

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

PETERS, Johann Anton de

Köln 16.I.1725–6.X.1795

Anton Peters (Jean-Antoine de Péters, Peeters) was the son of a German writing master and miniaturist. Following the visit of a French artist in 1744, he moved to Paris. In 1756 he married the daughter of a former avocat aux conseils du roi, Jean Gouel de Villebrune, each side bringing a dowry of 10,000 livres; he was then described as peintre ordinaire du prince Charles de Lorraine. (The same title is used when he attended the funeral of the young painter Pierre-Charles Mettay or Le Mettais (1728–1759) at Saint-Roch, 30.III.1759, and again when he rented a house in Paris in 1761.) Élisabeth Gouel de Villebrune was herself a miniaturist; her sister Marianne, Mme du Noblet (*q.v.* *s.v.* Villebrune) was a pastelist. Peters was apparently ennobled by 1761 (earlier than reported elsewhere: the “de” appears in a lease of a house in rue du Hasard, 14.IV.1761, and later legal documents add “ecuyer”), but it is not obvious why or by whom.

Peters became a member of the Académie de Saint-Luc in 16.X.1756 (already at the rue du Hasard, where he remained until at least 1787), exhibiting miniatures and drawings there in 1762. After its dissolution in 1776, together with the painter Antoine de Marcey de Ghuy he organised exhibitions at the Colisée which were quickly suppressed. During Christian VII’s visit to Paris in 1768, de Peters was commissioned to make two portraits of the king for 1440 livres, as well as another portrait for the duc de Duras (1200 livres) and 240 livres for a copy for comte Holck (Ayres 2022, p. 162, erroneously as by William Peters; corrected, letter in *Burlington magazine*, .VIII.2023, p. 816); the medium is unspecified, and may have been miniature. In the *Almanach des peintres* of 1776 he is described as “Peintre du roi de Danemark, peint supérieurement la miniature”, and he is also listed among the private collectors as having an excellent collection of paintings, drawings and prints, including a fine painting by Rembrandt. A sale took place in Paris (Remy, Basan, 9.III.1779 & seq.); this included two Boucher pastels. De Peters again described himself as peintre du prince Charles de Lorraine, rue du Hazard-Richelieu, in his submission to the 1779 Salon de la Correspondance (where he continued to exhibit until 1787). In 1789 he altered this to “peintre de S.M. le roi de Danemark”. A law student called Champelle published an acrostic celebrating the name of Peters in the *Année littéraire* of 27.III.1787.

Peters was also active in promoting and publishing music, establishing the Bureau d’abonnement musical in collaboration with an Italian violinist, Jean-Baptiste Miroglio; he was also connected with Glück in Paris.

A versatile artist, he was associated with a group of German followers of Greuze in Paris, among them Johann Georg Wille (who thought his friend talented, but too lazy to realize his full potential), Freudeberg, Kraus and Ziesenis. Réau, Ratouis de Limay and others describe him as “one of Greuze’s best pupils”, but beyond influence there is no evidence of any formal relationship.

Most of de Peters’s work seems to be in watercolour, chalk or miniature. His method is discussed in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres et des arts*, 20.IV.1779, p. 75:

Une nourrice habillée à la manière cauchoise, assise, & ayant sur ses genoux son nourrisson, qui tient de ses deux mains un collier de perles dont il agace son père nourricier, qui joue avec lui. Par M. de Peters, peintre, rue du Hasard.

Ce tableau a fait sensation par sa composition, la justesse du dessin, la couleur agréable & vigoureuse, & l’expression des caractères. Il est peint en *mixte aquarelle*, & porte 23 pouces de haut sur 18 de large.

L’auteur a inventé ce genre de peinture, qui réunit les avantages de la peinture à l’huile, la fraîcheur du pastel & le fini de la miniature, que l’on fera connoître incessamment d’une manière particulière.

A longer discussion of his work in various media appears in the edition of the same journal, 31.VIII.1779, p. 228.

