

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

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La Rivière, près de Pontarlier 19.III.1716 – Paris
3.XII.1782

Mécanicien du roi and inventor. He is frequently confused with, or stated to be the younger brother of, Louis-Adam Lorient, de l'Académie d'architecture. Of humble origins in a village near Pontarlier, he was apprenticed there, and soon made his earliest invention: a new method of making tin-plate. Paris offered more scope for his skills, and he arrived c.1745 (he was still in La Rivière in 16.XII.1743 when he was a witness at his brother's marriage). A clever loom for making ribbons was the subject of an injunction obtained by the ribbon-makers of Lyon, while for the comte de Caylus he developed a method of silvering mirrors.

Lorient's celebrated method of fixing pastel was initially revealed to the marquis de Marigny. His process was advertised in the *Annales, affiches et avis divers* for 3.X.1753 (from château des Tuilleries, avant cour des Princes); it was approved by the Académie a few days later, and certified again 1.XII.1753 (when examples including Carriera's pastels demonstrated the process's ability to treat mould and revive colour). These reports also appeared in the *Mercur de France*, .XII.1753, pp. 162f; .I.1754, pp. 156–58, the second article also gave his prices for different sized pastels: these ranged from 6 livres for the smallest (toile de 6) to 50 livres for the largest (toile de 50). The price for one of the commoner portraits sizes, toile de 15 or 65x54 cm, was 15 livres, and the work would be done within 8 days. By 1761, when a substantially similar notice appeared in *L'Avant-Coureur*, 2.III.1761, pp. 135–37), a refinement to the pricing structure included a distinction between drawings "à plusieurs crayons" (1 livres) or those using only a single drayon (10 sols each).

On the recommendation of Marigny, Lorient was awarded a pension of 1000 livres on condition that the process remain secret (decision of 27.X.1754). The process was made famous at the Salon of 1763 by Valade's portrait of the inventor, half of which was fixed by his undetectable method.

An advertisement in the *Annales, affiches...de l'Orléanois*, 12.VI.1772 informs us that—

M. Lorient, Ingénieur – Mécanicien, Pensionnaire du Roi, Inventeur du secret de fixer la peinture au pastel, approuvé par l'Académie, & annoncé au Public dès l'année 1753, étant invité par des Curieux & Amateurs de cette Ville, de vouloir s'y arrêter en allant à Menars pour fixer nombre de tableaux qui méritent de passer à Postérité, donne avis qu'il sera à Orléans Dimanche prochain 14 Juin, où ceux qui auront des tableaux au pastel, & même des dessins à faire fixer, pourront les faire remettre chez M. Laperche, Marchand Bonnetier, rue Royale.

Le secret du Sr. Lorient réunit au mérite de son utilité particulière celui d'ôter les taches de moisissure & de faire revivre les couleurs qui ont changé, comme le bleu qui a noirci, le rouge qui a perdu sa vivacité, &c. tellement qu'il les rend, avec leurs coloris, aussi frais que si l'ouvrage sortoit de la main du Peintre, & sans rien altérer de ce certain duvet qui fait le mérite de ce genre de Peinture, au point qu'il est impossible de distinguer un tableau fixé d'avec un qui ne le seroit pas; & ainsi que la dépence à laquelle on croitroit s'exposer ne retienne pas les Personnes qui desireroient profiter de ce moment de loisir & de

bonne volonté dudit Sr. Lorient, la table suivante indiquera ce que chaque objet pourra coûter.

	Hauteur.	Largeur.	Prix.
Pour une toile de 4 à	12 pouces sur	9 pouces,	4 liv.
Une toile de 6	15 p.	12 p.	6 liv.
Une toile de 8	17 p.	14 p.	8 liv.
Une toile de 10	19 p.	17 p.	10 liv.
Une toile de 12	22 p.	18 p.	12 liv.
Une toile de 15	24 p.	20 p.	15 liv.
Une toile de 20	27 p.	22 p.	20 liv.

