

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

SOMPISOIS, Pierre-Jean de

Paris c.1710 – ?Aachen p.1808

French miniaturist active also in Russia and the Netherlands (variously spelt Sampçoi, Sampsoy, Sampsoa, Samsu, Sompsoi, Sumpsois, Somsois etc., or in Russian Сампсуа or Самсуа) working on ivory and vellum, as well as in pastel. It is unclear where the forenames “Jean-François” found in many sources (including this dictionary) were first given, perhaps a confusion with his nationality. Biographical details are elusive, but significant additions were published here in 2022.

According to Frotier de La Messelière, de Sompsois was the son of a Swiss mercenary in the service of the duc de Gesvres. “De Sompsois” was the name of a noble, but fallen, family from Champagne. But an examination of parish registers and other documents indicates that this was unlikely. From the 1763 document cited below, we know he was the son of Mathieu Sompsois and his wife, Claudine Guérin, born in the parish of Saint-Roch, Paris, probably some time between 1700 and 1710.

Sompsois was in Paris on 10.V.1760, when his first wife, Marie-Anne Langlois, died, aged 60, rue de Tournon. She was described as the widow of Rhémond Lescot dit Dilon. The pastellist was described merely as “Jean Sumpsois, peintre” in the acte de décès, the index des scellés (Y12047) adding “peintre en miniature”. She was buried at Saint-Sulpice. A death certificate was deposited in the AN (MC/ET/XX/648) on 5.XI.1762. (Her first husband cannot have been Raymond Lescot, maître chirurgien à Paris, whose widow Catherine-Julie Jean de Gomerville died 12.III.1747.) There were no children from this marriage, whose date remains undiscovered, and it seems likely that Marie-Anne, born 1700, was considerably older than her husband.

The artist then remarried, as “Jean-Pierre Sompsois, peintre en miniature”, by contract of 27.VI.1763, his new wife being Marie-Angélique Lefuel, with François-Augustin Aubry as witness to the contract (AN MC/ET/XX/649); the religious ceremony took place at La Roche-Guyon, 3.VIII.1763. The parish register gives his names as Pierre-Jean Sompsois, peintre, fils majeur de Mathieu et de Claudine Guérin, from the parish of Saint-Roch, Paris, veuf de Marie-Anne Langlois. Their only daughter was born the following year, baptised Claude-Madeleine-Angélique at La Roche-Guyon, 17.X.1764; her father was then described as “peintre des cours de Russie et de Pologne, demeurant à Paris paroisse Saint-Eustache”, but he signed himself (for the first time) “Jean Pierre De Sompsois”. The parrain was Pierre-Louis Lefuel, employé dans les Vivres, the marraine Madeleine Lefuel, widow of Melchior Surette, a chirurgien-major in the Swiss guards.

Presumably it is Angélique Lefuel who appears with the artist in a double portrait described by Durosioi in “Vers à Monsieur de Sompsois sur le tableau fait par lui, où Madame son Epouse & lui sont peints ensemble” (*Œuvres mêlées*, II, 1769, p. 147f), extravagantly comparing her with Venus.

Angélique Lefuel had died in Paris, 2 rue du Renard, 17.III.1796, aged 77, when “Pierre Sompsois” was still alive but not in attendance (*v. infra*). A few months later, their daughter married, in Paris, 23.VII.1796, Jean-Jacques Saulmeur, sieur de Villeronde, an avocat conseiller au parlement de Paris who, in 1787, had been one of the guardians of Mlle Carraux de Rozemond (*q.v.*).

According to Stählin, Sompsois went to St Petersburg of his own accord in 1755, returning to Paris after a year having made several portraits. In 1756 he returned to St Petersburg “encore plus habile” and was commissioned by prince Pyotr Fedorovich and his wife, the future Catherine II, to do eleven portraits of the ladies-in-waiting of the court cast as the Seasons, the Continents and the Elements; they are now in the Chinese Palace at Lomonosov.

His final departure from Russia is variously reported as 1763 (Stählin) or 1761, just after he executed a remarkable miniature of the Tsaritsa Elisabeth I for the Esterházy presentation box, although a pastel of the future Tsar Paul I is thought to have been executed not before 1764. In 1765 Augustin de Saint-Aubin engraved one of his Russian portraits.

