

Lundberg, *La princesse de Rohan*

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[Gustaf Lundberg](#)

Marie-Sophie de Courcillon, princesse de ROHAN (1713–1756)

Pastel on paper, 63 x 50 cm

c.1740

Swedish private collection in 2008

PROVENANCE: Greve Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695–1770); listed in the *Catalogue général de tous les objets qui ont été expédiés à Stockholm*, août 1741, no. 24: “Portrait de la Princesse de Rohan, au Pastel, copié d’après La Tour, cadre doré et glace, 350 livres”; Tessin’s estate sale, held in the Grande Salle d’assemblée de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture Stockholm, 1786, Lot 6, “Madame la Princesse de Rohan Soubise en mantelet de velours bleu. Demie figure peinte au pastel par LA TOUR. Même cadre qu’au précédent”; [acquired by [?Greve Fredrik Sparre (1731–1803), the nephew and adopted son of Tessin and his wife/or by his cousin,] the art collector Greve Gustaf Adolf Sparre (1745–1794), who acquired Kulla Gunarstorps slott, Skåne in 1775, with which the pastel descended as follows: friherrinnan Elisabeth Amalia Beata, född Ramel; her daughter Christina Amalia, who married greve Jakob Gustaf De la Gardie; Gustaf Adolf Fredrik De la Gardie; sold in 1837 to greve Carl De Geer af Leufsta (–1861); his daughter, who married greve Baltzar von Platen (1804–1875); his daughter friherrinnan Elisabeth von Platen, who married greve Axel Wachtmeister på Vanås; by descent]

LITERATURE: Pierre Lespinasse, “Catalogue général de tous les objets qui ont été expédiés à Stockholm”, *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français*, 1911, p. 320 n.r.; Sigrd Leijonhufvud, *Omkring Carl Gustaf Tessin*, Stockholm, 1917, p. 113; Albert Besnard & Georges Wildenstein, *La Tour*, Paris, 1928 at no. 432, records the La Tour pastel whose existence is inferred from Mme Tessin’s copy; Gunnar W. Lundberg, “Pastellmalaren Gustaf Lundbergs Parisperiod”, *Nationalmusei årsbok*, Stockholm, 1929, pp. 23–50, p. 40; Gunnar W. Lundberg, “Carl Gustaf Tessins konstsamling på Åkerö”, in Per Bjurström, *Carl Gustaf Tessin och konsten*, Stockholm, 1970, p. 82, 84 reproduced; Merit Laine & Carolina Brown, *Gustaf Lundberg 1695–1786. En porträttmålare och hans tid*, Stockholm, 2006, pp. 74, 188, 250, 258; Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*, London, 2006, p. 512Aiii, incorrectly as by Mme Tessin

RELATED WORKS: (I) La Tour’s lost pastel; (II) the Åkerö inventory of 1757 refers to “Princesse Rohans porträtt af La Tour, en pastel, copié de Mme de Tessin, sous la direction de M. de Lundberg et retouché par lui”. This is possibly the second pastel of this subject recorded by Gunnar Lundberg in 1929 as at Övedsklosters slott.

GENEALOGY: [Rohan](#)

BELLE COMME LE JOUR” wrote greve Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695–1770) to his wife after his visit that morning to the princesse de Rohan “à sa toilette” (1 November 1739). The celebrated connoisseur was Swedish ambassador in Paris from 1739 to 1742; his wife Ulrika Lovisa (1711–1768) was the daughter of greve Erik Sparre, formerly Charles XII’s ambassador to Louis XIV, and her culture and sophistication had in particular impressed the ladies at the French court. Mme Tessin and the princesse de Rohan established a firm friendship

(17 letters from the *princesse* survive), and Ulla's admiration for her friend was recorded in her letter¹ to her sister-in-law Augusta Törnflycht written a few days earlier:

Elle rassemble toutes les perfections avec la grande beauté qu'elle a. Elle est bien faite. Les plus beaux yeux du monde La taille grande et majestueuse, avec cela polie affable gaie chantant bien dansant parfaitement aimant à rire beaucoup et Badine. Vous ne doutez point avec ces Talents la combien tout le monde la trouve charmante pour moy j'ay ladessus La voye du peuple.

