist’s death. Diderot and Mariette both mention the reported conversation between La Tour and Louis XV in which the artist criticised the state of France’s navy “nous n’avons point de marine etc.”: it is impossible to imagine that this occurred twice, nor that it was not related to a specific naval engagement. Diderot reports this exchange as occurring “en 1756” (he is quite specific, and is writing only a few years later), and while “façant le portrait du roi” (the known examples are between 1745 and 1748). Mariette, however, relates the incident as occurring while La Tour was working on the portrait of Mme de Pompadour when the king was present: “C’était dans le temps que les Anglais aient détruit notre marine et que nous n’avions aucun navire à leur opposer.” Since the portrait of Mme de Pompadour was exhibited in 1755, this cannot refer to naval engagements during the Seven Years’ War, but almost certainly situates the incident to the War of the Austrian Succession, probably to the second of the two engagements at Cape Finisterre in

9 See for example the Lexique des règles typographiques en usage à l’Imprimerie nationale (3e éd., p. 151) or the BnF Catalogue général.
10 Frère Barron, religieux jacobin at Saint-Quentin, who was asked first, declined, the minutes of the École gratuite of 6.III.1788 reporting that “il lui était impossible par rapport à sa station de prononcer loraison funèbre de M. de la Tour”: it is unclear if this implied some reservation about the artist’s piety.
11 Although Debrie 1991, p. 15 (following Tourneux 1904a, p. 6) states that in 1834 he was one of the few surviving people who had heard Duplaquet’s oration, she and Tourneux have probably confused the biographer Albert-Quentin-Marie-Catherine, chevalier Philiby de Bucelly d’Estrees (1777–1850) with his father, Albert (1745–1809), an administrateur at the Ecole de dessin from 1783 (c. DOCUMENTS, c.1806).
12 This and other stories will be found in the file of contemporary biographies.
1747. In Marie Fel’s version, based on a story La Tour himself told her and which omits any reference to the navy (but which may nevertheless derive from that discussion), La Tour was painting Mme de Pompadour when the king arrived, “fort triste”, following the battle of Rossbach. Since that battle took place in 1757, two years after the portrait was finished, the story cannot be trusted. But it suggests that La Tour himself was the source of these three (and no doubt many other) anecdotes, and that he retold them repeatedly, embellishing and updating them – if not completely inventing them – with great freedom. If so, legends such as the visits to Cambrai and England which may have had the same source are probably equally unreliable.

Other stories no doubt have some element of truth. We can readily believe that La Tour was proud of being a Picard without having to rely on the abbé Duplaquet, as the artist signed a letter (of 24.IV.1774) “avec la franchise et la cordialité d’un Picard.” So it is all the easier to accept that he may well have disapproved of the submissive pose of Brittany in Lemoyne’s allegorical sculpture of the king at Rennes as recounted by the abbé Soulavie much later, reporting that La Tour told him that “[Lemoyne] en [de la figure de Bretagne] fit une devergondée qui s’acroupit & se pâme devant le Bien-Aimé.” La Tour, Soulavie explained, “était un artiste célèbre par son génie créateur de l’art du pastel, & par son amour de la liberté.”

Of more value is the short account given by Marie Fel, attempting to remember the stories she had given to the connoisseur and author Antoine-Nicolas Dezallier d’Argenville (1723–1796). He was the son of the author of L’Abéribi de la vie des plus fameux peintres, 1745–52; Antoine-Nicolas himself published a Vie des fameux architectes et sculpteurs in 1787, and seems to have been planning a life of La Tour for the purposes of which he was gathering stories from those who knew him, according to Marie Fel. (Mariette, who was his second cousin, may well have heard these stories.) No sign of d’Argenville’s life of La Tour remains, although it is not impossible that he contributed the review of Duplaquet to the Année littéraire. It seems likely that this and the other derivatives were written by one of the administrators of the École gratuite who had asked Duplaquet’s consent to reuse his material, as he reveals in his preface. This saint-quentinois bias naturally focuses on La Tour’s local philanthropy and affection for his native town, to which he only returned when forced by senility. It may well have disapproved of the submissive pose of Brittany in Lemoyne’s allegorical sculpture of the king at Rennes as recounted by the abbé Soulavie much later, reporting that La Tour told him that “[Lemoyne] en [de la figure de Bretagne] fit une devergondée qui s’acroupit & se pâme devant le Bien-Aimé.” La Tour, Soulavie explained, “était un artiste célèbre par son génie créateur de l’art du pastel, & par son amour de la liberté.”

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Family background

B&W’s chronological table (the basis of the greatly expanded collection of DOCUMENTS here) commenced with discoveries by Georges Grandin, conservateur du musée de Laon, of what appear to be La Tour ancestors in that town going back to 1596. However the genealogy presented in B&W contained numerous gaps and errors which have only recently been rectified. The entry for the marriage between François de La Tour and Reine Havart was only found in 2016, while the documents Grandin reports for François’s birth and parents’ marriage (for which he gives no parish) were only located in the Archives de l’Aisne (in the parish of Saint-Michel, Laon) in 2016. Components missing from B&W included the relationships between La Tour and a number of people whom he mentions in his wills. A schematic tree shows the most important relationships; while more detailed genealogies, with source citations other than the standard usuels, are given for the La Tour, Deschamps, Garbe, Havart, Joret, and Masse families.

Parish records for Saint-Michel, Laon indicate that the artist’s grandfather Jean de La Tour was literate and a respected member of the community in that he appears as witness or parrain on numerous deeds or parish records. His eldest son François (the artist’s father) was a musician; he is said to have served in the army (as trompette in the duc du Maine’s company in the élite régiment des carabiniers: but this relies on a single document from 1684 in which his forenames are given as Jean-François, and should probably be disregarded as the family name is so common) before becoming a “chantre”, or cantor, at Saint-Quentin. He is also recorded (according to a document which has not been located, and is also probably a confusion13) as ingénieur-geographe, presenting an aerial view of Saint-Quentin to the Église royale there in 1712 (this said to have inspired his son’s first effort in drawing in 1718).14 By 1719 François was a maître écrivain (his cousin Denis Deschamps, maître écrivain in Laon, fought a legal case over his exercise of this protected profession; Denis’s brother Pierre was also a maître écrivain, in Vailly-sur-Aisne).

Families could ascend and descend the social hierarchy: what is remarkable is that La Tour retained contact with so many of his relatives who remained in humble occupations. (That said, it is notable that the only member of his family he portrayed for certain was himself – repeatedly.)15 The fact that La Tour mentions a large number of his “cousins” in his wills (made in 1768 and 1784) suggests that the exact relationships are worth exploring, and a number of links have now been established from parish records (Jeffares 2016). The family circumstances were clearly artisanal, if educated, rather than haut bourgeois, on both sides. Of La Tour’s mother Reine little was known until Jeffares 2016 demonstrated that she came from Noyon, where her father Louis Havart was a tapissier and her mother Anne Joret (aunt of the Raphaeil Joret in La Tour’s will) came from a family of tailleurs. Reine was the niece of Charles Havart, a tapissier who settled in Saint-Quentin. Pierre Avart (as the name was spelt in Saint-Quentin, but not in Laon) was surely his son, but was a mere manouvrier, or labourer, his daughter Agathe married Claude-Nicholas Baudemont, a mulquinier or weaver (parents of the young girls who were mentioned in La Tour’s will, as also was Agathe’s aunt

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13 The authenticity of the portraits said to be of either of his brothers or the Dullière portraits that belonged to Flore Warluzé cannot be verified: r. infra.

14 The drawing is preserved in the musée Antoine-Lécuyer, but there is nothing in the elaborate annotation to identify the author as an ingénieur or geographe (see DOCUMENTS, 1712).

15 The authenticity of the portraits said to be of either of his brothers or the Dullière portraits that belonged to Flore Warluzé cannot be verified: r. infra.
understanding of fabrics and textiles was profound. His position as directeur des vivres en Italie by 1736, before the influence at court. His elder brother Charles had obtained a position in arranging funds for the prize La Tour established at the État militaire, nor is there a file on him in the edition of the État militaire, nor is there a file on him in the Service historique de la Défense, Vincennes. It is also clear that he was known to Joseph-Henry Costa de Beauregard’s uncle, Antoine-Victor-Augustin d’Auberjon, comte de Murinais (1731–1797), who was major in the gendarmes bourguignons: he was wounded in the thigh but continued in action. He would have been just 19 at the time, and presumably had enlisted in the ranks, perhaps with the pastellist’s influence (although the great series of military portraits were made in the following years, La Tour had already portrayed the duc d’Ayen, capitaine in the Gardes écossaises). At Minden (1.VIII.1759) his horse was shot from under him. At Freiburg (29.X.1762), heading a troop of 25 men, he held the enemy at bay, allowing his men to re-form. In 1766 he was made an officier de cavalerie and awarded the Saint-Louis. He retired in 1778 according to Charlet. It is of course his role after that, and in particular his involvement with the collection now in Saint-Quentin after his brother’s death, that gives him special significance here.

Les Duliège
Neither La Tour nor any of his siblings married, and there were no direct descendants. La Tour’s step-mother had a brother, Louis-Alexis Duliège, one of whose sons, abbé Adrien-Joseph-Constant, was a chaplain in Saint-Quentin and became executor to Jean-François, chevalier de La Tour, the artist’s half-brother. The abbé Duliège too had no children, but his brother, Pierre-Alexis-René Duliège, did. Desmazé’s mention of a group of pastels (which included portraits of Mme de Pompadour and cardinal de Tencin as well as family portraits, as well as a group of documents that Desmazine published as the Reliquaire de La Tour, 1874) that descended to “Mme Varenne” is inaccurate and only unravelled in Jeffares 2019g. Flore-Joséphine Warluzele, as her name appeared at her baptism in 1820, was not related to La Tour. She married, apparently for the second time, Henry-Léopold Sarrazin in 1872. At a previous marriage in 1866, she was described as the widow of Émilien Duliège, but the relationship may have been informal as it is not elsewhere documented. Émilien was the grandson of Pierre-Alexis-René Duliège, and thus the great-nephew of the abbé Duliège. A group of études de têtes (among them Louis XV and the dauphin) was apparently offered to the Louvre by his father, Pierre-Louis-Alexis Duliège, 24.VI.1825, but rejected. Dréole de Nodon 1856 noted that that Duliège had died several years before he was writing, that his widow retained a part of the “belle collection faite par son mari” (perhaps suggesting they had been purchased rather than inherited), the others having been sold. Those belonging to Mme Warluzele appear to have been acquired by Desmaze himself after 1873, and were given at his death to the Ville de Saint-Quentin for the musée, but most of the works seem to have disappeared immediately. There is thus no means of

Joseph [sic]; Pierre’s sister married Louis Deruys or Deruis (various misspellings arise from the numerous illegible occurrences in parish registers), whose father was a Latin teacher but who was himself first a manouvrier and then a jardinier, while his son Jean-Baptiste was another mulquinier.

On his father’s side there were several connections with the Garbe family of blacksmiths. La Tour’s paternal grandmother Marie was the daughter of François Garbe (1610–1678), maréchal ferrant in Laon; her brother Nicolas married Elisabeth, Jean de La Tour’s niece, while Marie’s sister Marguerite married Pierre Caton, a tapissier in Laon; their daughter Anne-Françoise married écrivain Denis Deschamps (mentioned above), father of La Tour’s subject chanoine Claude-Charles Deschamps; one of the canon’s sisters, Noëlle, married an Augustin Masse, marchand de tabac à Paris: their daughter Charlotte Masse married Jean-Robert Dorison (1731–1803), an employee at the bureau des huissiers de la Grande Chancellerie and the son of a tailor from Saint-Denis (Dorison’s sister, also Charlotte, married a Michel Deschamps, perruquier à Saint-Denis). La Tour attended that wedding, and Dorison would later play a role in arranging funds for the prize La Tour established at Amiens, and as late as 1794 would represent Jean-François de La Tour in Paris. Confusingly Augustin Masse seems not to have been related to the marchand orfèvre, Grégoire III Masse, whose daughter Charlotte Masse married Jean- Baptiste Deschamps (mentioned above), father of La Tour’s subject Michel Deschamps, perruquier à Saint-Denis. La Tour’s portrait of Mme de Pompadour and cardinal de Tencin as well as family portraits, as well as a group of documents that Desmazine published as the Reliquaire de La Tour, 1874) that descended to “Mme Varenne” is inaccurate and only unravelled in Jeffares 2019g. Flore-Joséphine Warluzele, as her name appeared at her baptism in 1820, was not related to La Tour. She married, apparently for the second time, Henry-Léopold Sarrazin in 1872. At a previous marriage in 1866, she was described as the widow of Émilien Duliège, but the relationship may have been informal as it is not elsewhere documented. Émilien was the grandson of Pierre-Alexis-René Duliège, and thus the great-nephew of the abbé Duliège. A group of études de têtes (among them Louis XV and the dauphin) was apparently offered to the Louvre by his father, Pierre-Louis-Alexis Duliège, 24.VI.1825, but rejected. Dréole de Nodon 1856 noted that that Duliège had died several years before he was writing, that his widow retained a part of the “belle collection faite par son mari” (perhaps suggesting they had been purchased rather than inherited), the others having been sold. Those belonging to Mme Warluzele appear to have been acquired by Desmaze himself after 1873, and were given at his death to the Ville de Saint-Quentin for the musée, but most of the works seem to have disappeared immediately. There is thus no means of

16 Augustin is not mentioned in the inventory of Grégoire Masse l’aîné (1648–1709).
17 The young comte de Costa seems not however to have been given the letter, and no visit is recorded in his letters home.
18 Curiously neither Mazas nor Colleville & Saint-Christo list any promotions in 1766, but both are notoriously incomplete.
establishing whether they were correctly attributed or identified.

Yet another group of four pastels “provenant de la succession de M. de la T***, de Saint-Quentin” was auctioned in Paris, 28.II.–1.III.1842. It is tempting to think they were those disposed of after the death of Pierre-Louis-Alexis Dulière, but the correspondence with pastels still in the Saint-Quentin collection makes this improbable: it is unclear if they were a failed attempt to dispose of the works still in the musée Antoine-Lécuyer, some miscatalogued copies, or a group of duplicates given away by Jean-François de La Tour before the 1806 list was made.

### Early years

La Tour left his native Saint-Quentin by the age of 15. According to tradition, on his arrival in Paris he sought advice from the engraver Nicolas Tardieu who sent him to several artists, of whom Louis de Boullongne is reputed to have shown the most interest in his raw talent. The story is repeated by Mariette; it may have originated in the anecdote of Marie Fel which she mentions in her undated letter to La Tour’s brother after the pastellist’s death, but which she had much earlier told Dezallier d’Argenville, who in turn may have told his cousin Mariette. What is often overlooked is her reference to “son arrivée à Paris, sa vie dissipée” before being rescued by Boullongne’s recognition of his potential. Perhaps this was just a reference to the Bougier incident (infra) but it may indicate a broader pattern of behaviour.

His initial training was under the painter Claude Dupouch (1690–1747), not Spoede — a confusion arising from Mariette, but not rectified until recently, despite the fact that Jean-François de La Tour identified his brother’s master in his will (and on a label attached to the back of Fère, 8.III.1700, located only in 2019) in fact confirms that she was four and half years older than the artist. Anne’s mother, Marie-Anne de La Tour, was just 12 when she married Philippe Bougier in 1695 (like his brother-in-law François, the 26-year-old wilderness was also a chantre in the church); their first child, also a daughter, was born two years later, in 1697. Tourneux 1904a confused the matter by conflating Anne Bougier with a Marie-Anne Bruges, Mme Bécasse who died in 1740 aged 45; although the age would explain her mother’s early marriage, the spelling, as well as a 1728 baptismal entry for the Bécasse couple, contradicts the identification.

La Tour is often said to have attended the congress of Cambrai in 1724–25. These reports all originate with Duplaquet (the English newspaper cited in Debric & Salmon 2000, p. 27 n.12 as independent confirmation is the 1790 World obituary which is drawn exclusively from Duplaquet and reappears as the éloge later published in the Almanach littéraire in 1792). Duplaquet elaborates that he portrayed the wife of the Spanish ambassador (B&W’s carelessness with “ambassadrice” has been universally copied: Lorenzo Verzuso Benetti-Landi seems not to have been married) in pastel (another contradiction within Duplaquet’s narrative); and that he travelled afterwards to London with the British ambassador who provided him with accommodation; according to Mariette, La Tour moved on from London and returned to Paris because his travelling companion had died. (This might conceivably refer to Lord Whitworth, who after Cambrai returned to his house in Gerard Street, London where he died on 23.X.1725.)

However the evidence for a trip to London, and its duration, appears thin; the Cambrai pastel series is I think correctly attributed to Birochon (q.v.). Tourneux 1904a (p. 27) states that the London trip was certain, offering as proof the pastel J.46.1337. La Tour copied after a painting thought to be by Murillo in the National Gallery in London, although that picture, of which several versions are known, could well have been copied in Paris.

