

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

MOSNIER, Jean-Laurent

Paris 1743 – St Petersburg 10.IV.1808

Portraitist in oil and miniature. He was the son of Jean-Baptiste Mosnier, an horloger et marchand fruitier, and Marie-Anne Bunel, who had married in Paris in 1733; there is much confusion over his date of birth. He was *reçu* by the Académie de Saint-Luc in 1766 (rue du Petit-Bourbon, Saint-Sulpice, where he remained until the Revolution) as a “peintre en miniature”. The following year, on 9.I.1767, at Saint-André-des-Arts, Mosnier, “Peintre en émail”, married Marie-Genève (or Marie-Angélique on the contract) Pasquier, the witnesses including Étienne-Charles Challion, another enamellist, and François-Xavier Isabey, peintre. He was described as “fils majeure” implying a birth before 1742. Mosnier was a witness to the marriage of his sister Marie-Anne to Thomas-François Stanley (1735–p.1799), horloger (14.V.1771; AN MC XXVII/353); the other witnesses included two clockmakers and a bookseller. (Stanley, presumably English, had lived in the parish of Saint-Sulpice for many years; Benjamin Franklin was a client, and lent him money in London in 1773.) On 4.II.1776 Mosnier (“âgé de 32 ans passés”, implying a birth in 1743, the date adopted here) was still in the rue du Petit-Bourbon when he gave evidence against a certain Fontaine, accused of theft from the Comédie française of which he was cashier: Mosnier, who had three years left to run on his lease of the second floor apartment at a rent of 424 livres p.a. seems to have sold Fontaine furniture to the value of 2600 livres (Campardon 1879, p. 300).

His miniatures, which are widely known, are executed in the manner of Hall, and display a similar understanding of fabrics and textures. After copying several portraits of Marie-Antoinette, he was granted a sitting in 1776; the *Almanach des artistes* immediately informed readers “Il vient de peindre la Reine d’après nature”. The resulting miniature, from the Veil-Picard collection, owes something to the composition Mme Labille-Guiard’s 1774 self-portrait in the Tansey collection.

Only two pastels have hitherto been recorded as by Mosnier, at the château de Dampierre. One is signed and dated 1773, and is in very much the same style as the pastels of Hall. A third, the mother and mother-in-law of the two recorded subjects (but probably executed a few years later), can be attributed on the basis of general stylistic similarity, including the dark but strong colours, the dynamic composition and the exquisite hands of the subject. It seems likely that Mosnier used pastel only very occasionally, during this brief period of transition from miniaturist to oil painter, a medium which he practised at least from 1779, possibly in response to the suppression of the Académie de Saint-Luc.

Mosnier joined the Académie royale: he was *agréé* in 1786 (the “aspirant peintre de portraits, âgé de 40 ans”, was presented by Voiriot, *reçu* 1788. (The age given in the procès-verbal several times implies a birth in 1746, but presumably have been an attempt to gloss over his advanced years for this stage in his career.)

The self-portrait with his wife and another lady, which he exhibited in 1786, was evidently again a conscious riposte to another Labille-Guiard self-portrait (that with two pupils), a fact which did not escape the critics.

In 1789 Mosnier was commissioned by Pierre-Paul Nairac to execute a painting of Jean-Sylvain Bailly, maire de Paris for the chambre de commerce de Bordeaux; two letters, written from Paris 3.XI.1789 and 16.I.1790, survive, concerning payment for transportation costs etc. In contrast to his sister and brother-in-law (who were both active members of the Société patriotique from its foundation, although Stanley was imprisoned in 1794), during the Revolution Mosnier emigrated to London, where he lived initially in Leicester Square, but soon moving to 19 Devonshire Street (Sun Fire Office records, 29.III.1792). A report in the *European magazine* (XXIII, .II.1793, p. 83) confirms his birth as 1743, but gives his marriage to Mlle Pasquier as in 1786.