According to tradition de Sompsois combined his artistic activities with those of a secret agent (he even appears in historical novels of Valentin Pikul). This is possibly an inflation of the curious story about the artist mentioned by Catherine the Great in a letter to Charles Hanbury Williams of 17.IX.1756. She relates how the artist went to the Grand-Duke to show him “some portraits” (quite possibly those of the ladies-in-waiting), and took the opportunity to complain the French envoy. This was the curious figure who called himself Sir Mackenzie Douglas, Scottish by birth, a former Jesuit and Jacobite who had emigrated to France and persuaded Louis XV to appoint him envoy to St Petersburg with the chevalier d’Éon as assistant. Pyotr told him to mind his own business, while Catherine raised the matter with de Sompsois threatening him with the Fortress or the custody of Alexander Shuvalov.

He was in France by 1774 when he executed a remarkable gouache (with Galerie Alexis Bordes 2016; the pastel had been found by Sompsois’s daughter in 1806) showing Mme du Barry as Minerva painting a portrait of Louis XV, attended by putti representing the Fine Arts (one is using pastels). “De Sompsois, écuyer” appeared in a list of eleven associés libres of the Académie de Saint-Luc in 1775. He was in The Hague in 1778, where he was *reçu* maître-peintre (Pieter Terwesten noted “Craijnonneeren en Miniaturur-Schilderen van Portretten”), but there followed a curious incident recorded in the minutes of the corporation on 28.VII.1778: on being reminded to pay his fees, M. de Sompsois pleaded that he was a French nobleman and never had anything to do with common guilds. The governors resolved that he should be taught that no one, noble or otherwise, is exempt from the fees. In the same year de Sompsois was recorded in La Haye-du-Puis in Basse-Normandie. He was however back in The Netherlands in 1782 when he made a series of

portraits of the Gevaerts family, and is also located there later in the 1780s and 1790s. An advertisement for a print after a portrait (of C. P. Sander) by “den beroemden Konstschilder De Sompsois” appeared in the *Rotterdamse courant*, 26.III.1793. In the years 1790–91 he was in Paris, where he was visited by the comte de Paroy. A miniature of the comte de Provence, sd 1797, must have been made in exile, possibly in Blankenburg.

The story told by the occultist author Antoine Fabre d’Olivet (1767–1825) seems to fit with the biographical facts set out above. According to Fabre d’Olivet, his neighbour in Paris (in the rue du Renard – the Nanette Bugarel he mentions was the daughter of Gaspard Bugarel, agent de change, whose address is confirmed in documents) was Sompsois’s daughter, then teaching piano to support herself and her elderly mother (evidently Sompsois’s second wife). Finding himself at an inn in Aix-la-Chapelle, he asked as requested whether anyone knew “un vieux libertin appelé Sompsois, qui exerce la profession de peintre en miniature”, only to find the artist himself at the same table. Sompsois justified his conduct towards his wife in a lengthy explanation, deploring the legal position which had resulted in his exile from France to escape the breakdown of his marriage.

The 1774 gouache of Mme du Barry painting Louis XV was discovered in a Paris dealer’s and purchased by his daughter in 1806; according to her inscription, she thought her father was by then dead in 1806: but in fact he was still active in Aachen, as evidenced by a miniature of one Matthias Leonhard Schleicher and his five-year old son made c.1808 (exhibited in Köln, 1925). He must by then have been extremely old, and it seems likely that he died soon after; he evidently did not return to Paris.

The miniatures seem to be of higher quality than the known pastels, which show a predilection for distinctive cool colours. The allegorical themes were of course influenced by Carriera, but the rather wooden compositions are unlikely to have found favour in the highly competitive Paris market, and may account for his travels. They were however among the earliest pastels seen in Russia (he preceded Bardou and Schmidt, *qq.v.*), and contributed to a vogue in the second half of the century.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Laurens Johannes Bol, *Art Schonman*, 1991; Galerie Alexis Bordes, catalogue 2016; A. Bredius, *Oud-Holland*, 1901, p. 81; Antoine Fabre d’Olivet, *Mes souvenirs*, 1977, pp. 55ff; Louis-Alexandre Frotier de La Messelière, *Voyage à Pétersbourg*, Paris, 1803, pp. 71–75; Горбачева 2002; Guiffrey 1885, p. 263; Guiffrey 1915, p. 19; Earl of Ilchester, ed., *Correspondence of Catherine the Great, when Grand-Duchess, with Sir Charles Hanbury-Williams*, London, 1928; В. Г. Клементьев 1992, “Портреты Жана де Сампсуа в коллекции Китайского дворца-музея”, *Памятники культуры. Новые открытия. Ежегодник 1990*, Москва, 1992, pp. 298–307; Г. Н. Комелова, “Миниатюрист Франсуа Самсуа в России”, *Россия-Франция. Век Просвещения*, Санкт-Петербург, 1992; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008, pp. 456, 472; Oranienbaum.org website;