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While it seems fairly plausible that La Tour got to London, his attendance at Cambrai is probably a simple confusion.\(^{23}\) (The Birochon series, being in pastel, might simply have been attributed to La Tour for that reason alone, and Duplaquet extrapolated erroneously.) As for the duration of his stay, Mariette indicates only a few months, while it has been inferred that he stayed until 1727 from Duplaquet, who states that he arrived in Paris at the age of 23, but as he also seems to imply that this was his first appearance in the capital, his statement should be disregarded. (Another report of La Tour being in London in 1751, in a letter from his pupil Katherine Read, \textit{q.v.}, to her brother, is not credible: her informant probably referred to Alexis Loir.\(^{25}\)) In any case La Tour was back in Paris by 1727, where he remained except for a trip to Holland in 1766 and his return to Saint-Quentin at the end of his life.

As well as Dupouch, La Tour also received advice from Restout, who he thought “avoit la clef de la peinture”.\(^{25}\) La Tour later described him to Diderot (Salon de 1769) as the “pupil Katherine Read, \textit{q.v.}, to her brother, is not credible: her informant probably referred to Alexis Loir.\(^{25}\) In any case La Tour was back in Paris by 1727, where he remained except for a trip to Holland in 1766 and his return to Saint-Quentin at the end of his life.

As well as Dupouch, La Tour also received advice from Restout, who thought “avoit la clef de la peinture”.\(^{25}\) La Tour later described him to Diderot (Salon de 1769) as the only artist of stature who was able to communicate effectively:

Il m’avoua qu’il devait infiniment aux conseils de Restout, le seul homme du même talent qui lui ait paru vraiment communicatif, que c’était ce peintre qui lui avait appris à faire tourner une tête et à faire circuler l’air entre la figure et le fond en reflétant le côté éclairé sur le fond, et le fond sur le côté ombré; que soit la faute de Restout, soit la sienne, il avait eu toutes les peines du monde à saisir ce principe, malgré sa simplicité; que, lorsque le reflet est trop fort ou trop faible, en général vous ne rendez pas la nature, vous peignez; que vous êtes faible ou dur, et que vous n’êtes plus ni vrai ni harmonieux.

Early works

Lépicié’s publication in 1734 of an engraving of La Tour’s pastel of Richer de Roddes de La Morlière provides the starting point for his securely accepted work, although he was by then 30 years of age. (The portrait of Mme de Boullongne mentioned by Marie Félix must have been made in 1733 or before, but is lost.) Prints of Fontenelle and the actor Thomassin (\textit{v. infra}) must also date to this period. It is not immediately clear on what legal basis La Tour practiced before his agrément at the Académie royale in 1737; his apprenticeship had been with a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc, but he is not recorded as a member himself.

Unresolved questions remain about his early steps. A pastel of the comte de Manisi (\textit{v. Éc. fr.}, \textit{19.210}); it is remarkably similar to a pastel of a magistrate of the Mesgrigny family, \textit{19.2260}, inscribed \textit{verso} “Latour pinxit/1730”, has some elements in common with both the early préparation of Voltaire (Saint-Quentin) and one of the two “Birochon” groups; but, although an argument can be advanced based on elements such as the drawing of the mouths, the application of the pastel is quite different (particularly in the drapery, it shows little promise of La Tour’s ability).

Although there is no documented connection, it may be more than coincidence that a number of his subjects in the early 1740s seem also to have been painted (\textit{first}) by Aved: Richer de La Morlière, Said Pacha, possibly the Dureys, Rameau, Racine, Crébillon.

The circumstances which led Voltaire to commission his portrait from a virtually unknown artist (\textit{v. Cabées 2009b}) may have depended on the fortunate proximity of La Tour’s atelier in the hôtel Jabach to his neighbour, the abbé Moussinot, Voltaire’s agent in Paris. The sittings took place in April 1735; the portrait, its copies and its engravings transformed La Tour’s reputation. La Tour remained in communication with Voltaire for some years.\(^{24}\)

Possibly slightly earlier is La Tour’s first portrait of his friend, the abbé Huber (\textit{Jeffares 2014}), a member of a Swiss family of bankers who had converted to Catholicism and was taken up by cardinal de Rohan in the 1720s and by Chauvelin. An adventurer who belongs (and actually appears) in the pages of Smollett, from the 1730s he was close to Le Riche de La Pouplinière, Paris de Montmartre and Philibert Orry; in the absence of documents we can only speculate how such contacts may have helped La Tour. The abbé left La Tour, “que j’ai toujours chéri comme mon enfant et dont je respecte autant la vertue que j’admiré les talents”, an apparently valuable estate when he died in 1744, but this proved onerous and was disclaimed in favour of an annuity of 2000 livres, which in turn remained under discussion with the executor until 1770.

Another early work must have been the lost portrait of the Italian comedian known as Thomassin, who died in 1739. It is known only from an etching by the obscure T. Bertrand, who it is here suggested (2018) was Thomas Bertrand, son of the sculpteur Philippe Bertrand (1663–1724), an associate of René Frémín (both were \textit{maître} at the Académie royale 1701), subject of one of La Tour’s most brilliant early pastels.\(^{25}\)

A letter published in 1890 but since largely overlooked (apart from the cryptic entry for the lost portrait it mentions in B&W) provides some important clues about La Tour’s early progress. Undated (\textit{v. DOCUMENTS c.1736}), it was sent by “Laroque” to “M. Duche”, and discusses a portrait of a Manon Richer whose father was in the gardes and whose uncles were said to be influential (whether they included Richer de La Morlière remains uncertain); her unfinished portrait by La Tour was mentioned, with his address – rue Saint-Honoré, corner of rue du Chantre – which, as Tourneux noted, put the letter before 1744. This is apparently the same address as revealed in a 1736 document, and we suggest probably dates to around then too. It has escaped attention until now (2020) that, based on the figures named in the letter, the sender was probably Antoine de La Roque, the former gendarme aux Gardes françaises, art collector and supporter of Watteau and Chardin, and editor of the \textit{Morceau de France}; he describes La Tour as “mon ami”.\(^{24}\)

23 Adrian Bury conducted an exhaustive search for any evidence of La Tour in London for his 1971 monograph, but was forced to conclude that none could be found.

25 The reported letter from Voltaire to La Tour of 24.VII.1775 is however a confusion with a homonym.

24 Frémín had been sculptor to Felipe V in Madrid until 1738; Thomas’s brother André was based in Valais (La Granja de San Ildefonso) by 1746, later succeeding Frémín as sculpteur de sa Majesté catholique. It is not impossible that the Bertrands introduced La Tour to Frémín. Thomas was described as a graveur à l’eau-forte in 1735; by 1743 he was working in “taille douce” before switching to painting.
La Tour at the Académie royale

Agréé 1737, reçu 1746, conseiller 1751, La Tour exhibited regularly at the Salons until 1773, omitting only 1765 (in 1759 he appeared in the livret but withdrew his exhibits as he was dissatisfied with the hang, according to Diderot): about 120 pastels in all, some three-fifths of which are known today.

The procès-verbaux at the Académie say very little about the session (25.V.1737) where “le sieur Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, Peintre de portraits en pastel, aïant fait apporter de ses ouvrages” was agréé: there were some 33 academicians present, no voices were recorded against him, the Académie reconna sa capacité.”

His set pieces were selected the following week: they were to be portraits of François Lemoyn e and Jean Restout. Lemoyn e committed suicide a few days later, and Jean-Baptiste Van Lo o was nominated instead; but his departure to London and later return to his native Provence created a further hurdle, before La Tour finally submitted Restout alone for his reception. Thus it was not until 1746 that La Tour was finally receu.

Later (31.X.1750) he also presented the portrait of Dumont le Romain as a gift; it is often erroneously described as a moreau de réception – Salmon 2018, p. 169, argues that La Tour needed to present a second piece to advance to the level of conseiller, but there is no obvious mechanism for this within the rules of the Académie, and he may instead have given it in order to be able to retrieve the Restout which he wanted to “improve”.

From a letter of 19.II.1740 from the duc d’Aumont, in charge of the Menus plaisirs, we know that Madame Adélaïde borrowed La Tour’s portrait (perhaps the 1737 self-portrait), possibly to be copied – but evidencing royal interest at an early stage. His dominant position was already established by the 1741 Salon, where he exhibited the monumental portrait of the président de Rieux. La Tour’s relationship with de Rieux was established as early as 1738, when he was commissioned to portray the niece of the président, Mlle de La Fontaine-Solare; and the artist became an habitué of de Rieux’s château de Passy.

The galeries du Louvre

La Tour was granted a “logement”, or apartment, in the galeries du Louvre, in 1745. Very few pastellists enjoyed this privilege: the others were Copeyl and Chardin (neither worked exclusively in the medium). Vivien was accommodated in the Gobelins, although he made portraits of many of the illustres (those enjoying the privilege of logements) in 1704. The award was made by brevet: La Tour’s was granted 10.III.1745, filling the place of a deceased valet de chambre-horloger du roi.26 Five years later he was granted a superior set,27 moving from the third (marked C in contemporary plans – see DOCUMENTS for references) to the eighth (H) logement, the brevet being erroneously reported in numerous sources as an appointment to the title of “peintre du roi”, to which of course he was already entitled.

The apartments appear on the plans to be similar in size, but slightly different in layout: both were over five levels, with cellar, ground floor, first, mezzanine and second floors; while the gross area of each floor was up to 85 sq. m., in practice, corridors and walls reduced the net usable space to perhaps half that level. The light source in the principal rooms was northerly. La Tour’s immediate neighbours included Silvestre until 1750, and later Nollet and Loriot, and Desportes and Pasquier; but other La Tour subjects who were also illustres included Restout, Lemoyn e, Chardin, Dumont le Romain and C ochin.

La Tour retained the logement until 5.XII.1785, when a brevet de survivance for it was granted to Robert Robin (1741–1799), valet de chambre-horloger ordinaire du roi et de la reine.28 The pastellist had by then retired to Saint-Quentin. A sale of the contents of his logement took place on 19.I.1786.

La Tour required additional space, and when the occupant of the tenth logement, the enamellist Jean-Adam Mathieu, died in 1753, it emerged that La Tour had been using a room in his studio which was hung with his pictures (p. DOCUMENTS, 8.V.1753).

Confusingly on 4.VII.1778 La Tour wrote to d’Angiviller for permission, and four days later entered into a contract, to sublet Greuze’s logement (the sixteenth) for a term of 3, 6 or 9 years (at La Tour’s choice), for 800 livres per annum. The letter, which is hard to follow, suggests he needed a second logement because of the diversity of his interests and difficulty of organising his possessions in a small space. The lease cannot have been taken up for long: indeed on 4.II.1780 Greuze’s logement was ceded to Allegrain.29

La Tour’s other residences

The “maison natale” of La Tour in Saint-Quentin was the subject of a detailed inquiry by Basquin 1935, who published a map based on a 1750 plan. He was born in the Petite-Place Saint-Quentin, near the ruelle Coliette, just south of the

26 Claude Martinot (1691–1744), a member of an extended dynasty of royal clock-makers of which Balthazar (1636–1714) was perhaps the best known. His father was Henri (1646–1725) married Elisabeth, daughter of the sculpteur François Girardon. His inv. p.m. was conducted in his logement at the Louvre 9.XII.1744. In 1734 he married Marie-Jeanne-Madeleine Richer; the contract was signed by Charles Copeyl. After Martinot’s death Copeyl and Louis de Silvestre appeared in the registres de tutelles (AN YS705, 2.III.1751) looking after the interests of the children. Their son Jean-Claude Martinot, héritau de l’ordre de Saint-Louis, married Louis Tocqué’s daughter Catherine-Pauline.

27 This time replacing an engineer, Alexandre d’Hermand. For a description of the geometry of the logements, see Mascall 2016; the plan he reproduces, which shows all five levels of the logements, must be later than the 1710 he suggests: “le Sr Devisse” of the 1713 plan has been replaced by “veuve Devisse”: the widow of the historiographe Jean Donneau de Visé (1640–1710) was confirmed as occupant from 1713.

28 On Robin’s death the logement was assigned to Isabey, but it cannot be the space depicted in Bouly’s 1798 painting of Isabey’s studio as sometimes thought (c. Bouly 1988, p. 53).

29 According to Guiffrey 1873, pp. 90, 91, 96, 99, 178f. Greuze was awarded this logement on 6.III.1760, in place of the aqueducbier Jean-Baptiste La Rose. There is nothing to indicate that the logement was withdrawn from Greuze because subletting was not permitted, nor whether d’Angiviller had given his permission (his response was given orally according to Tourneux).
basilica known as the Collégiale (roughly where a car park is now to be found: the small shaded area on the left of the plan); and he died in a house about 60 paces away, at 657 rue de Tugny (subsequently renamed rue De La Tour), at the corner of the rue Granville (the larger rectangle near where the modern post office is still to be found). The area is unrecognisable today, the streets relocated following the damage in the First World War, as shown in the superposed plan II in Basquin 1935.

When La Tour arrived in Paris he presumably lodged with Dupouch, “rue et paroisse Saint-André des Arts”. By the time of Voltaire’s letters of 14.V.1735, he was in the hôtel Jabach, rue Saint-Mery. The following year he was living with his brother Charles “au coin des rues Saint-Honoré et Jean-Saint-Denis paroisse Saint-Germain” according to a document of 31.X.1736. The address is probably the same as that in the undated letter from Laroque to Duché cited above, “rue Saint-Honoré, a coin de la rue du Chantre”: the thirteenth century rues du Chantre and Jean-Saint-Denis were both merged into the rue de Rivoli, a little further from the Palais-Royal than the rue des Bons Enfants, opening before the Louvre. 30 By 18.XI.1743, La Tour was living in the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs.

As well as the logement in the Louvre, La Tour had a country house at Auteuil. His purchase of this by contract of 20.IX.1770, which was never completed (for reasons discussed in Finances below), is fully documented, but it is less clear exactly when he first leased the property: B&W list this as “vers 1750”. Subsequently numbered 59 rue d’Auteuil, near the Bois de Boulogne, it was originally 24, Grande-Rue, Auteuil and later became 40 rue Molière.

Previous owners included Philippe Le Fort (c.1745), an échevin de Paris in 1732 who had made his fortune selling fabric and lace; his widow, née Jeanne Ducrot (1672–1752), from whom it was inherited by her niece; Pierre Grassin (1689–1762), directeur général des monnaies de France; and the Chicoyneau de La Valette family, from whom La Tour leased and then bought the house, before selling it on to Mme Helvétius when unable to complete his purchase as described in the DOCUMENTS. In 1854 it was purchased by prince Pierre Bonaparte. His widow owned a drawing of the house before it was partly destroyed in 1871; the garden was subsequently much reduced in size.

Annexed to the purchase contract was a detailed appraisal of the property carried out on 12.I.1768 and reproduced in full in DOCUMENTS (the valuation then was 28,500 livres). It reveals the house to be very substantial, far larger than one person might need: it may well have attracted La Tour to have a country house near his wealthier customers in nearby Passy where clients such as de Rieux and Le Riche de La Pouplinière lived, and which he had frequented for some years (e.g. comte d’Egmont’s invitation of 30.VIII.1742). In the purchase contract it is indicated that “Ledit S. Dela Tour a dit avoir parfaite Connaissance” of the property, suggesting that he may indeed already have been a tenant for some time.

After 1772 it seems that La Tour occupied a house in Chaillot as a neighbour of Marie Fel. Her own property (where she died) was at Grande rue de Chaillot. An undated letter (c.1780) from Fel to La Tour, calls him “mon très cher voisin” and discusses a dinner they are jointly giving; in his 1784 will he left her everything he had at Chaillot (apart from a few specified items). A somewhat confusing letter from Fel to Jean-François de La Tour, of 5.I.1785 (after La Tour had gone to Saint-Quentin), indicates that Jean-François had sent her a list of the furniture at Chaillot: she was undecided whether to return, or to stay in her apartment in Paris, but she told the chevalier that Pasquier had advised that something must be done to protect La Tour’s pastels from the smoke. This suggests they occupied adjacent properties with a common chimney.

On 27.III.1775 La Tour and his half-brother Jean-François sold the house of their step-mother/mother in Saint-Quentin, “une certaine Maison bastiment, lieu et heritage, circonstancer et dependancer, situés en cette dite ville de Saint Quentin, rue du petit Paris, paroisse de Saint André, tenante d’une lizière a la rue de la vieille poissonnerie d’autre lizière avec la maison appartenant a l’Hotel Dieu dudit Saint Quentin, d’un boutparderriere au Sieur Dela Marliez et d’autre bout pardevant sur ladite rue du Petit Paris pour desdites Maison.” The description of the location between the rue du Petit-Paris (demolished to make way for the rue de Lyon) and the rue de la Vieille Poissonnerie (both of which were bounded on the north by the rue des Toiles) locate the house near, but not on the site of the maison natale proposed by Basquin 1935.

DOCUMENTS from 11.X.1784 concern the acquisition by Jean-François de La Tour of a new house on canonical land for La Tour’s return to Saint-Quentin and where he died (at 657 rue de Tugny, indicated in the plan above). Work continued on the house after his arrival. As with the house

30 Reproduced in G. Bertin, “Le cimetièr e d’Auteuil”, Bulletin de la Société historique d’Auteuil et de Passy, 1908, p. 189. However it is difficult to reconcile this with the property appraised in 1768.
at Auteuil, we have a very detailed appraisal which was carried out in accordance with the decrees of the Assemblée nationale on 16.XI.1790: the house was valued at 9300 livres.