He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1791 to 1796, to mixed reviews (the *St James’s chronicle* recognised that he “possesses extraordinary talents in a particular stile of painting” but thought that style “very inferior to that of the Portrait-painting of this country”: 12.V.1791). According to a letter from d’Eon to the Prince of Wales (4.III.1791, printed in the *Scots magazine*), the Prince offered (in replacement of the pension which Mosnier had lost) a gift of 100 guineas, presented on his behalf by Lord Rawdon (soon to be Earl of Moira, later Marquess of Hastings), whom the artist described as “a Lord and a General, brave alike in peace and war”. A note in the *Public advertiser*, 23.III.1792 stated that “M. Mosnier intends to present the British Museum with the portrait of her [the chevalier d’Éon] which gave such general satisfaction at the exhibition at the Royal Academy last year.” In fact the picture would be acquired by Rawdon, who commissioned the copy by Thomas Stewart now in the NPG, London; the original is not in the British Museum, but the Lowther Estate.

Following the renewal that year of the 1793 Aliens Act subjecting émigrés to greater control, he moved to Hamburg (1796) and St Petersburg (1802), where he became court painter to the Tsar. A substantial body of striking portraits have been somewhat neglected as a result of his working in four different places. The anonymous author in the European review of 1793 summarised his talents:

He is nicely discriminating in his likenesses: his tone of colouring is true, yet rich and vivid: his draperies and the extremities of his figures are finished with a degree of care which might be recommended to many of the ingenious Artists of our School of Painting to imitate.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Arnaud Communay, “Lettres de J.-L. Mosnier”, *Nouvelles archives de l’art français*, II, 1886, pp. 167ff; Dumont-Wilden 1909; *The European magazine*, 1793, p. 83; Grove 1996; Guiffrey 1915, p. 396; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Hermann Mildener, “Jean Laurent Mosnier: Der exilierte Hofmaler der Königin in Hamburg”, in Hans Dickel & Christoph Martin

Voghterr, eds., *Preußen, die Kunst und das Individuum*, 2003, pp. 57–80; Ottawa 2003; Charles Oulmont, “Portraits inédits par J.-L. Mosnier”, *Revue du dix-huitième siècle*, 1914, II, pp. 205ff; Paris 1974b; Denis Roche, “Jean Laurent Mosnier et ses portraits à l’huile”, *La Renaissance de l’art français...*, IV, 1921, pp. 169–79; R. B. Rose, “Nursery of Sans-Culottes: the Société patriotique of the Luxembourg section 1792–1795”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, LXIV, 1981, pp. 232ff [for Stanley]; Sanchez 2004; Walczak 2002; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

Pastels

J.548.101 La maréchale-duchesse de LAVAL, née Jacqueline-Marie-Hortense de Bullion de Fervacques (–1795), pstl/5 fls ppr gr-bl./toile/châssis, 79.5x63 ov. [c.1775] (fille du sujet, duchesse de Luynes, née Guyonne-Joséphine-Élisabeth de Montmorency-Laval (1755–1830); sa fille, duchesse de Montmorency, née Pauline-Hortense d’Albert de Luynes (1774–1858); sa fille, duchesse de Doudeauville, née Elisabeth-Hélène-Pierre de Montmorency-Laval (1790–1834); son fils, Marie-Charles-Sosthène, vicomte de La Rochefoucauld, 4^e duc de Doudeauville, dca di Bisaccia (1825–1908), ambassadeur à Londres; son fils, comte Édouard-François-Marie de La Rochefoucauld Doudeauville, dca di Bisaccia (1874–1968), château d’Esclimont; sa fille, Marie-Carmen-Élisabeth-Françoise-Gabrielle, comtesse de Mailly-Nesle (1902–1999); Grandes Étapes françaises; Paris, Drouot, Damien Libert, 14.XI.2008, Lot 34 repr., Éc. fr.; PC). Lit.: Ernest de Ganay, “Esclimont, demeure féodale”, *Connaissance des arts*, .N.1958, pp. 60–65, repr. p. 63 [new attr.] ϕνσ



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J.548.104 La vicomtesse de LAVAL [née Catherine-Jeanne Tavernier de Boullongne (c.1748–1838)], pstl, 56x48 ov. (Dampierre) ϕ

J.548.106 La duchesse de LUYNES [née Guyonne-Élisabeth de Montmorency-Laval (1755–1830)], pstl, 58x44 ov., sd 1773 (Dampierre) ϕ