A group of a dozen studies in Köln, mainly of female heads, executed with touches of pastel, are not reproduced here; nor are other trois crayons drawings which have been described as pastels. Two conventional pastel portraits of the artist himself and his wife appeared at auction in 1995 as by him: the discrepancy with the technique of the rest of his work raises doubt about the attribution: they might perhaps be by the artist’s friend, Alexis Loir, who made another (apparently earlier) portrait of de Peters in trois crayons.

A print entitled *L’Amour maternelle*, engraved by Chevillet after a wash drawing by Peters, is erroneously said to depict the dauphin Louis-Joseph (1781–1789) at the breast of his wet-nurse Mme Poirine but probably predates his birth. The subject matter is closely related to a drawing with pastel of a couple with an infant. The ages of the sitters make it unlikely that this is the artist, his wife and one of their four known children, of whom only one is subsequently recorded: Anne Elisabeth Philippine (c.1769–1809), who married Louis Moreau Lislet in 1789.

Monographic exhibitions

Peters 1971: *Anton de Peters. Ein Kölner Maler des Rokoko*, Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1971

Peters 1981: *Johann Anton de Peters. Ein Kölner Maler des 18. Jahrhunderts in Paris*, Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 12.VI.–9.VIII.1981. Cat. Götz Czymmek

Bibliography

AN MC ET/LXXV/667, 14.IV.1761 [bail de maison]; Bellier de La Chavignerie & Auvray; Bénézit; Chatelus 1991, pp. 156f, 219; G. Czymmek, H. Robels & B. Vogelsang, *Johann Anton Peters, ein Kölner Maler des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Köln. 1981; Darmstadt 1914; Fortlage 1910; Guichard 2008; Guiffrey 1915; Herluison 1873, *s.v.* Mettay; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; May 1942; Ratouis de Limay 1946; Réau 1922; Sanchez 2004; Voreaux 1998; Wille 1857

Salon critiques

Nouvelles de la république des lettres et des arts, 18.V.1779, p. 107:

Une tête de vestale peinte au pastel, par M. de Péters, peintre du prince Charles de Lorraine, rue du Hazard

Richelieu. Ce nouvel ouvrage de cet artiste distingué, annonce avec le même succès que ses autres tableaux exposés jusqu’à cette heure, la fécondité & la variété de ses talents. Dix-huit pouces de haut sur quinze de large.

Pastels

J.5836.101 AUTO PORTRAIT; & pendant: J.5836.102 épouse (∞ 1756), née Marie-Élisabeth Gouel de Villebrune (1732–1785) en habit de bal, pstl, 44x35 (Paris, Couturier-de Nicolay, 13.XII.1995, Lot 23/24 repr., est. F25–30,000/20–25,000, F38,000/30,000. Köln, Lempertz, 17.XI.2001, Lot 1109 repr.) [?attr.; cf. Loir] Φα



J.5836.105 Garçon, pstl, cr./ppr, 22.1x15.8 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 447). Lit.: May 1942, repr.; Peters 1981, no. 74, repr. p. 66 Φ



J.5836.107 Buste d’un beau vieillard à longue barbe, tête chauve, pstl, 24.3x37.9 (du

Charteaux & al.; Paris, Remy, 2.v.1791 & seq., Lot 322, b/i)

J.5836.108 Buste d'un beau vieillard à longue barbe, pstl, 48.7x37.9 (du Charteaux & al.; Paris, Remy, 2.v.1791 & seq., Lot 323, withdrawn)

J.5836.109 Buste d'homme, pstl (du Charteaux & al.; Paris, Remy, 2.v.1791 & seq., Lot 324, withdrawn)

J.5836.111 Tête de vestale, pstl, 48.6x40.5, Salon de la Correspondance, .v.1779

J.5836.111 Tête d'expression représentant une vestale, pstl, Salon de la Correspondance, .II.1783

J.5836.112 Buste de vestale, pstl, 48.7x40.6 (Paris, Paillet, 8.v.1789 & seq., Lot 8)

J.5836.113 Lady in blue and white drapery, pstl, 63.5x47, s Peters (Sir Theodore Hope & al.; London, Christie's, 13.vi.1927, Lot 2). Attr. M. W. Peters [?]; new attr., ?] φα