From 26.IX.1758 La Tour and his brother were involved in a property speculation with Pierre Salles: this was never La Tour's residence, and is discussed further below in Finances.

Royal portraits

Despite the interest shown by Madame Adélaïde in 1740 (see infra), La Tour’s work for the Bâtiments du roi seems to have commenced c.1744, according to the accounts summarised in Engerand 1900 (pp. 269–71: v. list infra and DOCUMENTS). Portraits of three courtiers were commissioned at 1500 livres each, among them the duc d'Ayen, later duc de Noailles and a future maréchal de France (1775), who was aide de camp du roi at the time. Evidently successful, the commissions were followed by eight pastels of the royal family for 12,000 livres (two of the king, two of the queen, three of the dauphin and one of the deceased dauphine), made 1746–49 and paid 1752. In that year La Tour was also granted a pension of 1000 livres by the Bâtiments du roi. Later portraits included several of the second dauphine, Marie-Joséphine de Saxe, the first in 1747, now known only from a miniature copy (La Tour also portrayed her half-brother, Maurice de Saxe, at the same time, and other members of the Saxe family later). Under Marigny, directeur des Bâtiments du roi from 1751, fewer portraits were commissioned, and La Tour had already displayed a temperament unsuited to such service. Of the history of the commission of the monumental portrait of Marigny’s sister, see the full ESSAY. The duc de Berry (later Louis XVI) and comte de Provence were nevertheless commissioned in 1762, but royal commissions fell away after the death of the dauphin in 1765.

Nevertheless, La Tour’s work remained on display in the royal apartments at Versailles, as shown in Louis-Jacques Durameau’s 1784 inventory. Among the numerous oil paintings, only nine pastels were included in the rooms whose displays were illustrated: they were all by La Tour, and all of the royal family.

A pastel of Charles Edward Stuart was exhibited in 1748 (as “prince Edouard”, to distinguish him from prince Charles de Lorraine) but lost: the numerous copies show that the portrait must have been extremely similar to the earlier pastel of his brother, with which it has been repeatedly confused. Its timing too was curious: when the salon opened, Charles was to be expelled from France under the terms of the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (although not signed until 19.X.1748, the preliminaries had been agreed and its terms were already known). Both pastels are closest to La Tour’s portraits of Louis XV: that of Henry, with the raised arm reminiscent of Rigaud, closer to the 1745 pastel of the French king, while Charles follows the more conventional pose of the 1748 pastel.

Stuart commissions

Apart from work for the French royal family, La Tour was commissioned to make portraits of the exiled Stuart princes which have subsequently caused much confusion. A pastel of Henry, Duke of York must have been made some time in advance of the 1747 salon where it was exhibited: it shows the prince in military guise, although Henry had already (25.V.1747) reached Rome having decided to abandon such a role in favour of the Church: he was created a cardinal weeks later. It was more likely to have been made after Henry’s arrival in Paris, shortly after the victory at Prestonpans in .IX.1745, while he was trying to raise support for the Jacobite rebellion, but before he left Paris in XII.1745 for Boulogne, where he remained until v.1746 when he was permitted to serve at the siege of Antwerp as aide-de-camp to the comte de Clermont; at the conclusion of that siege, in VII.1746, Henry was sent to Navarre (Bongie 1986, p. 130). (It is probably mere coinidence that La Tour exhibited in the same salon pastels of Henry, Clermont and Maurice de Saxe, who took Brussels at the beginning of 1746.)

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The self-portraits

La Tour’s many self-portraits occupy a central place in his œuvre. Perhaps surprisingly they never show him working with pastel crayons. But his own face was a source of lifetime fascination – indeed there are several examples where he seems to have projected his own features onto his subjects’, at least as judged from other portraiture. The numerous self-portraits are listed in Autoportraits; and range over the period from 1737 to about 1770. Their accuracy may be compared with a relatively small number of images of him by other artists in this ICONOGRAPHY.

His were not the first self-portraits in art (or even in pastel), any more than Rousseau’s Confessions were the first autobiography in literature; but the degree of self-obsession in both surely reflected the mood of the time.

While much theoretical attention has been given to these self-portraits, relatively little discussion has been devoted to the simple mechanics of their production. Did La Tour use a mirror, and if so how was it arranged? (The 1737
La Tour’s clientèle

La Tour’s subjects ranged from the royal family, whom he depicted in majestic poses with somewhat idealised faces, to his circle of artistic and intellectual friends, whose portraits in contrast reflect spontaneity and warmth. While the portrait of Duval de l’Épinoy might seem regal in its grandeur, Mariette tells us that the secrétaire du roi treated La Tour as a friend (this is confirmed in the abbé Le Blanc’s letter of 8.IV.1751, where the critic sent his regards also to be transmitted to Le Riche de La Pouplinière). The line between friend and client may not always have been rigid, nor completely mutual. Marmontel, whom La Tour regarded as a friend, regarded listening to the artist’s nonsense as the price for having his portrait painted by him:33

La Tour avait de l’enthousiasme, et il l’employait à peindre les philosophes de ce temps-là; mais le cerveau déjà brouillé de politique et de morale, dont il croyait raisonner savamment, il se trouvait humilié lorsqu’on lui parlait de peinture. Vous avez de lui, mes enfants, une esquisse de mon portrait; ce fut le prix de la complaisance avec laquelle j’écoutais réglant les destins de l’Europe.

La Tour’s clientèle extended to many of the leading figures from the worlds of diplomacy, war, politics, finance, music and literature.34 The closest parallel among contemporary portraitists is with the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, whose busts Louis Réau (1927) divided into six neat categories: the royal family, the court, magistrates and finance, savants and physicians, writers, and artists and actors. A name-check confirms that perhaps 20 subjects sat to both artists. We also know, from the abbé’s fictitious Mémoires du maréchal de Richelieu (v. DOCUMENTS, c.1744) that La Tour was “intimately” acquainted with both Lemoyne and with Orry at the time of their negotiations over the monument de Rennes must have taken place 1744/45; while La Tour may once again have embellished the account on the appearance of his master in one example (.285.149) sufficiently to have confused président Sérot and Chamfleury (in a letter of 1874).

34 These categories have provided the basic structure for recent studies of his work; however to pursue them properly requires the prosopographic approach only possible in the context of the complete catalogue with supporting genealogies essayed here; hyperlinks in the sitters’ names in the worldlist connect to those documents.

Supporting Mémoires du maréchal de Richelieu, which Soulavie relied, it is unlikely that he would have been too discreet to tell us.

The artist’s pupil Ducreux not only had the same penchant for self-portraiture, but managed himself to take on the appearance of his master in one example (.285.149) sufficiently to have confused président Sérot and Chamfleury (in a letter of 1874).

It is also clear that the choice of clients for La Tour was as important as the choice of artist for the client: the prestige from exhibiting a portrait of a great man was enormous, as is clear from d’Alembert’s account of the pastel that La Tour did not make of Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) in his eulogy on the philosopher published a few months after his death:

M. de la Tour, cet artiste si supérieur par son talent, & si estimable par son désintéressement & l’élevation de son âme, avait ardemment désiré de donner un nouveau lustre à son pinceau, en transmettant à la postérité le Portrait de l’Auteur de l’Esprit des Lois; il ne voulut que la satisfaction de le peindre, & il méritait, comme Apelle, que cet honneur lui fût réservé: mais M. de Montesquieu, d’autant plus avare du temps de M. de la Tour que celui-ci en éloit plus prodigie, se refusa constamment & poliment à ses pressantes sollicitations.35

Again, in a letter to Mme du Deffand of 27.I.1753, d’Alembert wrote that “Latour a voulu absolument faire mon portrait”, suggesting that, while he may have wanted to overcharge wealthy financiers, he was as anxious to establish his credentials as painter of the intelligentsia as many of them were to have their portraits shown in public. The point was particularly evident from the eighteen portraits La Tour exhibited in 1753. It was probably a concern from his earliest appearances at the salon, although he not have been in a position to command the famous to sit for him. We do not know for example whether Frère Fiacre, who appeared in 1739, did so for the benefit of the publicity it would give for raising funds for his convent, or whether La Tour wanted the kudos from portraying a face “fort répandu dans le monde”, which any child would recognise according to the critic. Whichever it was, despite the costume and the tire-lire, this was not – nor did La Tour ever make – a genre piece in the manner of Greuze of even John Russell.

The narratives of the versions of La Tour’s portraits of Jean-Jacques Rousseau remain confused despite numerous iconographical studies as well as a good many contemporary documents, from the former’s testaments as well as the latter’s correspondence. (La Tour’s name also appears among the recipients of presentation copies of a number of Rousseau’s books, and they remained friends for many years.) The finest surviving pastel may be that in Saint-Quentin from the artist’s studio, which may or may not be the primary version shown in the Salon of 1753. Rousseau promised an (autograph) copy of it to Mme d’Épinay in 1757, the artist planning to bring it to Montmorency, but before the réplique was ready, Rousseau had quarrelled with Mme d’Épinay, and instead he gave it the duc and duchesse de Luxembourg. In 1762 Rousseau told Mme de Verdelin that La Tour had only made two versions, of which he knew with them by virtue of their calling, one finds on closer analysis relatives, monks, confessors, presumably of real piety, as well as scientists, writers or even financiers for whom the petit collet was a liberation from certain social rules, or magistrates whose entry into parliament was facilitated by the clerical route. In at least one case (abbé Soulavie) marriage took place as soon as the Revolution permitted.
only the Luxembourg location; the other might be the one she had seen with Julienne. Two letters from Rousseau’s printer Pierre Guy dated XII.1763 make it quite clear that the Cathelin engraving showing Rousseau in Armenian dress was based on a version altered by La Tour himself, copied from clothing worn by real Armenians he had summoned; of this version no trace is now known (although it seems plausible that La Tour reused the costume for his portrait of Vernezobre, J.46.3054, which seems to have been described in Jean-François de La Tour’s work list as “un Arménien”). La Tour gave this or another version to Rousseau in 1764; it travelled from Paris to Möetiers securely wrapped so that Mme Alissan de La Tour was unable to inspect it when she facilitated its despatch. This was later said to have been given to Mme Boy de La Tour (the version now in the musée Jean-Jacques Rousseau at Montmorency), but an alternative narrative is that Rousseau sent it to Carl Marischal in Potsdam in 1765. La Tour’s image was the only portrait of him that met with Rousseau’s approval (“M. de la Tour est le seul qui m’aïe peint ressemblant” he wrote to Rey in 1770, dismissing the suggestion that Liotard’s small pastel be engraved), and he distributed so many copies of the La Tour engravings that by 1765 his publisher had run out of copies. A vast number of copies in pastel and oil are known, of varied quality.

What did La Tour’s clients themselves think of their portraits? We can of course infer something from the demand, prices etc., but there is surprisingly little direct documentation of their reactions. Mme de Charrière’s testimony once again is relevant, as is a letter from Mme Gelly of 1.IX.1753 direct to the artist expressing her satisfaction.

While pastel portraiture appealed in particular to the recently ennobled or moneyed classes, and more to the noblesse de robe than to the noblesse de l’épée (see Jeffares 2017s), La Tour’s reputation meant that the oldest established aristocracy also turned to him. The stinging criticism (on several levels) of Maurice Barrès 36 is hard to dismiss completely: “La Tour … fait l’insolent, mais ne domine pas; c’est un valet qui observe les invités, ce n’est pas Saint-Simon.”

It is also a mistake (Rue Réau 1927, cited above) to imagine that the clientele divides into completely discrete groups: some of the highest ranking courtiers and financiers had liaisons with the actresses and singers of the day – among them the maréchal de Saxe and Mme Favart or the comte de Clermont and Marie Sallé. It is impossible now to determine whether La Tour’s portraits of both were connected.

We also have the enigmatic record in the private accounts of prince Xavier de Saxe that (in V1.1759) the Saxon ambassador paid 2 louis d’or to “les domestiques de M. de Latour, peintre”, quite probably an inducement for the sitting to be arranged with a possibly reluctant artist. We know nothing about these servants, nor whether their faces might be found among their employer’s numerous préparations de inconnus. 

Later years – health etc.

The deaths of the dauphin in 1765 and of his widow two years later marked the end of La Tour’s work for the royal family, and a general falling-off in his output occurred throughout that decade. In a letter concerning the abbé Huber’s legacy (6.XI.1770) he alludes to an injury to his eye of which nothing more is known, but which may have caused him to make his first will in 1768. (This cannot be the defective vision of indeterminate cause inferred from the discussion of distances and angles in La Tour’s 1763 letter to Marigny 37; nor the short-sightedness from his childhood mentioned by Mariette; a much later letter from Marmontel to the artist, 19.XII.1783, refers to “l’état de vos yeux”, which might be a simple reference to presbyopia. It is also unlikely to refer to the allergy to oil paint as Duplaquet suggested, supra, if indeed that was a factor in La Tour’s preference for pastel.) It may be assumed that La Tour consulted his friend Pierre Demours about his condition, and it is possible that this was the occasion of the 1764 portrait of the ophthalmologist (J.46.1614).

It is evident from the artist’s surviving correspondence, which includes a number of what he aptly termed “jérémiades”, and from numerous contemporary accounts, that La Tour’s bizarre personality amounted to a psychiatric illness (perhaps today it might be diagnosed as bipolar disorder, but there may be elements of autism or even Alzheimer’s as well), which towards the end of his life had become disabling. That ultimately led to his retiring to Saint-Quentin under the care of his half-brother and the distressing accounts of his interdiction for mental incapacity (v. DOCUMENTATION, 15.I.1785). But the signs were apparent much earlier, from the outlandish letters to Marigny or even from Mme de Graffigny’s conversations with the artist in 1748. Even in 1750, Mme de Pomadour wrote to her brother that La Tour’s “folie augmente à chaque instant.”

Marie Fel

La Tour’s iconic portrait of the opera singer Marie Fel (J.46.1766) remains one of his most celebrated works; an earlier portrait (J.46.1763) is more elaborate. Both are discussed in the catalogue. He is said to have had a liaison with her which lasted more than 30 years. One of her later letters refers to a recollection of the time when she sang at a concert at Amiens when Chauvelin was intendant there, putting the start of their friendship to before 1751. In 1782 she accompanied La Tour on a pilgrimage to Rousseau’s tomb at Ermenonville (she and La Tour both subscribed to Soulavie’s published account). After senility forced La Tour’s retreat to his family in Saint-Quentin in 1784, Marie Fel continued to correspond with his brother, advising him in 1785 of the risk of smoke damage to La Tour’s pastels at Chaillot (v. supra). When she died at Chaillot in 1794, she left everything to Jean-François de La Tour, with Pasquier as executor; as the miniaturist was then imprisoned, Dorison acted for him.

There is no doubt from this correspondence about the genuine affection between the two, but there is nothing to allow the modern biographer to enter the bedroom.

Fees

The best contemporary records of payments for pastel portraits are from the Bâtiments du roi (the accounts published by Engerand 1900 provide a useful source of information, although they are not complete), and include

36 See CRITICAL FORTUNE, 1890.

37 Lanthy 2009, p. 4.

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Updated 29 August 2020
both major artists and minor copyists or portraitists working from existing iconography.

La Tour's concern for talent to be recognised by the wealthy led to his taking a Robin Hood approach, believing that, as Marie Fel put it, “les riches devoit payer pour les pauvres.” Famously for the (second) Pompadour pastel he painted, Voltaire fulminated that La Tour demanded the unprecedented price of 48,000 livres, but this was not immediately payable in cash, and Cochin, writing on La Tour’s behalf (7.X.1765), obtained an advance of 1200 livres.

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The payment of 200 livres for Laideguive, reported by Flodin to Tessin (letter, 23.xi.1761), must have been at a concessionary rate, reflecting the notary’s services to La Tour (perhaps in relation to the Salles affair – v. infra).

Finances

As noted above, in 1752 La Tour received a pension of 1000 livres p.a. “en considération de ses services” from the Bâtiments du roi, which continued until 1.1.1779 (it was brought to an end in 1780 for unstated reasons, but plainly La Tour no longer needed it). Confusions in the royal accounts obscure the financial success of La Tour's business, which is perhaps more evident in the investments he made: two annuities amounting to 6300 livres per annum on capital of 63,000 livres were purchased in 1765 alone, and La Tour's 1768 will lists income of 19,750 livres (although by then his accounts may not be accurate). Apart from his earnings as an artist, La Tour also inherited money from his brother Charles (1766)\(^*\) as well as from the abbé Huber.

The absence of any account books or of an inventaire après décès (La Tour revoked his wills before his death, and everything passed to his brother without the need for an inventaire) makes it difficult to analyse his finances or wealth precisely. As is reported below, his philanthropic donations excesoed some 90,000 livres somewhat larger than the size of Perronneau’s entire estate, but rather smaller than Rigaud’s succession of 222,823 livres. Rigaud’s fortune was earned over 63 years, during which his total revenues amounted to 499,100 livres. In contrast La Tour’s productive career was significantly shorter, and while some of his pictures attracted premium prices, he was far less prolific than Rigaud, and had lower overheads.