Pappe & al. 2008; RKD database; Schidlof 1964–65, II, p. 771; “Catalogue des plus célèbres artistes qui ont travaillé en Russie, tiré des *Mémoires du conseiller d’État Stählin*.... comm. par M. Busching”, *L’Esprit des journaux*, IV.1783, pp. 246–62, p. 254; Karl Stählin, *Aus den Papieren Jacob von Stählins, ein biographischer Beitrag zur deutsch-russischen Kulturgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Königsberg, 1926, p. 197; Jacob von Stählin, *Записки Якова Штэлина об изящных искусствах в России*, Moscow, 1990, I, p. 82; Terwesten 1776; Thieme & Becker; Барон Николай Николаевич Врангель, “Очерки по истории миниатюр в России”, *Старые годы*, X.1909, pp. 539ff

Pastels

J.687.101 AUTOPORTRAIT avec son [2^{ème}] épouse, m/u. Lit.: Barnabé Farmian de Rosoi, *Œuvres mêlées*, London, 1769, II, p. 147

J.687.102 [?]Marie-Thérèse de France, Madame Royale, duchesse d’ANGOULEME (1778–1851), pstl/pchm, 50x36, sd v “De Sampsois, 1791” (PC Picardie; Paris, Drout, Millon, 29.VI.2012, Lot 146 repr., with pendant, est. €4–6000, €3000; PC) φδ



~pendant, v. Louis XVII

J.687.103 ?Mme AVENOT, mère des trois Avenot et de Mme Dercy, pstl, ov. (Dax, Landes Enchères, 19.VI.2022, Lot 87 repr., anon. XIX^e, inconnu, est. €100–200) [new attr., ?] φαδν



J.687.1035 ?M. AVENOT DE LA CHAPELLE, ou de Bétancourt, officier au régiment de Champagne, pstl, ov., s ← “Sompsois” (Dax, Landes Enchères, 19.VI.2022, Lot 270 repr., as by Bonnefois, inconnu, est. €100–200) φδν

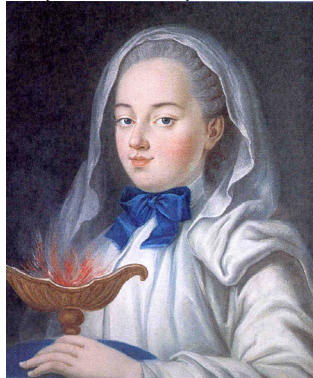


J.687.105 Pierre-Laurent Buirette, dit Dormont de BELLOY (1727–1775), comédien, auteur dramatique, en Russie 1757–61, pstl (le sujet). Lit.: de Belloy, lettre à M. Desternes, maire, du 15.IV.1774, “Je consens...à ce que mon nom soit gravé au bas des quatre vers. Quant au portrait, j’en ai un au pastel très ressemblant.” ~grav. Augustin de Saint-Aubin, 1765. Lit.: Bocher 1879, no. 17 n.r. ~grav. Chr. F. Fritzsck

J.687.108 La comtesse BRUCE, née Praskovya Alexandrovna Rumiantseva (1729–1786), en Eau, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ



J.687.11 Mme P. A. BUTURLINA, née Maria Romanovna Vorontsova (1738–1765), en Feu, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace. Comm. Catherine II; Menshikov Palace, Oranienbaum, –1820; Hermitage museum –1853). Lit.: Горбачева 2002, repr. φ



Dekker, v. Gevaerts

J.687.113 Johannes van DIJK (1718–1798), hoogleraar aan de Illustre School te Maastricht 1765, amateurtekenaar, pstl, 56x45, sd 1789 (Warnsveld PC). Lit.: rKD repr. φ



J.687.115 La princesse [Alexander Mikhailovich] GALITZINA, née Darya Alexeyevna Gagarina (1724–1798), en Hiver, pstl, 1760 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ



J.687.117 Mme Ocker GEVAERTS (∞ 1782), née Catharina Dekker (1752–1798), pstl, 33x27.5, sd → 1782 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.119 Maria Jacoba GEVAERTS (1767–1837), pstl, 33x27.5, sd 1782 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.121 Margaretha Hendrika GEVAERTS (1771–1848), pstl, 33x27.5, sd 1783 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.123 Mme Johan Repelaer (∞ 1794), née Adriana Alida GEVAERTS (1769–1858), pstl, 33x27.5, sd 1783 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.125 Johan GEVAERTS (1773–1847), pstl, 33x27.5, sd → 1783 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.127 Jhr Leonard Robert GEVAERTS (1774–1864), pstl, 33x27.5, sd 1783 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.129 Paulus GEVAERTS (1763–1836), pstl, 33x27.5, sd → 1782 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.131 Mme Arnold Willem Nicolaas van Tets (∞ 1799), née Cornelia GEVAERTS (1775–1851), pstl, 33x27.5, sd 1782 (PC). Lit.: rKD φ



J.687.133 Mlle Auguste GRONIER, pstl, 51.5x35, sd 1790 (Bern, Dobiaschofsky, 6.v.1994, Lot 309 n.r.)

J.687.134 ?Nicolaas HARTINGH (1752–1795); & pendant: J.687.135 spouse (∞ 1772), née Louise Elisabeth Ernestine Meyners (1755–1798), pstl, sd ?1790 (Baarn PC). Lit.: rKD n.r. φδ



J.687.136 Abraham Johan van der HOOP (1775–1826), pstl, 39x29, sd 1785 (Slochteren, Fraeylemaborg). Lit.: rKD repr. φ



J.687.138 Mevr. Jan Nanning van der HOOP, née Adelgunda Christina Wolthers (1752–1806), pstl, 50x41, sd ✓ 1785 (J. G. van der Hoop, Groningen, 1907. PC 2011). Lit.: Moes 1897–1905, II, no. 9246 φ

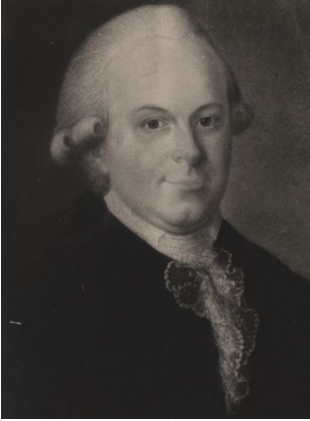


J.687.14 ~repl., 39x29, s (Slochteren, Fraeylemaborg). Lit.: W. Wijnaendts van Resandt, *Het geslacht van der Hoop*, 1926, repr. Lit.: rKD repr. φ

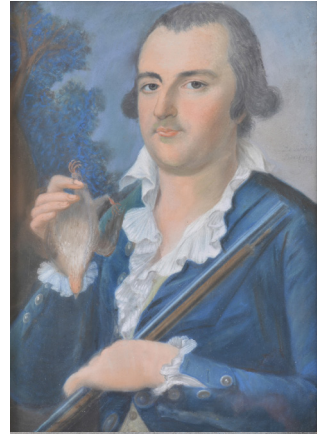


J.687.142 Carel Gerhard HULTMAN (1752–1820), staatsraad, gouverneur van Brabant, pstl,

41x32, sd 1794 (Vallendar, Koblenz, PC 1964).
Lit.: rKD n.r., attr. φ

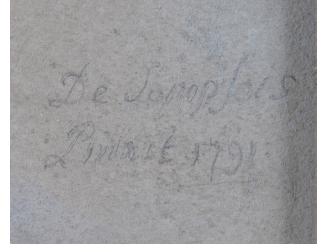


~pendant, v. dsse d'Angoulême



J.687.143 La princesse (Boris Alexandrovich) KURAKINA, née Elena Stepanovna Apraxina (1735–1768), en Été, pstl, 1755 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace. Comm. Catherine II; Menshikov Palace, Oranienbaum, –1820; Hermitage museum –1853). Lit.: Горбачева 2002, repr.; Перова 2006, p. 53 repr. φ

J.687.148 MARIA YAKOVLEVNA, princesse de Géorgie (∞ Georgyi Vakhtangovich Gruzinski), née Dolgorukaya (1728–1761), en l'Asie, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ

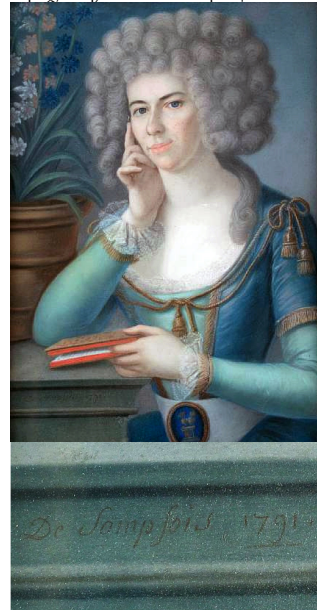


J.687.152 ?Anna Maria NAHUYs (1766–), pstl, 60x44.5, sd “De Sompsois 1791” (?s Gravenhage, VendueHuis, .III.2007, Lot 25 n.r., with 2 pendants, est. €900–1200, €1400. London, Bonhams Knightsbridge, 13.IV.2011, Lot 261 repr., inconnue, est. £400–600, £300 [=£360]). Lit.: rKD repr. φδv



J.687.15 Louis de MELLET (1750–1811), général; & pendant: J.687.151 épouse, née Elisabeth Hallongius de Breda, pstl/pchm, 38,5x27, s “De Sompsois” (Montpellier, Dame Marteau, 27.XI.2021, Lot 61 repr., éc. fr., est. €200–300) [new attr.] φv

J.687.144 Louis-Alexandre de LA MARCHE (1738–1794), lieutenant-colonel au 2^e régiment d'Orange-Nassau, pstl, 34.5x27, s “De Sompsois” (Montpellier, Dame Marteau, 27.XI.2021, Lot 61 repr., éc. fr., est. €200–300) [new attr.] φv



J.687.153 =?Young lady, elegantly dressed, half length, pstl/ppr, 63.5x55.5, sd “De Sompsois 1791” (Amsterdam, Christie's, 11.II.1993, Lot 257 n.r., D f/300–500)



J.687.145 [?]Louis-Charles de France, dauphin, plus tard LOUIS XVII (1785–1795), pstl/pchm, 50x36, n.s. (PC Picardie; Paris, Drout, Millon, 29.VI.2012, Lot 146 repr., with pendant, est. €4–6000, €3000; PC) [?attr.; it has been suggested that this may be by Mme Royale who is shown in the pseudo-pendant] φαδ

J.687.154 ?Huberta Catharina NAHUYs (1768–1834), pstl, 60x44.5, sd “De Sompsois 1791” (?s Gravenhage, VendueHuis, .III.2007, Lot 25 n.r., with 2 pendants, est. €900–1200, €1400). Lit.: rKD repr. φδ



Willem Adriaan NAHUYS (1732–1815); & pendant: spouse, née Anna Cornelia Zoutmaat (1735–1810), pstl, 59x44 (dochter Geertruida Elisabeth Nahuys; desc.: PC, The Hague) [v. Dutch sch.]

J.687.16 Willem Frederik NAHUYS (1771–1800), pstl, 60x44.5, sd “De Sompsois 1791”; & 2 pendant ladies, pstl, 59x44, each sd 1791 (s Gravenhage, VendueHuis, III.2007, Lot 25 repr., with 2 pendants n.r., est. €900–1200, €1400. Amsterdam, Glerum, 8.III.2010, Lot 121 repr., without pendants, est. €600–1000, €550) φ



J.687.162 Mme Alexander Alexandrovich NARISHKINA, née Anna Nikitchina Rumyantseva (1730–1820), en Air, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace. Comm. Catherine II; Menshikov Palace, Oranienbaum, –1820; Hermitage museum –1853). Lit.: Горбачева 2002, repr. φ



J.687.164 Mme Semen Kirilovich NARISHKINA (c. 1746), née Maria Pavlovna Narishkina (1728–1793), en l'Europe, pstl (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ



J.687.166 Mme Lev Alexanderovitch NARISHKINA, née Maria Osipovna Zakrevskaya (1741–1800), tenant un bouquet des fruits, en la Terre, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace. Comm. Catherine II; Menshikov Palace, Oranienbaum, –1820; Hermitage museum –1853). Lit.: Перова 2006, p. 20 repr. φ



J.687.168 Paul Petrovitch, later Tsar PAUL I (1754–1801), pstl/card, 45x38, sd ← “Sampsois”, a/r Eriksen, p.1764 (St Petersburg, GRM, inv. Ж-3902. Prince V. N. Orlov; acqu. 1919 БООП). Exh.: St Petersburg 2003, no. 12) φ



J.687.17 ~?min./pshm, 4.8x? ov. (London, Sotheby's, 31.I.1977, Lot 42. London, Christie's, 27–28.XI.2012, Lot 203 repr., attr.)