She goes on to refer to Lundberg's portrait of the *princesse* which would show her to be this seductive, beautiful woman. According to a recent source,² this was never executed. But it seems clear that the present portrait was that commissioned from Lundberg by his great patrons, the Tessins.

The *princesse de Rohan* was the granddaughter of the marquis de Dangeau (1638–1720) whose memoirs of the court of Louis XIV had so infuriated the duc de Saint-Simon that he devoted the rest of his life to correcting them. Dangeau's social ascent was marked by his daughter's marriage in 1694 to the duc de Montfort, creating an alliance with the important d'Albert de Luynes family. His son, Philippe-Égon marquis de Courcillon, marquis de Dangeau (1687–1719) married Françoise de Pompadour, from whom Marie-Sophie de Courcillon inherited the title of *dame du duché de La Valette*. At the age of 16, she married her cousin Charles-François d'Albert d'Ailly, duc de Picquigny, pair de France (1707–1731), son of the *maréchal-duc de Chaulnes*.³ He was dead within two years; a daughter⁴ died in infancy, and the title passed to his brother.

His widow was again in search of a husband, and on 2 September 1732 she married a more distant relative, the elderly prince de Rohan. Their independent wealth was protected by a contract under the “*séparation des biens*” régime, signed by Louis XV at Marly, listing the “*etat des meubles meublans, bijoux, diamans, pierreries, toilette et argenterie indépendante appartenans à Madame la Duchesse de Picquigny*”.

Her husband was a member of one of the most illustrious houses in France, whose origins as the ancient sovereigns of Brittany entitled the family to the quasi-royal status enshrined in the princely titles they were allowed to use in parallel with their French honours. Hercule-Mériadec de Rohan (1669–1749) had been destined for the church until the death of his elder brother in 1689, whereupon he assumed the title of prince de Rohan and pursued a career in the army. He rose to become *lieutenant général des armées du roi* in 1704, and served with honour in the campaigns against Marlborough. He obtained the office of *gouverneur* of Champagne in 1704. After the death of his father in 1712, he became prince de Soubise et de Maubuisson. Two years later, in recognition of his distinguished military service, he was created duc de Rohan-Rohan (the title of duc de Rohan was already in use by the Rohan-Chabot branch of the family) and made a pair de France. No doubt some of his influence at court was derived from his first marriage, in 1694, to Anne-Geneviève de Lévis Ventadour (1673–1727), daughter of the much-loved *gouvernante des Enfants de France*, whom Louis XV called his “*chère maman*”. Numerous children from this first marriage ensured the succession of his title, which passed to his grandson, a *maréchal de France* and a minister of state.

The couple were installed in *hôtel de Soubise* (now the archives de France), triumphantly redecored by the architect Germain Boffrand as a gift from the sexagenarian prince to a bride less than one-third of his age. Paintings by Carle Van Loo, Trémolières and others culminated in the spectacular mythological paintings of the *Histoire de Psyché* by Charles-Joseph Natoire (1738), a cycle that has been analysed both as a metaphor of male political ambition as well as an

¹ Letters to Mme Wrede-Sparre, née Augusta Törnflycht, 21 September 1739, 3 October 1740, RA Börstorpssamlingen vol. E3082, cited in Laine & Brown 2006 and partly quoted in Gunnar von Proschwitz, *Tableaux de Paris et de la cour de France 1739–1742*, Paris, 1983.

² Laine & Brown 2006: “*Detta porträtt kom inte till utförande*”.

³ See for example Christophe Levantal, *Ducs et pairs et duchés-pairies laïques à l'époque moderne (1519–1790)*, Paris, 1996.