The absence of an inventaire also means we know little about his assets beyond of course the collection of pastels now in Saint-Quentin. He seems however to have owned few pictures by other artists (many or all were probably gifts from the artists), and none of great importance. Nor do we know which if any his brother may have disposed of before his own death nearly 20 years later. While the core of the La Tour pastels remain in Saint-Quentin, the abbé Duliège may well have received more than the handful of pictures and documents Desmaze found with Mme Warluzel (v. supra).

The Salles affair

The property speculation by Pierre Salles which La Tour and his brother Charles financed in 1758 (advancing 53,594 and 26,585 livres respectively), leading to losses and claims on the guarantor (v. DOCUMENTS, 12.IX.1761), confirm a considerable level of affluence, as well as carelessness (La Tour was unable to produce evidence of payments received) and determination (the guarantor, a judge, had the La Tour claim set aside, forcing the brothers to take legal action).

La Tour and his brother Charles both lent substantial amounts to the financier Pierre Salles (-1774), rue Beaubourg. Salles, whose family seems to have originated in Vallegauque, Languedoc (his parents were Jacques Salles, banquier, bourgeois de Paris, and Anne Noguier), married (in 1744) Marie-Marguerite-Joséphine-Anatholie Machart (-1802); his brother was Jean Salles du Fesq (-1754), avocat du roi, député du Languedoc auprès du conseil du commerce, négociant (who went bankrupt with losses of 2 million livres and committed suicide on 19.VI.1754). Pierre Salles and a lawyer, Armand-Claude Le Franc de Jetonville, formed a company in 1742 to acquire and develop a plot of land which had belonged to Hardouin-Mansart. Salles had a two-thirds share, and was responsible for raising all the contraction costs for the seven hôtels to be built. By 1748 problems may have arisen (perhaps difficulties with the foundations in view of the proximity of the Seine\(^*\)) and the company was dissolved, Salles acquiring all seven properties for 615,000 livres (the estimate for the liquidation was 350,000, and the only other bidder was his former partner). They were a speculative development, intended to be let. Among them were the two buildings in which the La Tours were interested: the hôtel de Salles and the adjacent building, which became the hôtel Hocquart, both designed by the architect Jean Damun (Blondel’s son-in-law); they shared a garden, the hôtel des Salles facing onto the rue de Bourbon, the present rue de Lille, while the other, which faced onto the rue de l’Université, was acquired by Louis-Jacques-Charles Hocquart (1698-1783), trésorier général de

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\(^*\) Cited Jean Locquin, La Peinture d’histoire en France de 1747 à 1783, 1912, p. 6.
\(^*\) According to Debre 1991, p. 32, Charles de La Tour died wealthy and Maurice-Quentin was his heir: no source for this has been found, but it seems entirely probable.

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41 The litigation extended as far as London – Ex parte Oursell, re Julian.
l’artillerie (brother-in-law of the famous collector Pierre-Jacques-Onézime Bergeret). The hôtel Hocquart was leased to the comte de Lannion, lieutenant-général des armées du roi; later residents included the comte de Vaudreuil, the princesse de Lamballe, Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve and Suzanne Daru.

Charles de La Tour had settled an annuity on Salles on 9.VI.1747, and presumably induced his brother to join the financing. Charles lent 26585 livres 5 sols, due 31.XII.1758, while Maurice-Quentin lent twice as much: 53594 livres 10 4 s 4 d, of which 5408 livres 10 4 s 4 d was due 31.XII.1758 and the balance, 48186 livres 8 s 8 d on 6.III.1759. The properties were mortgaged as security. When Salles sold one of the houses to the highest bidder (by adjudication), Hocquart, on 10.I.1759, the La Tour brothers became subrogated to a claim on Hocquart which seems to have been unpaid. By 21.III.1759 final demands had been ignored, but by a deed of 17.v.1759 (v. infra) payment of the Salles and Hocquart debts within one year was guaranteed by a judge, président de La Fortelle. When he too defaulted, the La Tour brothers granted another extension, this time securing additional guarantees from La Fortelle’s son and his wife. The last known document (r. 1764 below) records a substantial part payment by La Fortelle; it is not known whether further amounts were recovered. Nevertheless it must be clear that the concentration of risk on such a project, particularly given Salles’s history, cannot have been prudent for the artist.

The house purchase at Auteuil

However the position may have been a little more complicated: for example, on 20.IX.1770 La Tour bought the house at Auteuil of which he had been a tenant for many years (v. supra), selling it on 30.IV.1772 for 30,000 livres: in fact he was forced to cede the property since he had been unable to raise the outstanding purchase price, which was paid by the purchaser to the original vendor. The vendor was Michelle-Narcisse Jogues de Martinville, who had taken over her husband’s affairs following his interdiction for mental incapacity; the bureaucracy over this arrangement meant that La Tour’s default was harder to manage than might be expected from this family of fermiers généraux, promoted by Mme de Pompadour and connected to the Sanlot and other families in La Tour’s clientele.

La Tour’s friends: artists, legacies

La Tour’s genuine altruism towards his fellow artists was evidenced by the story told by Cochin in his life of the modest and unassuming Parrocel, where in 1743 La Tour intervened to secure him a royal pension (in the 1746 Salon, no. 55, Parrocel exhibited a sketch belonging to La Tour, possibly a token of gratitude; La Tour had a small collection of paintings by his friends: among those mentioned in his brother’s will were works by Carle Van Loo, Wouwermans, Greuze, and possibly Vien). Apart from Cochin, the intimate circle around Parrocel included also Silvestre and Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne (La Tour’s friendship with whom is attested in Vigée Le Brun’s Souvenirs43; it may date back to his apprenticeship with Dupouch, who was close to the Lemoyne family, v. supra). Lemoyne owned a copy of La Tour’s portrait of Parrocel, portrayed La Tour, and was portrayed by him twice; the second of these was included in the Salon de 1763 “sous le même numéro” with another of La Tour’s intimate friends, the abbé Pommyer. When Pommyer wrote to La Tour in 1762, he mentioned Chardin and his wife; and it was Chardin with La Tour who were deputed to inform the magistrate of his election as associé libre of the Académie in 1767. In 1774 when Chardin retired from the Académie he presented them with the pastel La Tour had given him in 1760.
The writing was so erratic (page 3 above: in contrast to the hand known from earlier documents) that it was criticised by the magistrates examining the document after his death. Four months later, in V.I.1784 (and possibly in retaliation for the methods employed to induce him to return to Saint-Quentin), La Tour issued (in several copies) a revocation of all his wills and codicils, sending sealed copies to notaries in Saint-Quentin and Paris. This led to a series of notarial examinations in the days after his death, when Le Roy and Brichard, the Paris notary, first produced the 1784 will and then Jean-François de La Tour had it set aside on production of the second codicil.

Science and literature

In a letter to Desfriches of 18.V.1785, the Swiss textile-maker Emanuel Rhynier-Leissler (1704–1790) recalled a dinner 25 years earlier “chez M. de la Tour le célèbre peintre en pastel, qui m’ayant accroché et retenu par un bouton de mon habit me fit suer sang et eau en me parlant astronomie où il n’entendoit rien, tout comme moy, à ce que j’appris ensuite.” La Tour owned several telescopes by Dolland which he mentioned in his will, with rather bizarre provisions for their disposal by ballot. Unlike John Russell (q.v.) he does not seem to have used them for any constructive purpose.

La Tour’s interests in scientific matters were superficial, if broad-ranging – including apparently an interest in petrified tree roots under the Seine. This can be traced through to research by the abbé Soulavie. Similarly the interest in the Montgolfier brothers may have been stimulated by Pierre Barral, an engineer who had surveyed Corsica where La Tour’s brother Charles had served.

It seems that La Tour even had aspirations as a writer: when Jacques Necker arrived in Paris around 1750 to join the banque Vernet, La Tour, who knew Isaac Vernet (he was abbé Huber’s executor), showed Necker a comedy which he had written “tournementé de la folie de bel esprit”, to Necker’s embarrassment. It is sadly absent from our DOCUMENTS.

Philanthropy

La Tour’s philanthropic initiatives dominate his life from 1776 on. For the detail of these, refer to the DOCUMENTS. They included plans for prizes in anatomy, perspective and figure drawing presented to the Académie royale to be funded by a donation of 10,000 livres, but never embraced with much enthusiasm by the Paris institution. In contrast the authorities in Saint-Quentin (encouraged by the artist’s brother Jean-François who had retired there) were enormously supportive of his ideas for the creation of an école gratuite de dessin as well as donations for the benefit of poor women in confinement and old artisans in Saint-Quentin unable to earn their living. La Tour was careful to stipulate, however, in rather detailed provisions governing the benefactions, that the recipients should not be immoral or of bad character; thus having in 1776 settled two amounts of 6000 livres for women in confinement and incapacitated workers, just over a year later he required the payments to the latter to be redirected towards the former. Unsurprisingly his continuing attempts to manage his benefactions led to lengthy quarrels with the municipal authorities. In 1778 he also settled a further amount of 6000 livres with a view to establishing the école de dessin at Saint-Quentin. The municipal authorities immediately spent all 18,000 livres on pressing matters, and the elaborate documentation for putting his foundations onto a secure legal footing involved the purchase of annuities that would produce secure income hypothecated to fund the annual awards. These were to be calculated at “denier vingt”, i.e. a yield of 5%.

La Tour’s philanthropic donations to Saint-Quentin were said to amount to 90,174 livres 3 sols 4 deniers, yielding interest of 3,714 livres 14 sols 2 deniers. The aims of these foundations were quite broad: the Amiens prize was to be awarded to the citizen of Picardie who had done “la plus belle action d’humanité” during the year, failing which, whoever had discovered the most useful health remedy, or mechanical invention in the field of agriculture, manufacture, arts or commerce in the province or in the whole kingdom. In the first year it went to an inventor of a machine to stretch cloth whose benefits included that it could be run by two children. The following two years it was awarded for rescues from flooding.

Documents in the archives of the Académie d’Amiens show what was required to found an annual prize of 500 livres. On 23.I.1783 La Tour purchased perpetual annuities from a Paris stockbroker for a sum totalling 35,020 livres, intended to produce an income of 885 livres, of which 5495 15% was for the Amiens prize (allowing for costs and deductions to yield a clear 500 livres annually) and 3355 5% for the École de dessin in Saint-Quentin. (The complexities of the documentation arise because it was necessary to purchase in the secondary market annuities previously benefaction, and probably that for Amiens, although the 500 livres Desmaze cites for 1783 may be the same sum. Further confusion concerns the mixture of interest and principal, capitalised at different rates (deniers). In the absence of the 1801 document it is impossible to verify the computation.

44 L’Encyclopédie, V., p. 645.
45 This is the figure given in Desmaze 1854b, p. 298 (and repeated in Goncourt 1867, p. 23n.); it is unclear how it is made up (it mentions an initial donation of 18,000 francs to the école gratuite, supplemented regularly, to an amount calculated (presumably in a specific document) of 16 Thermidor an IX – 4.VIII.1801). It excludes the Académie royale
created and based on different yields – “deniers”, or reciprocal yields, of between 20 and 40 times.) For the former, the next step was a contract, on 2.V.1783 by which La Tour reconstituted the annuity; this was followed on 10.V.1783 by a deed of gift from La Tour to the académie d’Amiens, and on 15.VI.1783 by a letter of ratification of these steps sealed at the Chancellerie.

La Tour’s philanthropy may relate to his links with freemasonry, which remain somewhat obscure (some sources suggest his connection dates back to around 1745): he seems to have attended sessions of the Paris lodge Les Neuf Sears (founded in 1773), whose members included Franklin, Greuze, Houdon, Pajou and Marmontel. Probably initiated by the saint-quentinois physician Louis-François Rigaut, he was made an honorary member of the masonic lodge L’Humanité at Saint-Quentin (his appointment apparently dates from 5.VII.1774 according to the entry in the registre), along with Jérôme de Laval, professeur de dessin at the École gratuite in Saint-Quentin, and Joseph-Marie Néret, receveur au grenier de sel and another local philanthropist.

La Tour was asked to provide a portrait for the lodge; Néret was only able to obtain from Paris an engraving, which he describes as “rare, d’un des meilleurs portraits du e.” [frère] de la Tour”, accompanied by a disappointingly banal reply from La Tour, dated “A l’Or*** de Paris, le 3e jour du 6e mois 1781”. It was decided to wait until the following year, “quand ses fondations seraient faites”, to ask La Tour for his bust. This request was honoured, but only in plaster, but it was decided nevertheless to place it in the temple, opposite that of Savalette de Lange, the founder of the lodge. On this occasion (1782) La Tour was elevated to the grade of Vénérable honoraire.

Similar requests proceeded from the École gratuite who displayed La Tour’s bust annually during the prize ceremonies – probably a plaster cast of the Lemoyne terracotta now in the musée Antoine-Lécuyer.

II. THE WORK

La Tour’s works are never signed. He left no account books. It remains today easier to identify his work on the basis of pose and composition than on handling as such. For the lawyer Beaucousin, writing about the 1763 Salon, La Tour’s works could not be recognised by their style or handling, but only by their extreme perfection which he compared to the clarity of Pascal’s thinking.

Despite the annotation on a copy of the 1743 livret (often attributed to Mariette) claiming that the portrait of René Frémont was completed in seven days, La Tour never employed the rapid, graphic attack of his rival Perronneau. La Tour’s perfectionist technique was discussed in illuminating correspondence – in particular in letters to Marigny, 1.VIII.1763, and Belle de Zuylen, 14.IV.1770. In his report to Marigny suggesting a reply to the 1763 letter, Cochin’s advice was that, while it contained much that could not be disputed, La Tour exaggerated the difficulties of pastel, while oil painters also faced challenges he overlooked.

La Tour’s results were achieved through an individual style that synthesizes the graphic tradition practised by artists such as Perronneau or Vigée with the stumped, painterly finish of Vivien or Nattier.

From préparation to portrait

La Tour proceeded through a series of préparations to study various aspects of his sitters’ expressions, aiming to enliven his portraits with fleeting glimpses of their personalities rather than relying on the mythological or official trappings employed in contemporary portraiture to symbolise social status. These studies often commenced with simple monochrome outlines; a second préparation would then add colour, often setting the face against a shaded halo, leaving the rest of the paper uncovered. It is trite to comment that these préparations can in some ways be more impressive than the final works – a valid reaction today to their modernity, or at least timelessness, the faces often unencumbered by ancien régime costumes, and the boldness of the hatching often approaching abstract art. The effect is enhanced often by his use of strong light and harsh contrasts, all intended to be toned down in the final works. Eyes often lack catchlights, enhancing a feeling of abstraction. Even eye colour is unreliable (or at least differs between préparation and final portrait).

No doubt other pastellists made preliminary studies, but few have survived. Our knowledge of La Tour’s use of the préparation is in large part due to the collection preserved at Saint-Quentin, the impact of which on so many artists and writers (see CRITICAL FORTUNE) has given them a legendary status. La Tour’s own view of them may be inferred from the fact that some (e.g., J.46.2237 or J.46.1369) were made on sheets that had already been used for another purpose, at a time when he was already financially secure.

La Tour’s approach to his sittings was foreshadowed a century earlier, in an age preoccupied with spirituality, by Nanteuil’s insistence on psychological penetration of his subjects. La Tour’s legendary ability to explore his subjects’ souls was described by many authors: in the review of his obituary in the Année littéraire, the anonymous author mentioned that—

tandis qu’il ne semble occupé qu’à saisir la ressemblance de ses modèles, sa conversation vive, animée, spirituelle, charme l’ennui de l’attitude, et l’ame est peinte sur la toile avec autant d’énergie que les traits du visage.

The process in relation to one portrait, that of Belle de Zuylen (Mme de Charrière) which La Tour undertook on his trip to The Netherlands in 1766, is unfolded not only in his own letters but those of the sitter herself. La Tour worked, not in Slot Zuylen, but Groenesteyn nearby (the property of Belle’s uncle) where Belle went each morning for a three-hour session (nevertheless her copy, J.22.101, of her portrait of her, J.46.1481, is rudimentary). La Tour engaged her attention through his lively and witty conversation. After a month however he was still having difficulty with the eyes: he abandoned the first version of the portrait, and made another (presumably that now in Geneva). The first préparation, J.46.1487, which came to light only in 2015, gives some indication of what was lost in the Geneva pastel. La

46 This review of Duplaquet’s Éloge appeared in the revived Année littéraire, VIII, 1789, pp. 318–29; and was reprinted in L’Esprit des journaux, français et étrangers, XIX/3, III.1790, p. 90.
Tour made another préparation five years later, in Paris, but no finished portrait seems to have emerged. There are few other descriptions of La Tour at work, setting aside the anecdotes discussed below: but Diderot's account (Salon de 1767) described more sober behaviour than his reputation might lead us to expect:

J'ai vu peindre La Tour, il est tranquille et froid; il ne se tourmente point; il ne souffre point, il ne se hâle point, il ne fait aucune de ses contorsions du modéleur enthousiaste, sur le visage duquel on voit se succéder les images qu'il se propose de rendre, et qui semblent passer de son âme sur son front et de son front sur la terre ou sur sa toile. Il n' mime point les gestes du furieux; il n'a point le sourcil relevé de l'homme qui dédaigne le regard de sa femme qui s'attendris; il ne s'extasie point, il ne sourit point à son travail, il reste froid, et cependant son imitation est chaude.