J.687.171 Johan Adriaan van de PERRE (1738–1790), pstl/pshm, 79.5x60.5 ov. (Middelburg, Zeeuws Museum, G1628. Jhr. Reigersberg Versluys, Middelburg). Lit.: Moes 1897–1905, II, no. 5859/1; Huib J. Zuiderva, “An eighteenth century medical–meteorological society...”, *British journal for the history of science*, XXXIX/1, 2006, pp. 49–66, fig. 3 φ



J.687.173 Mme Sergei Vasilievich SALTIKOVA, née Matrona Pavlovna Balk-Poleva (1730–1813), en l'Automne, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov museum). Lit.: Горбачева 2002, repr. φ



J.687.174 C. P. SANDER, predikant by de Luthersche Gemeente, m/u ~grav.: Sophia Wilhelmina Evans. Lit.: *Rotterdamse courant*, 26.III.1793

J.687.175 Mme (Petr Mikhailovich) SHCHERBATOVA, née Natalia Pavlovna Balk-Poleva (1726–1791), en Printemps, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ



J.687.177 Greve Gustav Henning von STRALENHEIM-WASABURG (1719–1787), lieutenant-général, grand-croix de l'Ordre de l'Épée 1754, pstl, s Sompson, [c.1770] (Strasbourg, musée historique, inv. R.29) [new attr.] φv



J.687.187 Homme en habit gris, pstl/pchm, 81.7x66, sd v "De Somsois pinxit", 1755-60 (Hermitage inv. OP-43410. All-Union Society "Antiquariat"; acqu. 1938). Exh.: St Petersburg 2001, no. 50 repr. Lit.: Каменская 1960, no. 98 repr. Ф



J.687.1915 Junge Dame, pstl, 61x50, sd ← "De Sompsois 1791" (Ahlden, Kunstauktionshaus Schloß, 7-8.V.2022, Lot 1761 repr., est. €360; Ahlden, Kunstauktionshaus Schloß, 2-4.XII.2022, Lot 2286 repr., est. €220-440) φ

J.687.179 Mme G. N. ТЕРПОВА, née Matrena Gerasimovna Demeshkova (-1791), en l'Amérique, pstl, 1756 (Lomonosov, Chinese Palace) φ



J.687.188 Young man in a marine uniform, pstl, sd → "De Sompsois 1792" (Utrecht auction, details n/k; acqu. PC 2016) φ

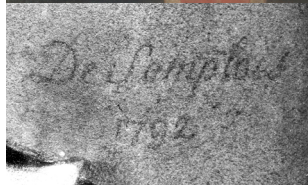


Four pastls of the Thomassen à Thuessink family, v. Dutch sch.



J.687.192 Lady in a white dress, pstl/ppr, 45.5x35.5, sd → "De Sompsois 1803" (Copenhagen, Havnen, Bruun Rasmussen, 12.IV.2021, Lot 188 repr., est. DKr2-3000) φ

J.687.182 Assuerus de Sandra VELDTMAN (-1803), pstl, 39x29, 1785 (Slochteren, Fraeylemaborg). Lit.: rKD repr. φ



J.687.189 Lady as a vestal, pstl/pchm, 72x57, sd v "De Sompsois Pinxit A° 1758" (Jeffrey Tillou Antiques, Litchfield, Connecticut, 2012) φ



J.687.184 Hendrik de Sandra VELDTMAN (1756-1816), pstl, 39x29, 1785 (Slochteren, Fraeylemaborg). Lit.: rKD repr. φ



J.687.193 Een Vrouwe portrait, met een gazen fluyer over 't hoofd, pstl (Daniel Steven Schorer; vente p.m., Middelburg, 12.V.1791, Lot 3)



Wolthers, v. van der Hoop



J.687.191 Dame en bleu tenant un loup, pstl/ppr, 82x67, 1760 (Moscow, Pushkin Museum, inv. Ж-3140. GZK, Leningrad, -1938). Lit.: Данилова 1995, p. 293 repr. φ

J.687.194 Een Vrouwe portrait, welke een brief leest, pstl (Daniel Steven Schorer; vente p.m., Middelburg, 12.V.1791, Lot 4)

J.687.196 Dame à la corbeille de roses, pstl, 57x40 (Rennes, Jezequel, 24.II.2020, Lot 8 repr., as éc. fr. XIX^e, est. €300-400) [new attr., ?] φv



J.687.215 Garçon tenant un fusil; & pendant:

J.687.216 enfant avec des fleurs, pstl, 54x39, sd
→ “D Sompsois/1792”/- (Toulon, Hôtel des
ventes, 22.VI.2019, Lot 97 repr., est. €500–800)

φ