Presumably one of those curieux was the connoisseur Charles Le Normant du Coudray (1712–1789): it was evidently on this visit that Lorient fixed Perronneau's portrait of him (23.VI.1772, according to the owner's inscription on the back). He followed this up on 10.VII.1772—

M. Lorient, de l'Académie des Sciences, n'ayant pas eu le temps de fixer tous les portraits au pastel qui lui ont été présentés, donne avis qu'il se rendra à Orléans sur la fin de cette semaine; on peut juger actuellement que l'on a des épreuves sous les yeux, que son secret bien loin d'altérer les couleurs, ne fait qu'en relever l'éclat. Son second séjour dans cette Ville, qui sera de peu de durée, est pour satisfaire les personnes qui n'ont pas pu profiter, pour leur tableaux, de son talent.

Soon after, Mme Laperche (*q.n.*) or her relative, M. Leprince, stole the secret and offered it at half the price (*Affiches*, 18.IX.1772).

Among the numerous inventions of which Pierre Patte, architect to the Herzog von Zweibrücken, provided a lengthy description in a letter to the *Mercur de France* in 1778 is the hydraulic machine of which Lorient presented models to the Académie des sciences in 1760 (its approbation was recorded in a resolution of 5.IX.1761) and 1763, prior to constructing the working machine for Marigny at Ménars in 1771. The model was preserved in Lorient's cabinet, and is quite probably that shown in the pastel by Valade (*q.n.*) now in Saint-Quentin.

This picture by 1908 had descended to Auguste Pellechet, great-great-grandson of the inventor Jean-Antoine Pellechet (*q.n.*), the brother of Lorient's first wife, Anne-Marie Pellechet (her marriage to Lorient took place in Courtemaîche, Jura, 2.X.1746). Lorient's relationship with this family was close (much later, in 1777, he was godfather to his wife's great-nephew). Pellechet's expertise as inspecteur des travaux en ciment des maisons royales no doubt contributed to Lorient's invention of a waterproof cement known as *mortier Lorient*, with various uses, including the repair of broken statues, and it is unlikely that the Pellechet and Lorient pastel procedures were developed independently or without an awareness of the chemistry of solidification of powdery substances.

Lorient's expertise brought him to the attention of Joseph Paris Duverney, investor in the lead mining operations in Brittany for which the concessionaire were the widow and son of the armateur Noël Danycan de l'Épine. Lorient invented some eight different machines to improve the mine, including a hydraulic hammer he devised for the extraction of lead ore. However the requirements for frequent maintenance interrupted production and led to protracted litigation with Duverney, but

Pellechet's daughter married Danycan fils, and would later be involved with the promotion of Pellechet's pastels.

Somewhat later Lorient was engaged by Marigny to work at Ménars, but, in 1767, had to interrupt this work to develop the mechanical "flying table" for the Trianon (which allowed the royal party to be served without the intrusion of servants).

By 1779 Lorient agreed with Marigny's successor at the Bâtiments du roi, comte d'Angiviller, to publish his pastel secret, and (26.XI.1779): he wrote a memoir which the Académie had printed in 600 copies, of which 200 were for Lorient (*Procès-Verbaux*, 5.II.–29.IV.1780). Lorient's *L'Art de fixer la Peinture au Pastel* was on sale in the colonades du Louvre (Roze de Chantoiseau 1782–92, p. 58), and it was reprinted in scientific journals (e.g. *Observations et mémoires sur la physique...*, XV, .I.1780, pp. 448ff). Lorient had a logement in the Louvre (granted 7.III.1770: no. 7, between Montucla, censeur royal and premier commis des Bâtiments du roi, and La Tour), where Anna Rajeczka, later Mme Gault de Saint-Germain (*q.n.*), stayed with his widow (née Marie-Thérèse Gilles: she must have married Lorient just before his death, as his first wife was buried at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois 11.IV.1781) in 1783 before the apartment was reassigned to Montucla (who, as censor, had previously approved for publication Lorient's 1774 treatise on waterproof cement). After Lorient's death his son Claude-Antoine sold the cabinet de machines to the crown for a pension of 700 livres, later converted into an annuity (decree of 11 Floréal, an II).

Bibliography

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