The palette in his finished portraits was somewhat conventional, the predominant colours being pinks, blues, greys and whites; colour, while often bold, is always controlled. Typically blue hatching is used on temples and jowls. Often La Tour adds linear, zig-zag highlights of directly applied strokes over patches of stumped colour, providing apparently spontaneous touches of sheer brilliance whose effects derive from the optical reflection characteristics of pastel (to borrow William Empson's phrase, “The careless ease always goes in last”). His unrivalled mastery of the textures of the human face, fabrics and accessories in no way detracted from the overall conception or psychological penetration of his finished works; balance is always maintained.

Lighting in the finished works is subtle (but almost always from high, on the left), frequently using the technique he learnt from Restout of “faire tourner une tête et à faire circuler l'air entre la figure et le fond en reflétant le côté éclairé sur le fond, et le fond sur le côté ombre”. Backgrounds are usually of graded darkness, without accessories; but in a few of his more important pastels, overcast skies are shown, and in several others an outdoor landscape is seen in an opening in the upper right.

The abbé Huber lisant J.46.1902 is the sole example of a candlelit scene, although its chiaroscuro may have been rehearsed in the clever adaptation of a Rubens painting of the Magus Gaspard into the Saint-Quentin Diogène J.46.1783, holding a lantern in place of the bowl of gold; the lighting effects are not fully adjusted. We know too that the pastellist had some early exposure to his namesake’s work: the abbé Gougenot (1748, p 115), applauding the demise of historical or pastoral garb, suggests “On en est redevable à M. de la Tour, qui le premier s’est fait une regle de peindre ses Portraits avec les habits ordinaires.”

Larger compositions

La Tour made a couple of ambitious portraits en pied, enriched with accessories and backgrounds which have attracted much attention (not least because scholars enjoy the puzzles they set). In some of these larger compositions errors of perspective are evident, a deficiency of which La Tour himself was well aware: he alludes to it in the postscript to his letter to d’Angiviller of 4.VII.1778.

Huber J.46.3902, Duval de l’Épinoy J.46.1724 and Perrinet de Jars J.46.2482 are perhaps precursors, but the monumental portraits of the président de Rieux J.46.2722 and Mme de Pompadour J.46.2541 are on a scale of their own, exceeded (in ambition thought not in physical scale) by the portrait of the dauphine and her son J.46.2259 (and that unfinished, perhaps because he lost interest) – La Tour’s only foray into the territory of group portraits with multiple figures. These were rare in French eighteenth century portraiture; but, although also unusual in their output, both Perronneau and Liouard found the challenge more interesting. Although the significance of each accessory in these monumental pastels has been analysed widely, questions remain, both with Mme de Pompadour and with Marie-Joséphe de Saxe et son fils – notably to what extent the interiors shown were real, and how much made up, or inventively combined, by La Tour himself. Did he for example change the colour scheme of apartments in Versailles from white and gold to the pale blue-green we see here simply because it worked better visually with the medium he was using? 51

La Tour also made far fewer pendants than most of his contemporaries: for the painter of the bourgeoisie, the marriage portraits of husband and wife were bread and different accessories. Roussel J.46.282 and Philippe J.46.2508 are almost identically posed, as are Coventry J.46.1565 and the Jacquemart-André inconnu J.46.3192. While many portraitists re-used successful poses for different clients, La Tour was not above doing so in public, for prestigious clients: Marie-Joséphe de Saxe, in the pastel exhibited in 1761, holds her fan in exactly the same way as her mother-in-law shown in 1748 (thus unusual poses offer no assistance in chronology). 49 His restraint may have been intentional: La Tour is supposed to have said: “I faut semer un tableau d’effets et non pas l’en paver.” 50

There is a good deal of discussion in recent literature, deriving ultimately from La Tour’s own account in his letter to Marigny, of the question of distance between the artist and sitter. La Tour needed to sit a couple of feet from his subjects, but this caused him problems with perspective and even the disturbing fact that the sitters’ eyes no longer seemed to be looking in the same direction.

La Tour (aside from two juvenile copies after Rosalba) never embraced the mythological genre of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries such as Nattier or Hubert Drouais: the abbé Gougenot (1748, p 115), applauding the demise of historical or pastoral garb, suggests “On en est redevable à M. de la Tour, qui le premier s’est fait une regle de peindre ses Portraits avec les habits ordinaires.”

Compositions

If La Tour’s handling of the chalks varied, the same cannot be said of his compositions, to which the critics of the 1748 Salon objected as surprisingly (and boringly) uniform for an artist of such talent. When he departed from the portraitist’s standard three-quarters bust, he repeated his ideas: Marie Fei J.46.1794, Mme de Mondorvonne J.46.1413 and Mlle Ferrand J.46.1798 display an idée fixe that reappears against very different accessories. Roussel J.46.282 and Philippe J.46.2508 are almost identically posed, as are Coventry J.46.1565 and the Jacquemart-André inconnu J.46.3192. While many portraitists re-used successful poses for different clients, La Tour was not above doing so in public, for prestigious clients: Marie-Joséphe de Saxe, in the pastel exhibited in 1761, holds her fan in exactly the same way as her mother-in-law shown in 1748 (thus unusual poses offer no assistance in chronology). 49 His restraint may have been intentional: La Tour is supposed to have said: “I faut semer un tableau d’effets et non pas l’en paver.” 50

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48 Rosenberg 2004 traced it to the 14.IV.1750 sale by the widow of Pierre d’Hargiade; it was not specifically listed in his 1735 inventaire (but might have been one of the underdetailed genre pictures), but may well have been on the Paris art market in the 1730s.

49 It seems seems was the dauphin’s favourite colour: see Émilie Szymski, Les Appartements du Dauphin Louis-Ferdinand, fils de Louis XV et de la Dauphine Marie-Joséphe de Saxe au château de Compiègne, 1737–1766, École du Louvre, thesis, 2014, p. 86 & passim.

butter, but the painter of celebrity disdained the convention. The Roussel pendants (J.46.282 and J.46.2821) were better balanced than the Grimods (J.46.180 and J.46.181), where the artists seems to have conceived of two individual portraits without thinking through the difference in scale.

One feature that was widely prevalent in eighteenth century portraiture was the stone oculus. A hangover from the seventeenth century print, La Tour employed it with irony in the 1737 self-portrait “à l'œil de bœuf” – but he never used it again. In contrast, Perronneau used it frequently in pastels from around 1757, when it must already have seemed retrospective, and he continued to use it into the 1780s. While other artists turned to oval frames as an alternative solution to the aesthetic question of how to fill the corners in a rectangular portrait, La Tour never felt this need, confident in his ability to light the face and draw the eye away from the problem (see Frames, below).

**Accessories**

While a handful of La Tour’s most important compositions include elaborate background details, many have completely plain, graded areas. These smaller portraits are not however entirely free from accessories, contrary to some critics’ suggestion. A number include chairs, which were presumably studio props, and if so may assist in dating the works. The most famous is the humble slat-backed chair for Rousseau, but that was clearly selected for this client alone. The other chairs are mostly upholstered in red or blue damask. That in Dupouch (1739), J.16.1693, with its lightly undulating top with a double row of tacks, probably reappears in the Aix homme au livre (J.46.2817), also from the late 1730s. A reasonably plain carved wood back appears in the primary version of Pommyer (J.46.2518) as well as in Nollet (1753), J.46.2424. (The chair is omitted in the studio ricordos of Pommyer.) A more elaborate decorated giltwood frame seems to be identical in Mme Hilaire (J.16.1809) and Lady Coventry (1752), J.16.1567.

Four of La Tour’s largest pastels include terrestrial globes: Mme de Pompadour’s seems to have been her own, but the models in Marie-Joséphine de Saxe et son fils, the président de Rieux and Duval de l’Épinoy seem to be the same. They are open respectively on Europe (France), the Caribbean, Africa and the Atlantic – though with what significance may be debated. Duval’s globe (and possibly the others), judging by its size, brass fittings and dotted lines marking the tropics and ecliptic, appears to be the model supplied by the abbé Nollet in 1728.

Another accessory that seems to take on special significance in La Tour’s work is the book, often of music, sometimes handsomely bound (Orry J.46.2431, with his arms prominently displayed on the bibliophile), in the process of being studied (Mlle Ferrand J.46.1790: the savante), or interrupted (the princesse de Rohan J.46.273: the music lover), or furtively consulted (“Mme Louise”, the nun J.46.2183, might be expected to be reading a work of devotion rather than a musical score). It can be big (Dumont le Romain J.46.1681) or small (Voltaire J.46.11); open (Laideguive J.46.1899) or just a finger holding a place (Orry J.46.2431). Mme Rouillé J.46.274 and the abbé Huber J.46.1902 have additional books in piles; Mme de Pompadour J.46.2541 has them in neat upright rows and flat on the table; de Rieux J.46.2722 has paper book marks to show his volumes are in use. Mlle Sallée’s J.46.2842 are still in the book case, practically invisible – but nothing in a La Tour portrait is unseen (except, nearly, the folio in veau fauve, edge on, hidden behind the bust of Louis XV leaning on the mirror – and so unseen twice – in the Dauphine and her son, J.46.2259). Many of the volumes are dog’s-eared: this visually gives the illusion of reality, while symbolically denoting the directness of the sitter’s engagement: these are working materials, not unopened presentation volumes for show alone.

At least 20 La Tour pastels have books or scores (not counting repetitions or copies). For comparison, in Perronneau’s pastels, although half a dozen shown artists holding porte-crayons with portfolios of drawings, Novère is the only sitter with a large volume (it may be a book or a portfolio); the oil of his brother reading stands alone in the œuvre. Liotard, who employs accessories more readily than either, has fewer than half a dozen pastels with books, and an equal number with letters. By contrast La Tour never includes pet animals (apart from dogs), and avoids over-used devices such as the “Au Roy” letter much favoured by jobbing portraitists to the period. The implication is clear enough: La Tour is the painter of the intellect, of minds that are at home among the volumes that encapsulate their interests.

**Faces and intelligence**

Even when not explicitly bibliocentric an even rarer quality of La Tour’s portraits is their ability to capture, or at least convey, the sitter’s intelligence. It is notable that Lavater52 chose a La Tour pastel (of Paradis de Moncrif J.46.2437) to illustrate this, adding this commentary:


In the first French translation53 (1781), the text was rather freely embellished:

Les grâces de l’Original ne se retrouvent pas dans cette copie, cependant on reconnoit dans la forme du front, dans l’extrémité de l’os au dessus de l’œil droit, dans l’obliquité & la pointe du nez – une expression de goût & de délicatesse – Mais il faut en convenir, la Nature en formant ce visage, annonçoit une plus haute destination que celle de produire des Ouvrages de pur agrément.

Much discussed, particularly among later critics, is La Tour’s use of the smile. In a way this sits oddly with his focus on intelligence: in other artists’ hands the two can be contradictory. From Champfleury to Matisse, La Tour’s smiles have defied analysis: are they the essence of his portraiture, or are they artificial betrayals? Gombrich54 contrasted his approach with Roger de Piles’s advice to painters which emphasised that “when the sitter puts on a smiling air, the eyes close”: La Tour defied this, leaving the eyes open:

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52 Johann Caspar Lavater, Physiognomische Fragmente, Winterthur, 1783, t. p. 60.
And yet the very combination of slightly contradictory features, of a serious gaze with a shadow of a smile results in a subtle instability, an expression hovering between the pensive and the mocking that both intrigue and fascinate. True, the game is not without its risk, and this perhaps explains the degree to which the effect froze into a formula in the eighteenth century portraits of polite society.

La Tour is also the master of showing (often only the tiniest glimpse) teeth, a phenomenon in eighteenth century portraiture that has received some attention recently. There are numerous smiles with visible teeth in earlier portraiture, from Boucher to Perronneau and Mme Roslin, but as Colin Jones56 notes, La Tour made “numerous subtly animated portraits, in which the teeth floated tantalisingly in and out of focus”. He brackets the dental exposure in his Democritian self-portrait (J.46.1007) with those by “odd-ball artists” such as Liotard and Ducreux. In fact a much more subtle example is the portrait of Duv al de l’Épinoy where La Tour employs a trick whose magic is only revealed de visu: it does not work from a photograph, however high the resolution. As the pastel is approached, the expression suddenly changes – at a distance of about one metre – from a wry, quizzical, almost cynical ambiguity, to one of pure pleasure. This is effected by the inclusion of the sitter’s two front top teeth in the slightly opened mouth: they are virtually, but not completely, invisible in the pastel, but are not perceptible at a distance or in reproduction. The trick was used by other artists – notably by Vigée Le Brun, one of whose hallmark it became, but never with quite so much sublety.

Other authors56 have emphasised La Tour’s capture of the momentary by focusing on soft tissue rather than bone structure, the sparkle in the eye of particular importance (as can be seen in the dead effect of some preparations when the catchlights are omitted); the sense of movement can be intensified by slight facial asymmetries. Both ideas reinforce the view that character itself is mobile and transient.

III. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

For general information on the materials and methods of the eighteenth century pastel, the discussion in my PROLEGOMENA provides a broad context within which there are many references to La Tour. Some of this material is summarised below.

Scientific investigations

Only a limited amount of information about pastel pigments and materials has so far been collected by modern scientific analysis. Among the papers specifically analysing La Tour pastels are Shelley 2005, which examined the Met. Garnier d’Isle,146.1827, in detail; Pile & White 1995, where Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR) was applied to a La Tour pastel (Dawkins,146.1612); and Gombaud & al. 2017, which investigated pastels by La Tour (the princesse de Rohan, 146.273, and Voltaire, 146.312) using photography (within and beyond the visual spectrum), as well as FTIR and Raman spectroscopy and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA). Inspection with infrared or ultraviolet light is rarely as informative as it can be for oil painting (where restorations painted over varnish show up as darker areas in UV); but UV can show the presence of lead white (used by many eighteenth century pastellists, including on occasion La Tour), which fluoresces white in UV.

Materials

Paper

In common with most contemporary pastellists, La Tour used paper as the primary support for his pastels and préparations: usually blue, but occasionally brown. (But even this preference was not rigid, as it has recently emerged that

56 Notably Percival 1999, p. 86f.
at least one57 of the pastels in Saint-Quentin is on parchment which La Tour was previously thought never to have used.) Sometimes exposure to light has obscured the evidence, but for finished pastels mounted on a strainer the sides usually provide reliable evidence of the original colour. All such paper was hand made, on frames which left regular patterns of chain marks; La Tour rubbed these down, leaving an irregular network of loose fibres which were excellent for holding pastel without leaving a distracting grid pattern. Constant de Massoul noted that La Tour used a “blue Dutch paper”. John Russell, in the 2nd edition of his Elements (1777, p. 21: see TREATISES), added a curious footnote, suggesting that La Tour (“lately a Painter of note in Paris” – this was 1777) often used “with great success” small grounds, prepared by stewing small dust over paper brushed with gum water, brushed to remove any loose particles when dry.

Show-through from a bright blue support was at least a question in theory, although it is debatable whether this was really a problem where the whole sheet is usually covered with opaque pastel. Nevertheless La Tour described58 an experiment in treating his paper with yellow ochre mixed with egg yolk to facilitate the elimination of show-through of the blue colour:

mettre avec une brosse une légère teinture d’ocre jaune à l’eau simple, bien délayée ensemble avec un peu de jaune d’œuf sur du papier bleu; cela empêche le lourd qu’il est difficile d’éviter par la quantité de couleurs nécessaires pour couvrir le bleu du papier.

Although large sheets of paper were available from early on, it is common among eighteenth century pastels to find two or more smaller sheets joined together on the same strainer. Often59 this was simply a question of availability of paper of the right finish for anything beyond say 60x50 cm, but La Tour made a particular practice of working on a head on a smaller sheet for convenience, as in the full-length Mme de Pompadour. Care was required to disguise the joins, usually by a small area of overlap, and to ensure joins did not fall across the face or other areas where they would be particularly noticeable.

Secondary support
As is explained in the PROLEGOMENA, the classic construction of any eighteenth century pastel is expected to involve the paper being pasted, or “marouflé”, on canvas already fixed to a wooden frame known as a strainer (a stretcher, in contrast, has moveable keys at the corners allowing it to be expanded to take up lost tension in the canvas: they were rare in the eighteenth century). The purpose of the arrangement goes beyond mere convenience: the tension in the canvas aids the pastellist in getting a “bite” to hold the particles on the paper. Préparations, on loose sheets, were different.

An examination of La Tour’s supports (those in Saint-Quentin and the Louvre are best documented) shows that he breaks all these rules. As a detailed analysis reveals, it is far from the case that all genuine La Tours will be found on blue paper, marouflé sur toile, still on the original strainer. Several of his early, larger pastels are on keyed stretchers. A good many full-sized portraits are on paper pasted directly to cardboard instead of being marouflé sur toile. And intriguingly some where the paper has been marouflé sur toile have been cut from the original strainners and, at some stage, laid on board. Some of these modifications may have occurred in later campaigns of restoration (or even just in reframing), but it is suggested that some may have been done by La Tour himself for glass encapsulation (explained in Fixing below), which subsequent conservators may have removed, replacing the glass backing with cardboard or a new strainer. That La Tour was responsible for at least some of these non-standard assemblies (e.g. direct mounting on cardboard) is evidenced by the mention in his 1768 will, bequeathing to several artists “mes crayons de pastels et couleurs et toutes mes études qui ne seront pas sous verre ou glace et qui ne sont pas colléz sur des cartons ou des toiles.”

