

Karoline Luise in Karlsruhe¹

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Earlier this week I visited Karlsruhe to see the fabulous exhibition *Die Meister-Sammlerin: Karoline Luise von Baden* which is at the Staatliche Kunsthalle and runs to 6 September 2015. There's a related show *En Voyage – Die Europareisen der Karoline Luise von Baden* at the Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, until October, and the magnificent (and extraordinarily cheap) catalogue (edited by Holger Jacob-Friesen and Pia Müller-Tamm) covers both. A further volume, also beautifully produced, includes a series of in-depth essays edited by Christoph Frank & Wolfgang Zimmermann, entitled *Aufgeklärter Kunstdiskurs und höfische Sammelpraxis. Karoline Luise von Baden*. Karlsruhe mounted an exhibition on Caroline Luise in 1983, organised by Jan Lauts whose biography and other research on his subject has been the bedrock until now. (In case you are confused, the Markgräfin never spelt her name either way, preferring Carolina Louisa; you'll still find her under C in the *Dictionary of pastellists*.)



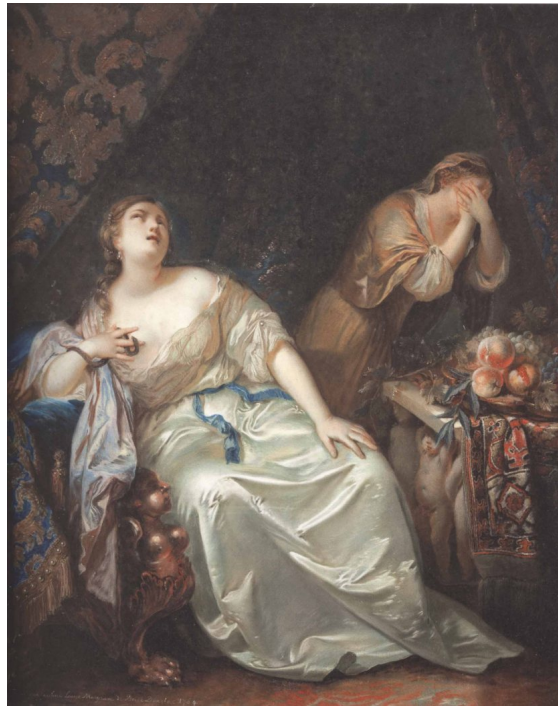
Van Dyck, Susanna Fourment and Her Daughter (Washington, NGA)

There are so many riches in the catalogues that you can be absorbed in them for months, and to do full justice even to the main exhibition you need to allow several days. The approach is monographic in the sense of a single focus – the extraordinary connoisseur, collector and artist at the centre – but encyclopaedic in content and treatment. This is an exhibition which can be enjoyed at all levels, and can be approached from so many different angles that it is almost impossible to review. Perhaps you should go one day to look just at the pastels, and another to focus on the Dutch paintings. Or the furniture; or the objets; or the scientific specimens. Anyone interested in any aspect of European culture in the eighteenth century will find this a rewarding

¹ This essay first appeared as a post on my blog, neiljeffares.wordpress.com, on 6 August 2015. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, "Karoline Luise in Karlsruhe", *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/KarolineLuiseInKarlsruhe.pdf>.

experience. Go if you like just to see the magnificent Van Dyck portrait of Susanna Fourment and her daughter (normally in Washington), with its gorgeous colours of crimson, silver and black. (And while you're there, don't forget the excellent permanent collection rich in paintings from Grünewald to Largillierre.)

It won't surprise you that my chief interest was in the pastels. Caroline Luise was an amateur artist, as of course were many royal and aristocratic ladies. But I have never seen any amateur work with this level of accomplishment, albeit confined to copying the paintings she collected and so obviously loved. Whether working in pastel or in oil (or just red chalk) her pictures are finished to the highest professional standard, showing great skill in recreating the subtlest textures and minutest details (some of which are now lost in the originals where varnishes have darkened). Her taste, with its penchant for Northern school cabinet paintings, was consonant with this meticulous craftsmanship. You can get an idea from the reproductions, but they are no substitute for seeing the originals. Here is her reception piece for the Danish academy, *Der Tod der Kleopatra*, after a painting by Netscher which hangs beside it in the exhibition:



Caroline Luise, Cleopatra (Copenhagen)

Famously Caroline Luise was taught by Liotard, and Liotard is an essential component in the story. As you will know, he is also the subject of a solo exhibition currently at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh and coming, in October, to the Royal Academy in London. As I am a contributor to the catalogue of that exhibition it's inappropriate for me to review it, but if you've been to Edinburgh you may wonder how the Karlsruhe approach compares. Edinburgh tells the story of Liotard with his works alone (just 22 pastels: the number will double in London). Karlsruhe not only has a commendable number of Liotard pastels (10 pastels by him out of a total exhibition of 296 objects), but they include some of the best – most notably the Uffizi self-portrait which is very difficult to see normally.



Liotard, self-portrait (Uffizi)

But in contrast to the British show, you see Liotard in context with his pupil and with other pastellists: a total of 20 pastels are on show (and you can see several more in the permanent collection), allowing Liotard to be compared with examples by Rosalba, La Tour and Perronneau.

The treatment in the catalogues and essays is similarly broad. Astrid Reuter has an excellent study of Caroline Luise and pastel, while Leila Sauvage offers the initial results from a scientific analysis of the construction of Liotard pastels with techniques that have not hitherto been available.

The organisers should be commended not just for assembling a superb group of works of art in so many areas but for the wisdom of their decisions, on matters such as lighting (how much better to have a natural feel than the stark LEDs that so many designers now want to use and which I have criticised in previous posts) and wall colour (the subtle green just right – far more successful than the mid-blues that prevail in America, or the deep chocolate favoured in Britain at the moment). Where in Britain could such a show be mounted, on such a scale and with such commitment?

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