⁴ Omitted from the standard works since infant girls had no genealogical significance; recorded in André René Le Paige, *Dictionnaire topographique, historique, généalogique et bibliographique de la province et du diocèse du Maine*, Le Mans & Paris, 1777, tome 1, p. 116.

iconography of the female subject of desire.⁵ But the geometry of Boffrand's new oval pavilion, with the prince's apartments on the ground floor, while those of the princesse occupied the first floor, testifies to the reality of this marriage, and it was perhaps inevitable that infidelity occurred. The abbé de Bernis (1715–1794), then a mere provincial chanoine and versifier, came to Paris in search of advancement around 1740. Mme de Pompadour fell under his influence, but was not yet in a position to obtain for him the prizes his ambition demanded. Instead he turned to the princesse de Rohan, and shortly became “l'amant en titre et déclaré de la belle princesse de Rohan” in Marmontel's phrase. (The police inspector d'Hémery's report put it rather more coarsely,⁶ while Bernis's own *Mémoires* are naturally more discreet.) However a seat in the Académie française, an embassy to Venice and a cardinal's hat all followed with the help of one or other of his admirers.

The princesse was the subject of portraits other than the present pastel. A bust by Lemoyne was completed in 1737 for the hôtel de Soubise, but is now lost. Gobert's portrait of her in a blue *habit de masque*, still hanging in the grand salon of the Rohan family's château de Josselin, was until recently attributed to Nattier. This most fashionable of portraitists was the author of the most celebrated image of the princesse, of which the primary version, exhibited at the Salon of 1741 (no. 58) is now in Toledo (Ohio).⁷ It excited much praise from the usual critics as well as more unusual tributes such as the *Fable sur un portrait de la princesse de Rohan* by Paradis de Moncrif.⁸ Among the numerous repetitions and copies, one was given by the subject to Mme Tessin, and was recorded among the Tessin works sent back to Sweden in 1741 and, sold at auction in 1786, lot 5. The present pastel was the following lot, in a similar frame.

The Tessins waited impatiently for their copy of the Nattier, but the artist would not permit it to be released before the Salon. Lundberg was a natural artist for the Tessins to turn to for a portrait of someone they so dearly loved. The Swedish artist had been in Paris since 1717, and was able to build an important reputation as a pastellist in the wake of the fashion created by Rosalba Carriera on her trip to Paris in 1720. However Lundberg's Protestantism prevented his admission to the Académie. Tessin was able to influence the king to make an exception, and Lundberg was *reçu* in 1741 by royal command. Their relationship remained close after Tessin returned to Sweden, with Lundberg following a few years later. Lundberg made innumerable portraits of Tessin, his wife and members of their family.

The present work shows all the characteristics of the finest work Lundberg produced during his Paris period. It is technically similar to another Tessin Lundberg, the portrait of Élisabeth-Alexandrine de Bourbon-Condé, Mademoiselle de Sens (now in the Nationalmuseum).⁹ Characteristics include the splendidly rich colours (Lundberg's deep blue is a particular trademark), the handling of the hair and the beautifully smooth flesh.

Tradition dating back to the 1786 sale (and the old backing board) has it that this pastel was by Maurice-Quentin de La Tour. This arose from a confusion. The 1741 Tessin inventory refers only to a pastel copied after La Tour (without specifying by whom), while the Åkerö inventory of 1757 refers to “Princesse Rohans porträtt af La Tour, en pastel, copié de Mme de Tessin, sous la direction de M. de Lundberg et retouché par lui”. We know that Mme Tessin made some pastel copies (for example, one after Aved's portrait of the actress Mme Quinault Dufresne appuyée sur un balcon, tenant un chien) under the direction of her teacher, Lundberg, whose portrait of her husband she also copied. It seems likely that the 1757 inventory refers not to the present pastel (whose quality excludes any possible involvement by an amateur), but, as it says, to a copy

⁵ See Katie Scott, *The Rococo interior*, New Haven & London, 1995, and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, review in *The art bulletin*, December 1997.