La Tour pastels seem to show these anomalies far more frequently than genuine work by his rivals, and what would often be taken as indications of inauthenticity in their work should be assessed with caution with him. In short some of the simplest tools for identifying fakes are unreliable in La Tour’s case.

Supplies of pastel crayons
There is frustratingly little evidence as to if or where La Tour obtained his pastels, or whether he made them himself. Pastels were of course readily available commercially in Paris, but even by the end of La Tour’s career, as a number of authors mention, the commercially available crayons could not always be trusted to have followed the diligent stages in washing and purifying that, for example, Chaperon insists were required to remove potentially noxious impurities. (Impurities could also arise from ill-prepared supports or even from sweat from the pastellist’s fingers.) While these authors had every motive to exaggerate the hazards, it is notable that La Tour described a technique for removing salt traces from chalks and pastel using a knife and even a hot iron passed close to the pastel.60

It seems most likely however that La Tour did not regularly make his own pastels. Had he done so, it is highly probable that he would have included the vast practical difficulties this entails in his 1.VIII.1762 letter to Marigny identifying all the frustrations and hurdles to the art of pastel. On the other hand, in his 1768 will he specifically bequeathed to three artists “mes crayons de pastels et couleurs” (as well as his unframed studies): as he did not use oil paint, “couleurs” is likely to refer to the pure or ground pigment not yet made into pastel. Perhaps like some other pastellists he used tiny quantities of pure pigment with stump for highlights (see PROLEGOMENA, §4.V.7).

We should also be careful not to believe the numerous puffs by pastel makers who advertised that La Tour used their materials. Thus in the Mercure for ii.1746 Mlle Charmeton advertised her “excellens crayons dont le célébre M. de la Tour & autres fameux Peintres en ce genre font actuellement usage par préférence à tous autres”, while much later (5.VII.1781) he formally endorsed Nadaud’s crayons. While La Tour was obviously close to the pastel-maker Vernezoëbre, his name does not appear in the 1760 list of customers (v. Jeffares 2018f).

57 Duchesne, 1.A6.2583, identified by Florence Herrenschmidt while conserving the work in 2006.
58 In a letter to Belle de Charrière, 14.IV.1770.
59 Burns 2007, pp. 71ff. Several examples were studied in the Los Angeles 2018 exhibition, including La Tour’s président de Rieux and Louis XV (J.46.207).
60 Letter to Belle de Carrière, 14.IV.1770, cited supra.
Some of La Tour’s pastels are catalogued as being in “pastel with gouache”. These are references to areas (usually small spots or highlights) applied wet with a brush, but the material is unlikely to be true gouache; rather the artist was probably using ground pastel crayons mixed with water (or possibly alcohol). La Tour used the technique only occasionally, at the start of his career, and mainly for depicting hard or precise objects such as lace, gold braid or metal buttons.

Fixing

As an inveterate experimenter, La Tour devised many approaches to the question of fixing pastel. Some of his failures are evident visually, such as the watermarks on his famous self-portrait à la toque d’atelier in Saint-Quentin.

There are numerous references in the literature to La Tour having invented a method of fixing. In the posthumous sale of the pastels (mostly now found in Saint-Quentin) announced by his brother, the preface states that “Tous les Tableaux en pastel sont fixés par l’Auteur, et sont d’une fraîcheur comme s’ils venaient d’être peints”, but that statement should be read with caution in view of the prejudice work in pastel encountered at that stage. Visual evidence from a number of his portraits (e.g. the autoportrait J.46.1101 and Restout J.46.2691 at Saint-Quentin) reveal tide marks indicative of local fixing. Microscopic examination in other cases (e.g. the Met. Garnier d’Isle J.46.1827) has shown La Tour’s use of intermediate layers of fixative used as a working tool to enable him to isolate certain parts of the drawing as he proceeded (Shelley 2005). The préparation with egg yolk described in his letter to Belle J.46.1101 revealed the presence of sturgeon glue, suggesting that he had discovered the essential ingredient of Loriot’s fixing technique far earlier than thought hitherto.62

La Tour certainly experimented repeatedly, and not always satisfactorily; but at one stage his dissatisfaction with these experiments was such that he seems to have resorted to sandwiching his pastels between two sheets of glass, sealed together.63 The backing sheet was a thick (more than 1 cm) and extremely heavy piece of glass. The disadvantages are obvious, given the notorious fragility of glass of the period, and it had been thought that no example had survived.64 However at least two La Tour pastels use (or used) the system: Jean Monnet (J.46.2377; Saint-Quentin) of 1756 and Lord Coventry (J.46.1565) of 1752.65 It appears that both works were originally executed on paper marouflé onto a strained mounting conditions for pastels”, ICOM Committee for Conservation, 12th triennial meeting, Lyon, 1999, preprints, i, pp. 52–54, who concluded that the method of encapsulation between glass is “not necessarily the worst option”.

La Tour’s invention is conceptually similar to developments in enludoric and glass painting by artists such as Vincent de Montpetit, Jouffroy and Vispré, which in turn may have been inspired by the investigations of two sheets of glass with sufficient convexity to avoid direct contact between the pastel and the inside of the front glass. Both works have labels on the back of the canvas behind the rear glass sheet written in a contemporary hand (not La Tour’s). Since these works were some four years apart, it is likely that a number of other La Tour pastels were originally mounted in this way but have subsequently been remounted, whether from breakage or other conservation considerations. Consequently evidence of later supports may be less decisive as a determinant of authenticity than for other artists.

Pastel box

An empty pastel box is said to have been left by La Tour at the slot Zuylen during his 1766 trip (it may have been intended specifically for travelling), and was given to the musée Antoine-Lécuyer (inv. LT 84) in 1919 by a descendant of Belle de Charrière.66 It measures 9x32.5x24.5 closed, and still has traces of blue pigment in one of the compartments.

View and glass

The early eighteenth century saw the largest pastels ever produced: Vivien’s pastel of Max Emanuel devant la ville de Mons J.77.285 (1706) measures 215x146 cm; La Tour’s président de Rieux J.46.722 (c.1741), which Mariette erroneously thought the largest pastel ever made, was 201x150 cm, while the Louvre’s Mme de Pompadour J.46.5541 is a mere 177.5x136 cm.

Gautier-Dagoty’s little known critique67 of the 1755 salon includes an interesting discussion of the effect of glass on La Tour’s pastel of Mme de Pompadour:

L’harmonie de ce Portrait surpassa les compositions en huile de ceux de M. Michel Vanloo & de M. Toqué: c’est, dit-on, la glace qui a cet avantage; elle met tout d’accord, & laisse une unité que l’on perdroit entièrement, si le Tableau étoit à nud. Des demi-Connoisseurs qui ont déjà écrit sur le Salon, ont prétendu au contraire que la glace étoit noire, & qu’elle gâtait le Tableau. On voit bien que ces Auteurs n’ont pas vû comme moi le Tableau sur le chevalet. Le Pastel & la Peinture en caustique sont des Peintures froides & sèches que l’on ne peut vernir; la glace seule peut adoucir ces Peintures féminines, & leur donner une unité que l’on ne perd pas.

The problem of display and lighting of glazed works was of long standing: La Tour’s Mme de Pompadour was initially placed in the 1755 salon so as to reflect light in its glass, and had to be moved overnight.68 In the 11.VII.1803 auction catalogue where the pastel was offered for sale (Lot 335), Paillet and Delaroche were careful to note that “ce morceau … est recouvert par une belle glace blanche fait exprès à Saint Goblin.” Similarly La Tour’s ruined pastels of Restout and Dumont le Romain were denuded of their frames, Antoine-Nicolas Martinière (1706–1784), maître émailleur pour les horlogers à Paris, presented to the Académie des sciences, 4.III.1769. The dates suggest that it was La Tour’s process that inspired these rather than the converse.

The son of Eugène-Jean-Alexandre, comte de Bylandt, who, in 1837, had married Belle’s great-niece Maria Henrietta van Tuyll van Serooskerken (Gaggetta Dalaimo 2011, p. 55; see also Bulletin de l’Académie, 27.XI.1919. I am most grateful to Hervé Cabezas for details of the box (see also Fleury & Bénédite 1954, p. 84). However its authenticity rests on family legend rather than tangible evidence; the box may be later.


perhaps to obtain their glass: they were listed among the revolutionary seizes from the ci-devant Académie on 9.XII.1793, when they were inventoried in the Premier Garde-meuble with this note: “Ces deux tableaux sont perdu par l'auteur même qui, trop vieux, voulut les retoucher: on peut compter que les glaces”. In the 21.VII.1796 inventory, Philpault noted that by then they were “sans bordure”.

La Tour’s unfinished portrait of the family of Louis XV, or Marie-Josèphe de Saxe and her son (J.46.2598), was relegated to a side room according to the inventory of the École gratuite de dessin at Saint-Quentin carried out on 24.IV.1815, the glass being “en trois parties”: it is unclear if this was a deliberate economy or the result of breakage.

The lawyer and engineer Claude Bernier de Saint-Martin wrote to La Tour in 1764 describing the various problems with finding suitable glass for pastels.69 That made in France used Spanish soda which rendered it dark and greenish, while flint glass, developed in England, was weak, unless supplied in thick sheets. To avoid the colour problem, pastellists tried to use thinner sheets, but this put their work at risk from glass breakage. The glass from Saint-Quirin, which was known as verre de Bohème, was excellent (practically colourless) apart from its annoying undulations, which were disagreeable and annoying for viewers, and even made the picture invisible from certain angles. Bernières’s proposal was to strain this type of glass with the machine he used to make curved sheets. Alternatively he suggested an even better plan: to provide the sheet with a deliberate, regular bulge (“bombé”); these were already in use for protecting wax and plaster medallions. This route resulted in greater strength, and also dealt with the spacing problem without resulting in the pastel frame having to be too deep and projecting untidily from the walls of the room. He proposed to use a curve that would result in a space of 8 to 10 lignes (18 to 23 mm) at the centre of the largest canvas. He immediately glazed and framed, to protect it from damage. He proposed to use a curve that would result in a space of 8 to 10 lignes (18 to 23 mm) at the centre of the largest canvas. Did La Tour pay any attention – or was the concept of the convex sheets part of his thinking in the glass capsule idea?

Once the pastel is finished it would normally be immediately glazed and framed, to protect it from damage. In theory that would make it less likely to be subsequently altered. But there are many examples of later intervention. La Tour was notorious for reworking his pastels, often far later (such as his retrieval of his portrait of Restout from the Académie royale). Voltaire’s letter to Berger, 3.VII.1738 indicates that La Tour’s studio replica of his portrait was kept unframed; how it was protected is less clear.

Alterations

La Tour is notorious for ruining his works by later alterations in an attempt to improve them. The portraits of Restout (J.46.2687) and Dumont le Romain (J.46.1681) in the Louvre (now damaged beyond repair) evidence this, with the procés-verbaux evidencing his borrowing the works long after they were completed. It is often thought that this occurred after senility had set in, but this habit was ingrained far earlier, as can see from Mme de Graffigny’s correspondance (v. supra) as well as Katherine Read’s 1751 letter (relevant to La Tour even if she was misinformed of his movements, v. supra):

I don’t doubt of his getting money by his great merit and great price, not from his quantity of work, unless he leaves off that custom of rubbing out which he practised but too much, although I can scarce blame it in him as a fault, as it proceeded from an over delicacy of Taste and not from a light headedness as was alleged, for he has no more of that about him than is natural to and becoming a French man.

Questions

There remain many unanswered questions about La Tour’s work and methods. Some are questions to which modern science may provide some answers but for others our information is adequate only to offer uncertain or incomplete replies – despite the evidence to be found in La Tour’s own correspondence (i.e. far more than we have for other pastellists). Where did he work? What lighting system did he use? How did he arrange his canvas or support his loose sheets for preparations? What sort of container did he hold his pastels in? Where did he obtain his materials? Which of the portraits were fixed, and by what methods? How long did each portrait take (“seven days” for Frémîn, v. supra, scarcely seems credible), over how many sittings, where? Is it safe to extrapolate from the single testimony of Belle de Zuylen? How much work could be done without the sitter present? What role did assistants play in the primary versions? Where and how were the replicas and copies made? What were the finances of his business? Between the much-quoted prices asked for a handful of specific works and the size of his fortune at death are a host of missing accounting details from overheads to the simplest of all questions – how many pastels did he produce?

Engravings

Unlike many of his contemporaries, La Tour seems to have had limited interest in popularising or making money through the systematic dissemination of engravings of his works, although the importance of several subjects (Voltaire, Rousseau in particular) ensured their popularity then and later, and the medium may well have assisted his early steps (v. supra) for Lépicié’s 1734 engraving of Richer de La Morlière and for prints of Fontenelle and the actor Thomassin; however Nicolas Tardieu did not engrave his work). But the variety of engravers employed (among them Aubert, Beauvarlet, Cathelin, Dupin, Flipart, Moitte, Petit, Surugue and Willie) suggest that no longer term business association was envisaged. Some were personal friends – for example, Georg Friedrich Schmidt, whose portrait La Tour made; he also made that of Gravelot, whose only contribution to the œuvre gravé was the ornaments for a print of Löwendal.

Copies; pupils

A good many repetitions of La Tour’s works were made in his lifetime: some are evidently autograph (and it by no means follows that the first version is the best): Salmon however correctly observed that La Tour only made one version of each stage of his preparations (copies, particularly of those in the Saint-Quentin collection, abound). La Tour himself reused his own compositions, and even facial features, for other sitters. Others may be contemporary

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69 A version was published in the Memoir, VI.1764, pp. 158ff. See TREATISES.

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copies by unrelated artists: at the Menus plaisirs, for example, between 1749 and 1751 a certain “Aubry peintre” made a number of pastels of members of the royal family (for prices between 288 and 300 livres each – AN O 3001), quite probably after La Tour’s models: he was probably Louis-François Aubry (q.v.). A substantial proportion however were probably made by pupils working under La Tour’s guidance (although we remain ignorant of exactly how this was organised: even as early as 1736 when Voltaire’s portrait was to be copied, we learn that Voltaire knew the copy was to be made by a female artist, who has not yet however been identified.

Unlike most pastellists La Tour evidently had a substantial studio, and the practices and names of those involved have yet to be fully uncovered. Numerous claims to have been his “pupil” require sceptical evaluation (and possibly indicate no more than having been granted the privilege of watching the master at work), although Ducreux’s claim to have been his “only pupil” cannot be correct (one suspects that Ducreux’s work lists contain a number of lost copies of La Tour portraits, as well perhaps as other commissions the master was unwilling to undertake himself). Among the pastellists he is supposed to have taught one can name also Anstauame, Labille-Guïard, J.-A.-M. Lemoine, Montjoie, Neilson, Read, J.-B. Restout, Mme Roslin, as well as obscure figures such as Mlle Allais, Damance and Tirman (qq.v.).

As to what each learned from La Tour there is limited evidence, but a memorandum from Garnier d’Isle to Le Normant de Tournehem of 10.VIII.1749 concerning the appointment of Jacques Neilson to run the basse lisse workshop at the Gobelins reveals not only that La Tour had taught him “le pastel où il réussit très-bien” but that he had acquired “la nuance et l’intelligence des couleurs et parfaitement bien le dessin.” To these suspects one might add the lengthy list of artists to whom La Tour bequeathed “leur portraits et miniatures” in his will (were these their original portraits, his portraits of them, or copies of his works?). Copyists such as Mlle Navarre (in pastel), Frédou (mostly in oil) and engravers such as Georg Friedrich Schmidt (qq.v.) must also have frequented his studio. Anne Féret, Mme Nivelon (1711–1786),70 who lived in Versailles, was sent La Tour’s pastels of the dauphin and dauphine for her to copy the heads for full-length portraits en pied in oil. Amateurs such as Belle de Zuylen, Mme de Charrière also visited, and Diderot also described watching him at work. Schmidt’s 1742 engraving of the artist’s autoportrait à l’œil de bœuf was evidently distributed to a number of the pastellist’s friends, as it was described watching him at work. Schmidt’s 1742 engraving of the artist’s autoportrait à l’œil de bœuf was evidently distributed to a number of the pastellist’s friends, as it was distributed to a number of the pastellist’s friends, as it was

The quality of the pastel copies by pupils has remained largely a matter of speculation. Montjoie, for instance, whose own independent work is of limited achievement, nevertheless is identified as the author of a copy of La Tour’s autoportrait given to the abbé Mangenot in 1755: that appears to be the pastel now in Amiens, which hitherto (until Jeffares 2019) was universally assumed to be autograph and widely believed to be the masterpiece exhibited in the salon of 1750. It is perhaps noteworthy that Montjoie was one of the three artists La Tour nominated in this 1768 will to divide his pastel materials and unframed studies. Montjoie would later exhibit La Tour pastels from his cabinet at the Salon de la Correspondance in 1787; perhaps they too were copies he had made.