Jeune femme jouant de la harpe (Monaco, Sotheby's, 22.II.1986, Lot 22 repr., attr., inconnue), v. Guérin, *Mme de Genlis*

J.5836.116 Après le bain, pstl, 55x44.5, ov. (London, Sotheby's, 11.XII.2002, Lot 156 repr., attr., est. £2–3000) [?attr.; cf. a/r Lavreince] φα



Photo courtesy Sotheby's

J.5836.119 ~version, pstl, 52x43 ov. (Bergerac, Hôtel des ventes du Périgord, 26.VII.2008, repr., Éc. fr. XVIII^e, est. €700–800. Neuilly, Aguttes, 12.III.2019, Lot 280 repr., svr de Lavreince, est. €400–600) φα



J.5836.121 ~[?]pendant, Jeune femme surprise au moment d'entrer dans sa baignoire, pstl, 54.5x44.5 ov. (Paris, Drouot, Rabourdin, Choppin de Janvry, 14.vi.2002, Lot 61 repr., Éc. fr., est. €2300–2500) [apparently pendant; ?attr. Peters] φα

J.5836.123 Ehepaar mit Kind, pstl/ppr, 63x49 (Professor Adolf von Jordans, Morenhoven)

Drawings heightened with pastel

J.5836.125 Jeune cavalier, pstl, cr./ppr, 20.2x16.1 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 450)

J.5836.126 Man, half-length profile to left, trois cr./ppr, 29.9x23 (Nicolas Schwed, cat. 2011, no. 16 repr.)

J.5836.127 Tête de jeune femme, pstl/ppr, 22.3x16.6 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 441). Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr. p. 262; Peters 1981, no. 66 repr.

J.5836.128 Tête de femme, cr. clr/ppr, 22.4x16.6 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 442 Peters 1981, no. 67, repr. p. 8 φ



J.5836.129 Dame mit aufgestütztem Arm, cr. clr/ppr gr., 30.2x22.9 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 443 Peters 1981, no. 68, repr. p. 35

J.5836.13 Tête de jeune femme, pstl/ppr, 22.4x16.4 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 444 Peters 1981, no. 69 repr.

J.5836.131 Dame avec livre, pstl, mine de plomb et aquarelle/ppr, 30.8x22.8 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 445 Peters 1981, no. 71, repr. p. 45

J.5836.132 Jeune femme, pstl, cr./ppr bl.-gr., 27x21.7 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 446 Peters 1981, no. 67, repr. p. 8 φ



J.5836.133 Jeune femme assise sur un canapé, pstl, cr./ppr bl., 29.9x23.2 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 482)

J.5836.134 Tête de jeune femme, pstl, cr./ppr, 36.2x27.7 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 487 Peters 1981, no. 78 repr.

J.5836.135 Tête de jeune femme, pstl, cr./ppr, 20.8x16.9 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 1075)

J.5836.136 Dame, pstl, cr./ppr, 18.3x14.4 (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, inv. Z. 1076)

J.5836.137 Mother and father playing with their child, watercolour, gch., pstl, black chlk/ppr, 62.5x48.2, Salon de la Correspondance 1779, 1782 (London, Sotheby's, 3.vii.1996, Lot 148 repr., est. £6–8000). Exh.: Peters 1971;

Frankfurt 1989, no. 2.10 repr.; Köln 1995, no. 208, clr pl. CXVII φ



~cop. Johann Wilhelm Caris, pnt. (Köln, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum)

J.5836.14 Dame parée richement: elle est en pied, assise dans un fauteuil, et tenant de sa main droite un livre sur ses genoux; son bras gauche est posé sur une table de toilette: sur cette table et par terre, on voit un tambour à un ouvrage, une basse de viole, des livres, des papiers de musique, &c., gch., 48.7x37.9 (du Charteaux & al.; Paris, Remy, 2.v.1791 & seq., Lot 318)

J.5836.141 Femme cauchoise, aussi assise, tenant sur elle un enfant endormi, gch., 48.7x37.9 (du Charteaux & al.; Paris, Remy, 2.v.1791 & seq., Lot 318)