

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

SHEE, Sir Martin Archer

Dublin 23.XII.1769 – Brighton 13.VIII.1850

The future president of the Royal Academy was trained in the Dublin Society school by Francis Robert West. At the age of 15 Shee left home and set up as a portraitist in pastels, of which only one example has come to light, apparently executed in Dublin in the 1780s. (It suggests that he may be responsible for some pastels which are overambitiously attributed to Hamilton or Lawrence.) According to an advertisement in *Saunders's News-letter*, 18.VII.1786, "M. Shee, Crayon Painter, has removed from his late Lodgings, to Allen's, No. 32 Dame-street." Two years later he had turned to oils where he met with immediate success in Dublin. It is unclear in which medium was a portrait of a Miss Burke praised in the *Dublin evening post*, 7.VI.1788: "the colouring is good, the attitude spirited and graceful."

He moved to London in 1788: a contemporary biographer suggested that he had earlier intended to make the move, but "the approbation bestowed on some small portraits in Crayons, which he had executed previous to his intended departure...induced him to remain two years longer." He was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools on 19.XI.1790 (aged 21). Finding his introductions to the leading painters of little use, he nevertheless expressed his determination not to return to working in crayon, and within a few years had become firmly established as a successful portrait painter. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1789, becoming an associate in 1799, a full member in 1800 and president in 1830.

Bibliography

Anon., "Memoir of Martin Archer Shee, Esq., RA", *The European magazine*, .XII.1823, pp. 482–96; Bénézit; Crookshank & Glin 2002; Dublin 1969; Figgis 2014; Figgis & Rooney 2001; Grove; McGuire 1939, p. 15; Oxford DNB; Strickland 1913; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

Pastels

J.6754.101 Mrs James BURKE, née Margaret Carey (1772–1852), sister of Mathew Carey, publisher and inn-keeper in Philadelphia, ∞ 1° John Murphy; 2° James Burke, pstl, ov., Dublin, c.1788 (Philadelphia, Library Company. Desc.: Mrs H. Lee Hudson; don 1994). Lit.: *The Library Company of Philadelphia 1994 annual report*, p. 25 repr. φ