Voiriot, not listed as a pupil, nevertheless made a number of lost copies of La Tour pastels which appeared in his parents’ estate inventory (1747: both were of pastels La Tour had exhibited in the salon of 1739, where Voiriot might have seen them), as well as a copy of the La Tour portrait of the dauphin commissioned for the “service du roi” in 1752 (150 livres; medium unspecified; Voiriot also copied a Nattier royal portrait for the same price); later he produced a surviving pastel copy of the Rousseau portrait, of considerable merit. That an established artist produced copies of La Tour’s pastels over a period of at least six years gives an indication of the depth of this industry, unique among eighteenth century pastellists.

We remain ill informed as to the exact process of replication before photography. Russell and others have given accounts of tracing procedures for glazed works, but whether these were used in practice is unclear. It should also be noted that repetitions were not always exactly to scale (e.g. La Tour’s Saint-Quentin version of the abbé Pommyer is approximately 90% of the primary version), while in other cases the correspondence is astonishingly accurate locally but results in misaligned parts (e.g. ear to elbow) on a global scale, indicating that they were made freehand.

Even pictures in the “fonds de l’artiste” at Saint-Quentin may not be immune from miscegenation with studio copies created in La Tour’s lifetime, and possibly students’ work at the École gratuite de dessin. In 1835 the conservateur at Saint-Quentin, Louis Lemal, who had introduced a system of seals to protect the La Tour pastels, was accused by a predecessor, Édouard Pingret, of having substituted copies of La Tour pastels for the originals, but the accusation was held to be without foundation – although René Le Clerc, in a notebook made c.1950 when he was conservateur at Saint-Quentin, listed a number of pictures he considered to be poor modern copies, substituted for stolen originals (he was particularly disturbed by the more vigorously worked faces such as Père Emmanuel). Fleury and Brière subsequently questioned four of the works in the collection. Three years later Pingret repeated the accusation, in relation to the portrait of Manelli, having seen an identical work in a Paris dealer’s – probably the copy Dréolle de Nodon recorded as belonging to Quentin DuTour around this time (see Saint-Quentin 2012, pp. 90). During the nineteenth century numerous copies of the Saint-Quentin pastels were made. Some were set pieces for the annual competitions at the École gratuite de dessin – for and Mme de Pompadour. The Cottin sale included an enamel of Saïd Pacha (Paris, Helle & Glomy, 27.xi.1752, Lot 634).

70 Her biography established in Jeffares 2020a.

71 Among those inventoried at his death (Guiffrey 1884, p. 168) were enamels of the king, queen, prince de Condé, duc and duchesse d’Orléans.
example, abbé Pommier was set in 1858 (registre des délibérations, 17.III.1858). A request to make copies by a young artist called Briatte led to an extended discussion of the system for permissions (registre des délibérations, 30.VIII.1877).

In a 1904 letter to Maurice Tourneux, Élie Fleury questioned the integrity of the collector Alphonse Mennecé de Barival (brother of the administrator of the École gratuite at Saint-Quentin) and challenged the authenticity of some of the pastels Saint-Quentin acquired from him. Later Fleury (1908) warned readers of copies by Adolphe Deligne and Jules Degrave, both directors of the École gratuite at Saint-Quentin, as well as by their pupils, Émile Queuin, Jules Chevreux and Charles Escot; artists such as Raphaël Bouquet and J. Wells Champney also produced high quality work during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Raymond Casez was less accomplished, while Dréolle de Nodon mentions an Auguste Williot by whom only oil landscapes are known), while numerous unidentified hands have produced fakes that are sometimes difficult to detect. (Mme Claude Latour, convicted in 1947 of faking paintings by Utrillo, claimed to be the great-great-granddaughter of the pastellist; but there is no evidence that she attempted to forge his work.)

Curiously no one (until here, in 2020) seems to have pointed the finger at the rather clumsy pastiche in Saint-Quentin (146-2659) with the maréchal de Saxe’s head stuck onto the marquis de Voyer’s body: this has been treated (as recently as 2004) as a genuine préparation for the Louvre pastel.

Others are sufficiently accomplished that they can appear superior to the autograph versions, and are only detectable with certainty when the construction and materials are examined. But given La Tour’s propensity to use non-standard supports such as cardboard instead of proper strainers, or to remove canvases from strainers to put into glass capsules, the physical evidence is not always as clear-cut as one might want.

The question of modern copies also arises more widely, particularly in relation to major names, from Carriera to John Russell. Accessibility to an original was key. Works in the great collections (notably the Louvre, Saint-Quentin and Dresden) were also set pieces for students, as occasionally revealed by stamps on the reverse of canvases.

**Frames**

Little is documented about La Tour’s frames (see Jeffares 2018). In the case of such a major artist, a good many frames were changed in the early years of the twentieth century when his work became fashionable and dealers sold his pastels as de luxe objects to extremely wealthy collectors who would not have been satisfied with the rather modest **cadres d’origine**. This may have been more of a problem for Perronneau’s frames. The few frames are stamped, and documents rarely survive identifying the framers: this was especially the case with pastels where frames were supplied by the artist. The few exceptions include several royal commissions handled by the Bâtiments du roi, including frames for La Tour’s portraits of the king, dauphin and dauphine by the sculptor Louis Maurisian. Pons 1987 noted that Maurisian submitted an invoice in 1748 for frames for portraits of Louis XV and Marie Leszczyńska, citing “le temps de Maurisian pour les dessins dont un par Mr de la Tour”, but the frames in the Louvre may not correspond to those described. In 1749 he made a limewood frame for the portrait of the new dauphin.

There is some evidence that La Tour kept frames ready for use: on 19.I.1786, the contents of his logement in the Louvre were auctioned off, and included “Pastels, Ustensiles de peintre, bordures dorées et cartes géographiques, le tout provenant du cabinet de M. de La Tour, peintre du Roi.” When La Tour made a réplique of his pastel of Rousseau to give to the writer, he paid for the frame and glass, expenditure which Rousseau thought it his duty to reimburse (letter to Le Nieps, 9.I.1763).

Diderot commenting on the abbé Lattaignant in the Salon de 1767 mentions its “petit cadre de bois noir”, and in relation to the pastels shown in 1769 mentions “Quatre chefs-d’œuvre renfermés dans un châssis de sapin, quatre Portraits”, implying a single frame for the four works. Most of the préparations in the artist’s atelier were described in his brother’s 1806 testament as in “cadres noirs”. This is confirmed by the inventory of the École gratuite de dessin at Saint-Quentin carried out on 24.IV.1815, reporting the larger pastels as in gilt frames, but ending “56 têtes d’études, 1753, p. 155f. The passage is discussed in Pons 1987, p. 43 and n.18. It anticipates to some degree Kant’s remark in Kritik der Urtheilskraft (1790, §14: Gesammelte Schriften, Berlin, 1913, v, p. 220): “Besteht aber der Zierath nicht selbst in der schönen Form, ist er wie die goldene Rahmen bloß, um durch seinen Reiz das Gemälde dem Beifall zu empfehlen, angebracht; so heißt er alsdann Schmuck und thut der ächten Schönheit Abbruch.”

![Dictionary of pastellists before 1800](www.pastellists.com) – all rights reserved

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with the Banque de France on 28–30.VIII.1939. The Hirsch family lost three La Tour pastels: Belle-Isle and his wife Marie Sallé was sent to Manod, while Duval appears to have remained in Trafalgar Square.83

Among less frequently noted conservation issues, a letter from Marie Fel to La Tour’s brother, dated 5.I.1785,84 refers to a report by the enamellist Pierre Pasquier concerning “les dangers, et le dommage que la fumée pourroit causer aux pastels de M. de La Tour”: it perhaps refers to those in his house at Chaillot, and invites the chevalier to visit and “faire fermer les écartemens du mur”.

IV. CRITICAL FORTUNE

The vogue for pastel

Although Vivien had provided all the necessary artistic ingredients, the great vogue for pastel only took hold some years after his success (notably the salon of 1704, where he exhibited two dozen pastels), when the Venetian pastellist with the Banque de France on 28–30.VIII.1939.
82 Thus the Hirsch family lost three La Tour pastels: Belle-Isle and his wife and an inconnu: see Meaux 2018. Similarly a pastel by Huet was taken from Georges Wildenstein’s vault in the Banque de France: see New York 2005a, no. 139. Arthur Veil-Picard’s Mlle de La Boissière (J.46.2926, now in the Louvre) was taken from vault 63 in the Banque de France; transferred to the Jeu de Paume on 29.X.1940 before being taken to Germany (erpproject.org database, consulted 2018).
83 See my ESSAY.
84 Reprinted in chronological table of La Tour DOCUMENTS.
Rosalba Carriera made her famous trip to Paris in 1720–21 and carried off the prizes, not by superior talent, but by winning over important patrons all the way up to the new king. No further technical developments were required: but there is no more striking example in the history of art of a medium becoming fashionable so suddenly. The call was made for French artists to emulate her – for reasons perfectly articulated sixty years before by the founder of French opera, Pierre Perrin, in the dedication to Colbert of his Recueil de paroles de musique.

En vertu Monseigneur, j'ose vous dire qu'il y va de la gloire du Roy et de la France de ne pas souffrir qu'une Nation, par tout ailleurs victorieuse, soit vaincue par les étrangers en la connaissance de ces deux Beaux-Arts, la Poesie et la Musique.

One of the immediate responses was by the painter Jean-Baptiste Van Loo, who, as Dandré-Bardon explained, presented to the Académie in 1722, along with a history painting—

aussi les portraits de Meudames de Prie et de Sabran qui lui avoient déjà fait dans le public, un honneur infini, autant par la variété, la ressemblance, l'ars qui règnent, que par la multitude des copies qui en furent répandues. Ces ouvrages au pastel étoient au pair des plus beaux que nous connussions alors en France dans ce genre. Nous voyons avec plaisir combien ce talent s'est perfectionné de nos jours. Preuve bien sensible, que le progrès du génie sont illimités et que la France se charge du soin d'en donner l'exemple à l'Univers et à la posterité!

Van Loo however quickly reverted to oil, leaving the scene to others – most notably to La Tour. Not long after his portrait of Voltaire, La Tour was commissioned by the président de Rieux, son of the famous financier who himself was the son of a minor painter, to produce a portrait in the presidency of Rieux shown at the 1745 Salon as “le triomphe de la peinture en pastel”. Generally the praise was lavish, with occasional reservations, as when Gautier-Dagoty 1753b commented “ce peintre n'a jamais rien produit de verve, il a le génie du technique, c'est un machiniste merveilleux”; Diderot hints at an emotional vacuum. His biblical rebuke to La Tour, “Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris”, can be read today uncritically. The full sentence was “Ce peintre n'a jamais rien produit de verve, il a le génie du technique, c'est un machiniste merveilleux”, but he had foolishly shown it to Louis XV, whose enthusiasm was not what La Tour hoped for; accordingly he tore it to pieces. (It is notable that this is the portrait Diderot mentions – in his Salon de 1767 – as having been shown in the famous confrontation between La Tour's self-portrait and Perronneau’s; later authors have all assumed it was the autoportrait au jabot shown in 1750.)

At the same encounter (7.VII.1748), Graffigny asked to see La Tour's large pastel of Mme de Pompadour, which had already (earlier than most researchers had known) become famous. La Tour told her that he had also destroyed that (“Il l’a encore brulé parce qu’il avoit donné un faux trait”), although it was of a size to have commanded a fee of 10,000 livres. Whether La Tour should be taken literally is unclear. The pastel now in the Louvre was not exhibited until 1755; it shows the addition of a new head on a separate sheet.

Diderot admired La Tour and his unrivalled ability to understand the mechanism of physiognomy and gaze; but his phrase, “machiniste merveilleux”, has been repeated uncritically. The full sentence was “Ce peintre n’a jamais rien produit de verve, il a le génie du technique, c’est un machiniste merveilleux”, Diderot hints at an emotional vacuum. His biblical rebuke to La Tour, “Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris”, can be read today on various levels.

Responses to La Tour at the salons

In each salon from 1738, La Tour was always the object of critical discussion, and almost always praised beyond his rivals. Mariette went on to describe the portrait of Duval de l’Épinoy shown at the 1745 Salon as “le triomphe de la peinture en pastel”. Generally the praise was lavish, with occasional reservations, as when Gautier-Dugot 1753b questioned the “affections de joye” of Manelli, its juxtaposition with the academicians and philosophers merely exacerbating the incongruity.

Some care is needed in reading these critiques, whose main value in some cases is the information they provide about lost pastels not described in the livret. For example, the abbé Le Blanc’s extravagant praise in the salon de 1747 was noted by abbé Gougenot (1748) cynically as having been “dictées autant par des principes de reconnaissance que d’écritoire”. Mariette went further: his annotation on his copy of Le Blanc 1747 implied that La Tour was rumoured to have bribed Le Blanc with his own portrait to induce him to attack La Font de Saint-Yenne’s Réflexions.

One widely overlooked salon critique, an anonymous letter in the Jugemens sur quelques ouvrages nouveaux, even alleged that a cabal of académiciens had formed; jealous of La Tour’s success, they had propagated the idea that pastel was an inferior medium.

Also overlooked until recently are the references to La Tour in the correspondence of Mme de Graffigny with her friend Devaux. Writing of the Salon de 1742 (which she visited with Nicolas Vennevault, q.v.), she picked out La Tour pastels as masterpieces, “surtout le sien, peint avec un chapeau à point d’Espagne, detroussé d’un côté, qui lui fait un ombre sur le visage. C’est un morceau parfait: je ne pouvois m’en arracher”. The anonymous critic in the Mercure picked out this “portrait inimitable de l’Auteur, dans le goût du Rimbrand”. Six years later she was horrified when she asked him about the piece: it had been intended for the Uffizi, she told her (this appears to be the only mention of this plausible commission; the pastel there purported to be La Tour is unconvincing), but he had foolishly shown it to Louis XV, whose enthusiasm was not what La Tour hoped for; accordingly he tore it to pieces. (It is notable that this is the portrait Diderot mentions – in his Salon de 1767 – as having been shown in the famous confrontation between La Tour’s self-portrait and Perronneau’s; later authors have all assumed it was the autograph au jabot shown in 1750.)


“Omitted from B&W and ignored in the subsequent literature, such as the discussion of Perronneau’s Rembrandtism in Arnoult 2014. Genesis 3:19 (echoed in Milton, Paradise lost, X.208), cited Salon de 1767 in relation to La Tour, but Diderot also used the phrase in the “Entretien entre d’Alembert et Diderot”, Œuvres complètes de Diderot, Paris, 1875, ii, pp. 105–21; it was popularised in secondary sources (e.g. Ratoiu de Limay 1946, p.136; Deyot 1904) deriving from Droïelle de Nodon’s Éloge. See also Ecclesiastes 12:6–8: “antequam rumpatur funis argenteus et recurrat virtus aurea et conteratur hydra super fontem et confringatur rota super cisternam/et revertatur pulvis in terram suam unde erat et spiritus readeat

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Updated 29 August 2020
Contemporary reputation

During his lifetime La Tour enjoyed an unequalled reputation (although curiously only the Académie d’Amiens elected him an honoraire). Already by 1742 his celebrity was such that the visiting Ottoman ambassador Mehmed Said Paşa (who had been portrayed by Coypel on his 1721 trip with his father) demanded a portrait by him (the report in the Mercure noted already the patience the sitter required to sit for La Tour). In a letter of 7.IX.1749, Daniel Wray wrote to his friend Philip Yorke to advise him on things to be done in Paris: “Call in too at Chardin’s, who paints little pieces of common-life, and upon Liotard (but he is the Colonel’s painter), admirable in crayons”, acknowledging however that they were more expensive than British artists like Pond. Several weeks later Wray added: “Give me leave to correct a mistake in my last letter. The Crayonnist whom I meant to commend (from Hogarth’s testimony) is La Tour. I confounded him with Liotard the Miniature-painter.” Among those who did were the Earl of Coventry and his bride, Maria Gunning, who stayed in Paris for at most three months in the summer of 1752, long enough for La Tour to paint both their portraits (but perhaps not long enough for the artist not to need to base the faces on his pastels of Maurice de Saxe and La Camargo – leading Franche 1906 to imply that the pastels were fake).

By 1762, when Allan Ramsay (q.v.) published his fictional Dialogue on taste, a La Tour portrait had become a byword in England for “vastly natural” resemblance:94

I have reason to be convinced by a thousand experiments, that the leading principle of criticism in poetry and painting, and that of all the learned principles which is the most unexceptionably true, is known to the lowest and most illiterate of people. Your Lordship has only to hide yourself behind the screen in your drawing-room, and order Mrs. Hannah to bring in one of your tenant’s daughters, and I will venture to lay a wager that she shall be struck with your picture by La Tour, and no less with the view of your seat by Lam bert, and shall, fifty to one, express her approbation by saying, they are vastly natural.

It is perhaps surprising that relatively few English Grand Tourists stopped to have their portraits painted by him: apart from the Coventrys and Henry Dawkins, perhaps Lady Hervey (n.40.1801). But war between the countries was a barrier during much of La Tour’s career.