⁶ Translated as “he is a lecher who has had Madame la princesse de Rohan” in Robert Darnton, “Policing writers in Paris circa 1750”, *Representations*, 5, Winter 1984, pp. 14f.

⁷ See Jean-Marx Nattier, Versailles, 261999 – 30 janvier 2000, cat. Xavier Salmon, p. 136.

⁸ *Œuvres de Moncrif*, tome II, Paris, 1791, p. 151.

⁹ See Jeffares 2006 for further details of this and other pastels mentioned in this article.

by Mme Tessin after the Lundberg; this further derivative may be the version recorded in 1929 as at Övedsklosters slott (and may have descended from Tessin's friend, the architect Carl Hårleman (1700–1753)). By the 1786 sale, the “original”, that is the one from which Mme Tessin worked, was inferred to be the La Tour rather than the intermediate version by Lundberg.

It is tempting to go further and ask if there ever was an original by La Tour on which Lundberg based his portrait. There is after all no such portrait known today, and no record of La Tour having exhibited a portrait of the princesse. But this I think goes too far, as the identification of the source as La Tour goes back to 1741 and cannot be dismissed. Even established artists like Lundberg worked from models by other artists. I have written elsewhere¹⁰ of the particularly confusing subject of the royal princesses Madame de Clermont and Madame de Charolais, two pendants by Rosalba Carriera of which Lundberg made copies – one of which is also recorded in Tessin's 1741 inventory, no. 84, valued at 250 livres.¹¹

It is entirely plausible to see the princesse de Rohan commissioning a portrait from the up and coming La Tour, and he often portrayed young women holding books or music (his portrait of Marie Fel is an example showing just how differently he notates music). A close parallel would be La Tour's portrait of Mme Rouillé de l'Étang, in a similar *mantelet à la polonoise*, shown in the 1738 Salon, which shows a markedly different concept of space – as of course do La Tour's celebrated images of the princesse's rival Mme de Pompadour. The most plausible explanation seems to me that there was a La Tour portrait of the princesse (which may never have left the Rohan's possession, if indeed it ever left La Tour's studio) which Lundberg used as a source for the face, but that the final composition moved quite far from the original. Professional pride would have demanded no less: the Swedish artist had built his reputation before La Tour had become known.

There is an intriguing footnote in the form of a letter from that third bluestocking, Belle de Zuylen, Mme de Charrière, whose difficult features La Tour struggled to capture in repeated sessions during 1766 as she recorded in a series of letters, in one of which¹² she noted with pride that “La Tour voit souvent Mme d'Étioles dans mon visage et la belle princesse de Rohan dans mon portrait”. A face remembered after a quarter of a century by a master who had portrayed the greatest beauties of the era; perhaps, as with some of his portraits of Belle, La Tour was never satisfied with his portrait of the princesse de Rohan, and the work was destroyed – leaving Lundberg's image as the only evidence.

While Nattier's deified princesse holds a book (inscribed *Histoire Universelle*), Lundberg's subject holds instead a sheet of music with the words of an aria. Beautiful as the Toledo painting his, the averted eyes, contrived pose and mythological garb all contribute to a certain frigidity. In contrast there is a directness and immediacy in the pastel which embody the seductiveness of “la Divine Princesse” that captivated both Tessin and his wife.

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¹⁰ Neil Jeffares, “Les portraits des princesses de Bourbon-Condé par Rosalba Carriera”, *Le Musée Condé*, décembre 2004, n° 61, pp. 14–19.

¹¹ The present pastel was valued at 350 livres, the same as Tocqué's arresting portrait of Tessin now in the Nationalmuseum.

¹² Letter to Constant d'Herminches, 7 October 1766.