During his 1753 visit to Paris, the young Stanisław Poniatowski was it seems one of many anxious to visit the artist: “Le peintre en pastel, La Tour, tout difficile qu’il est, m’avait accordé l’entrée dans son atelier.”95 In 1752 the marquis d’Argens was able to write “nous possédons aujourd’hui un artiste, qui est infiniment supérieur dans l’art de peindre au Pastel, à tous les peintres qui l’ont précédé, & qui vivent aujourd’hui; c’est le célèbre la Tour, dont les portraits ont la force & la vérité de ceux de Vandeick.”

In contrast to his rivals, even those of the stature of Perronneau and Liotard, La Tour was able to remain in Paris virtually throughout his career. (The prince de Ligne exaggerated his powers of persuasion when he wrote to Voltaire on 1.vi.1766 “J’ai persuadé, il y a quelques jours à sa Cour, et de nous la faire, par un portrait meilleur que tous les autres.”)

But by the end of his life, La Tour’s work had lost its dominance. When d’Alembert died (1783), his posthumous inventory (carried out with Watelet in attendance) valued the famous La Tour portrait of him together with another picture, also unattributed, at just 20 livres, while a large pastel of Friedrich der Große (perhaps by Cunningham) was valued at 120 livres; it, and other portraits (such as the Mlle Lusurier oil), were specifically bequeathed in d’Alembert’s will, but the La Tour was not mentioned explicitly and fell into the residual estate.

Posthumous reputation

La Tour’s reputation suffered after his death, except perhaps in his native city of Saint-Quentin (La Tour is to that town what Shakespeare is to Stratford-upon-Avon). Although the École gratuite de dessin fell into desuetude during the Revolution, the inhabitants launched a petition in 1801 to reestablish it, as happened in 1805; the chevalier Coupé de Saint-Donat published an obituary in the Journal des arts. But elsewhere neglect was profound: when some of the pastels from La Tour’s studio were offered for sale in 1810 after his brother’s death, the prices achieved were disisory (for details of this confused sale and his brother’s previous attempts to dispose of the collection, v. DOCUMENTS).

Lecarpentier included La Tour in his Galeries des peintres célèbres, 1821, despite his disapproval of the medium of pastel; while Jarry de Maney 1841 included him in his dictionary of philanthropists, considering that the pastellist “ne peut être compté parmi les grands peintres français.” Yet his importance was not lost on artists: Gérard is reputed to have told the miniaturist Auguste-Joseph Carrier, on seeing a La Tour préparation, “On nous pilerait tous dans un mortier, Gros, Girodet, Guérin & moi, tous les G, qu’on ne tirerait pas de nous un morceau comme celui-ci.” (Blanc 1865).

When eleven préparations, including portraits of Voltaire, Rousseau and Mme de Pompadour, were offered to the Louvre in 1835, Alexis-Nicolas Péringon (1785–1864), commissaire expert des Musées royaux, reported (Archives des musées nationaux) that they were difficult to value as pastel; while Jarry de Mancy 1841 included him in his dictionary of pastellists before 1800, Pierre-Louis-Alexis Duliège (nephew of La Tour’s executor, abbé Duliège; his son Emilien left a group of pastels to his inventory (carried out with Watelet in attendance) valued the famous La Tour portrait of him together with another picture, also unattributed, at just 20 livres, while a large pastel of Friedrich der Große (perhaps by Cunningham) was valued at 120 livres; it, and other portraits (such as the Mlle Lusurier oil), were specifically bequeathed in d’Alembert’s will, but the La Tour was not mentioned explicitly and fell into the residual estate.

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commented on three pastels by La Tour offered by the marquise de Ferrières, that they had “beaucoup de mérite comme tous ceux de Latour, mais ce genre de peinture étant peu en faveur dans ce moment”, the value of all three was at most Fr150–200. Nor was this view confined to the saleroom: in a review of marine paintings in the 1836 salon, an artist’s obscurity was blamed on his choice of medium, just as had happened to La Tour, “dont quelques beaux pastels on été exhumés des greniers du Louvre, où la moisissure avait épargné Mme de Pompadout e et quelques autres, pour l’ornement du musée historique de Versailles.”97

With the help of the Goncourts and other enthusiasts for the dix-huitième, La Tour’s importance was reestablished by the end of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that a key role in the reevaluation of the ancien régime pastel was played by the collection in the Louvre, which has always been dominated by La Tour. Originally a few pastels were interspersed with other pictures in the Grand galerie, but an arrangement which persisted into the twentieth century seems to have been in place from the reorganisation98 of 1834, the Grande salle des pastels being no. 14 of the salles des dessins, on the first floor of the northern side of the Cour carrée.99

This process commenced in the middle of the century, with enthusiastic descriptions of the pastels in the Louvre by Arsène Houssaye (1849), Julien de La Roche noire (1852), Théophile Gautier (1855), the Goncourts (1867) and Champfleury (1853), all of which emphasised the dominance of La Tour and the portrait of Mme de Pompadour in particular (the Louvre had a dozen more La Tours from the earliest times).

In 1837 the musée de Saint-Quentin opened, and started to exhibit the collection of La Tour pastels left to the École de dessin. It was located in the former Fervaques church in Saint-Quentin, a multipurpose space which housed the town library, the Société acadénique, the chambre des notaires etc.100 In 1849 an inventory was taken, published in catalogues issued from 1856 (many of the sheets still bear the paraph “Mt” presumably of Félix Mennecet, the school’s administrator). The entry in Gulhermy’s Description des localités de la France for Saint-Quentin, which he visited in 1855 records that the sale of the museum “renferme plus de cent portraits au pastel de la main de Latour.”101 Visits to Saint-Quentin were noted by artists such as Gauguin, Matisse and Mary Cassatt and writers including Maurice Barrès and Anatole France. The young art historian Anatole de Montaiglon wrote an impassioned letter to his friend Robert Wheaton from Saint-Quentin in 1845.102 Degas copied La Tour; Jacques Doucet is said to have been inspired to collect eighteenth century pastels by seeing some La Tour heads at Degass’s. For Matisse, “les deux plus grands portraitistes sont Rembrandt et La Tour, pour la vérité. Les autres, c’est toujours un peu du théâtre.”

Among the numerous great collectors of pastels of this era, Camille Grout and Jacques Doucet stand out. The watercolours made by Karbowski in 1905 to record the celebrated collection of Jacques Doucet in the rue Spontini (later broken up at auction103 in 1912) show us the famous couturier’s approach; as figs. 1 and 2 reveal, pastels by La Tour were again hung with paintings by Chardin and Reynolds.104

Since the revival of interest in pastel, the literature has burgeoned, with innumerable articles in French journals (among many examples, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, Le Gaulois, 7.vi.1919: “Il n’y a pas…un peintre qui soit plus foncièrement français que Maurice-Quentin de La Tour”, arguing for the supremacy of La Tour over Perronneau notwithstanding the attempt to prove otherwise in the Cent pastels exhibition of 1908) and tributes ranging from serious scholarship to ephemera such as Arsène Houssaye’s plays and even several novels inspired by La Tour (from Pastel vivant, by Paul Flot, 1904, to Marquise au portrait, by Barbara Lecompte, 2014). Typical perhaps is a piece by Ouida (1862) based on a story told by the La Tour pastel on her wall (evidently modelled on the Marie Fel in Saint-Quentin): La Tour’s reputation for psychological enquiry lends itself to this once popular genre. Henri Lavedan’s Les Portraits enchantés (1918) even served a political role, depicting an imbecile Kaiser encountering the La Tour portraits at Saint-Quentin.

Ratouis de Limay, responding to Diderot’s criticism, admits that he excelled at capturing the outer life of his subjects, their “mondanité” rather than their thoughts; others will grant that La Tour made his sitters appear to be talking, or just about to do so. This trope is found also in Hourticq’s 1943 text in an exhibition catalogue, while Starobinski cleverly contrasted this with Perronneau’s

98 See Salmon 2018, p. 36 (and Jeffares 2018g for further comments on pastels in the Louvre). For other accounts of the hang of pastels in the Louvre at earlier stages, see Guérin 1715 and Dezallier d’Argenville 1781. Although Reiset 1869 provides the name of some of the artists whose pastels hung in various rooms, only O’Shea 1874 gives specific pastels for each.
99 The position is now occupied by room 52 of the Napoléon III apartments.
100 Alexandre-Eusèbe Poquet, Histoire d’abbaye de Fervaques à Saint-Quentin, Paris, 1878, p. 53.
101 Manuscript, BnF, NAf 6108, tom. XV, f° 303 verso. Among the historical portraits he noted was the portrait of the dauphine with her son, the due de Bourgogne, whom he confused with the earlier generation of the Grand Dauphin’s wife and son.
102 Manuscript, Morgan Library (there is an incomplete translation in Memoir of Robert Wheaton, 1854, pp. 45ff); for text, see CRITICAL FORTUNE; where there are references for the other passages cited too.
sitters, who appear to be listening to music. Hourticq also took up the comparison with Perronneau, whom he acknowledged as a more elaborate colourist, while La Tour’s strength was in capturing “la tension de la pensée”; ultimately “de beaux rubans et des dentelles ne peuvent nous intéresser autant qu’une pensée en pleine action.” There remains a group of influential art historians, from Roberto Longhi on, who prefer Perronneau to La Tour (e.g. Pierre Rosenberg, in 2007: “Je suis de ceux qui préfèrent les pastels de Perronneau à ceux de Maurice Quentin de La Tour”), hinting that there is something stilted, tricky or even false about La Tour; there are others no doubt who find this a fashionable view to espouse.

What then are we to make of La Tour? Without accepting Brieger’s assessment of La Tour as the finest French painter, one recognises in him the portraitist who brought the most virtuosity, the most verve (pace Diderot) to the interpretation of human physiognomy. Michael Levey (1993) was in no doubt about the importance of his portraits, “virtuoso achievements…which retain an impact of vivacity and vitality, unequalled except by the busts of Lemoyne.”

After a period of intense study, how do we answer Diderot’s essential question: “Obtiendrait-on d’une étude opiénière et longue le mérite de La Tour?” As we sift through pages of contemporary salon critiques, detailed enquiries into sitters’ biographies and social standing, followed by acres what is termed “critical fortune”, are we any the wiser? Perhaps to some extent what is absent tells us as much. As one searches through the broadest possible literature, the surprise is not that there is so much discussion of La Tour in certain (mostly French) circles, but that he doesn’t always make it into the very top tier, even of portraitists. No history of world culture would omit Chardin, Fragonard or David – but many mention La Tour only as a footnote if at all. This is not the place he would have expected for himself, nor that which his contemporaries would have anticipated.

To some degree this can be attributed to the disregard in which portraiture, and pastel in particular, is regarded in most academic spheres, a topic I have discussed elsewhere (v. PROLEGOMENA). That is the only way in which one can explain the nearly complete omission of his name from the 2014 colloquium proceedings Delicious decadence: the rediscovery of French eighteenth century painting in the nineteenth century – a work devoted to the legacy of the Goncourt (while Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard, Greuze, Watteau and even Lancret appear dozens of times), but that isn’t a complete explanation. Even the competitions with his best rivals, which seemed settled in his favour so decisively in his lifetime, are no longer agreed: if it is easier (for some) to admire La Tour than Perronneau, it is easier (for others) to love Perronneau than La Tour. And the charlatanry that disqualified Liotard from serious consideration in the Paris of the mid-eighteenth century is no obstacle to the pedestal he now occupies in many serious circles. This of course is to accept the tyranny art history imposes of hierarchies and rankings, with the consequent legitimisation of oblivion for the also-rans. Again I have written elsewhere about the narrow-mindedness of this approach which closes our minds to the astonishing depth of talent among the pastellists in ancien régime Paris.

But there are other factors which have worked against La Tour, some perhaps in ways that might not have been anticipated. He published nothing. He barely travelled. Until relatively recently, no substantial body of his work has been visible in public collections outside Paris and Saint-Quentin (and being in pastel not always on view). The fog of anecdotes, much of which I argue was at least heavily embellished by his own vanity, has been at best a diversion from an intense study of the portraits themselves. Admirable though his quest for perfection may have been, it has resulted in a rather smaller œuvre than might have been expected, and this has become submerged under the masses of versions and copies that encumber a catalogue that has any pretension to completeness.

La Tour’s ability to create very powerful portrait imagery – sufficient to allow weaker versions to be taken for originals – is the trap that has clouded our assessment of his genius. For ultimately he is to be judged not by his intellectual pretensions, his eccentricities, his philanthropy nor even his reputation or influence as an artist, but by his ability to put look and to think, and make us reflect on the magnificence of portraiture as a testament of human interaction at its most sensory.

Prices since 1800

Much of the discussion about collecting and taste in the period after 1800 can be found reflected in the prices achieved by pastels at auction. This is discussed in more detail and in a broader context in §XIII of the PROLEGOMENA.

Prices for pastels collapsed at the end of the eighteenth century. After the death of La Tour’s brother in 1807 it proved practically impossible to sell his pastels at auction106 over the next few years – just as Pérignon had indicated: Rousseau was bought in at 30 francs against an estimate of 150 francs. The explanation of the poor result reported to the École gratuite de dessin (the vendors) was that “la nature des tableaux au pastel avait été un obstacle insurmontable une plus haute elevation des prix. Ces tableaux sont actuellement également dédaignés par le marchand et par l’amateur.” The three La Tour pastels in the 1867 Laperlier sale reached sums between 200 and 225 francs. The first real signs of revival in prices were in the Mme Denain sale (Paris, 6–7.IV.1893), where La Tour’s Mlle Sallé reached Fr18,000.

Four years later Mme Rouillé achieved Fr31,550, reaching Fr365,000 in the Bardac sale in 1920 and, in 1926, Fr1 million (equivalent today to over £2 million in inflation-adjusted money). La Tour’s value was already well known by 1896, when General Pitt-Rivers asked for information about prices of a pastel attributed to him; he was told “this is very valuable because De La Tour is quoted very well in Paris – about a thousand pounds.”107

105 The only mention (p. 147, passed over for the index) is in an article in the Daily Telegraph of 23.VI.1900, noting the absence from the newly opened Wallace Collection of La Tour, “the greatest of the pastellists”.

106 See the Régistre des deliberations de l’École gratuite de dessin de Saint-Quentin in DOCUMENTATION, 11.V.1810; inaccurate summaries in Diderot) to the interpretation

107 By M. Cavini, of 24 King Street, St James’s, enclosed with letter of Sir Thomas Grove, 11.X.1896. The pastel from the Pitt-Rivers collection may in fact have been the Perronneau once identified as of M. Miron.
As noted above other La Tour pastels achieved high relative prices at the same time. The splendid La Tour Duval de l’Épinoÿ was not immediately recognised when it was originally sold locally in Beaumont-la-Ronce, 26–28.IV.1903, Fr5210; but it was acquired soon after by Jacques Doucet for Fr120,000. In the Doucet sale in 1912, it sold for Fr600,000 (equivalent today to nearly £3 million), double the estimate, and reported at the time as the highest price ever paid for a pastel. (Its subsequent purchase by Calouste Gulbenkian was for an even higher sum.) Writing in the *Burlington magazine*, Robert Dell, its first editor, revealed typically British fury:

Is it in accordance with common sense that a masterpiece by Fragonard [le songe du mendiant] should fetch 137,500 francs, and a masterpiece by Latour, who can hardly be counted the equal of Fragonard, 660,000? The truth is that prices have no sort of relation to artistic value.

Prices relative to other pictures reached a zenith in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when works by La Tour fetched prices comparable with canvases of Fragonard or Watteau, and in excess of fine paintings by Rembrandt or Chardin.

Another spectacular price was the £48,000 (Fr1.2 million at the time) agreed by Nathan Wildenstein with the Greek shipowner Nicolas Ambatielos for La Tour’s président de Rieux in 1919 (Clemenceau saw it earlier that year, and said “c’est le plus beau pastel que j’ai vu…il devrait rester en France”); however, Ambatielos became bankrupt before payment was made, and the picture returned to Wildenstein where it remained until Maurice de Rothschild bought it for an undisclosed sum in 1930. It was sold to the Getty in 1994, also for an undisclosed sum.

By 1959 even La Tour’s preparations were saleable (at the Chrysler-Foy sale one sold for $11,000).

Today La Tour remains in demand, although his rival Liotard sometimes outpaces him in the saleroom. And neither achieves the prices seen for old master oil paintings, let alone contemporary art. Perhaps Robert Dell was right.

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108 See ESSAYS, Duval where we estimate that the apportioned 1943 purchase price equates to some £4 million in modern money.

109 The appendix in Gimpel 1963 includes paintings such as Fragonard’s *Le Billet doux* (Fr420,000 at the Cronier sale in 1905, $250,000 in 1919); Watteau’s *Deux cousins* (Fr220,000); and Rembrandt’s *Titus* ($40,000 in 1919).
General references etc.

Monographic exhibitions

La Tour 1917, in Manchege 1917


La Tour 1981: Pastels de Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, Paris, musée du Louvre, cabinet des dessins [no cat.]


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Salon critiques: 1738, 1739, 1741, 1742, 1745, 1746, 1747, 1748, 1751, 1753, 1755, 1757, 1759, 1761, 1763, 1767, 1769, 1771, 1773

Genealogies La Tour, Deschamps, Garbe, Havart, Joret, Masse