

La Tour, Duval de L'Épinois

NEIL JEFFARES



[Maurice-Quentin de La Tour](#)

Louis DUVAL DE L'ÉPINOY (1696–1778)

Pastel on multiple sheets of paper,
119.5x92.8 cm

1745 [Zoomify](#)

Lisbon, [Museu Calouste Gulbenkian](#),
inv. [2380](#)

PROVENANCE: [?la fille du sujet, Mme François-Pierre Dedelay de La Garde, née Marie-Marguerite Duval (1732–1752); inv. p.m., 23.II.1753.] Le sujet; Jean-Jacques Gallet de Mondragon (1711–1796), son gendre; saisie d'émigré, 2.I.1797; restauré à sa veuve, née Marie-Jeanne Duval (1733–1823), par arrêt des Consuls, 6.IX.1802; leur fils, Jean-Jacques Gallet, 2^e marquis de Mondragon (1755–1819); son fils Théodore, marquis de Mondragon (1794–1875); sa fille, Eulalie, marquise de Beaumont (1828–1892); son fils, Guillaume-Marie-Théodore de La Bonninière, comte de Beaumont (1850–1901); vente, château de Beaumont, Beaumont-la-Ronce, 19–28.IV.1903, F5210; Léon Helft, antiquaire; acqu. Jacques Doucet 1905, F120,000; Paris, Georges Petit, 5–8.VI.1912, Lot 75, est. F300,000, F600,000; baron Henri de Rothschild, Paris, 1927; acqu. 1943

EXHIBITIONS: Salon de 1745, no. 167 (“M. **, amy de l’auteur, aussi en grand”; Paris 1908a, no. 37, pl. 27; Paris 1927a, no. 37, pl. XXX-42; Paris 1930; Washington 1950, no. 22 repr.; Lisbon 1999, no. 32 repr..

LITERATURE: Mme de Graffigny, letter to

Devaux of 7.IX.1745, correspondence, 2000, VI, p. 577; [abbé Desfontaines], “Explication des peintures, sculptures, & autres ouvrages...Salon du Louvre, 1745”, *Jugemens sur quelques ouvrages nouveaux*, IX, 1745, p. 210; Desmaze 1854; Mariette 1856, III, p. 70; Desmaze 1854; Tourneux 1904b; Tourneux 1904c; Alexandre 1908a (“étonnant... une des pièces capitales parmi tant de joyaux”); Fourreau 1908, p. 59 n.r.; Guiffrey 1908, p. 641; Lemoisne 1908, p. 21 repr.; Furcy-Raynaud 1912, p. 301; Guy Pène du Bois, *Hearst's international*, XXII, 1912, p. 129; *New York times*, 27.X.1912; Ratouis de Limay 1927, p. 329 n.r., “La Tour s’est en effet surpassé, et dans l’exécution de la physionomie fine et un peu hautaine..., et dans celle, vraiment étonnante, de l’habit de moire grise...”; Gersaint 1927, repr. cvr; B&W 133, fig. 124; “The novelty at the 1930 Paris salon: the first annual salon, in 1737, reconstituted”, *Illustrated London news*, 17.V.1930, p. 887 repr.; André Pératé, “Les salons”, *Revue bleue*, LXVIII, 1930, p. 377 n.r.; Ratouis de Limay 1946, pl. XIV/19; José de Azeredo Perdigão, *Calouste Gulbenkian: collector*, Lisbon, 1969, pp. 124–27, p. 128 repr.; Bury 1971, pl. 17; Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful science: Enlightenment entertainment and the eclipse of visual education*, 1996, fig. 180; Goffen 1995, pp. 96–97 repr. cl; Soares Costa & Sampaio 1998, pp. 92–95 repr. cl; English text, pp. 289–90; Debrie & Salmon 2000, pp. 119ff, ill. 53; *Calouste Gulbenkian Museum – album*, Lisbon, 2001, p. 123, no. 97 repr.; D. T. Jenkins, ed., *The Cambridge history of western textiles*, 2003, pl. 26; Marguerite de Saint-Marceau, *Journal 1894–1927*, ed. Myriam Chimènes, Paris, 2007, p. 706; Kisluk-Grosheide & Munger 2010, p. 222, fig. 62; exh. cat., *Gulbenkian par lui-même*, Paris, Hôtel de la Marine, 10.VI.–2.X.2022, p. 251 repr.; Paris 2023, fig. 1; Wunsch 2023, fig. 1; Wunsch 2024, fig. 18; Salmon 2024, fig. 238; Roch 2025; *Dictionary of pastellists* online, [J46.1724](#)

RELATED WORKS: A number of copies of varying levels are known; see artist article in *Dictionary* for list

GENEALOGY: [Duval](#)

DUVAL: C'EST LE TRIOMPHE de la Peinture en pastel"¹ according to Antoine Duchesne, prévôt des Bâtiments du roi, in an annotation to his copy of the livret of the Salon de 1745 where this work was coyly described as "M. ***, amy de l'auteur".² Mariette too annotated his copy: "le roy des pastels de La Tour". It is impossible to challenge either appraisal. But as we gorge our eyes on this sumptuous portrait of a man with a Jocondesque smile, a few thoughts may take us beyond the purely sensuous pleasure of the harmony of silvers and blues that flatter both the sitter and the medium itself – La Tour as always is showing off, choosing a composition that allows him to cover a wide expanse of moiré silk requiring the greatest virtuosity in technique, thereby forcing his critics to concede that these short strokes of white chalk which make no sense close up turn into pure light from the required distance. In the process the master overturns the received laws of colour: in pastel, blue can be a warm colour, and pinky reds can recede in favour of glowing silvers.

Mme de Graffigny described her response in a letter to her friend Devaux (7 September 1745):

J'ai hier matin voir les tableaux du Louvre. Il ne sont pas merveilleux cette année, quoique Mrs les peintres ayent eu deux ans pour travailler. Ce sont Presque tous portraits, et La Tour empeche de regarder les autres. Disenteuil [abbé de La Galaizière] y est de sa façon, si singulièrement ressemblant que je pensai lui aler parler. A coté de lui est un sous-fermier, peint aussi par La Tour, qui est un chef d'œuvre. Il est assis, il prend du tabac en vous regardant a vous faire rire par son air riant. Il est habillé de la plus belle moire gris de perle qui ait jamais été fabriquée; on est pret a tater l'etoffe, rien n'est si admirable.

The subject is shown at his desk, in a pose of almost English nonchalance, caught in the act of taking snuff, his relaxation emphasised by his crossed legs and the placing of the chair at an angle to the gilt-mounted bureau on which are displayed the large tome he is reading, and a terrestrial globe, turned to Africa, with no obvious connection with the sitter. The globe, judging by its size, brass fittings and dotted lines marking the tropics and ecliptic, appears to be the model supplied by the abbé Nollet in 1728. The presence of these working tools keeps the atmosphere this side of languor, but the impression of studied informality is reiterated by the dog's-eared page where the book lies open, and the angled volumes on the shelf which juxtapose a fine binding with the unbound books clearly intended for use. This sitter wants us to see him not simply as a well-dressed gentleman, but as a scholar and a man of action.

La Tour also wants us to know that he was an "amy de l'auteur" – a phrase that carries additional resonance today as art historians continually remind us that this artist was at his best when portraying his friends. He does this by a trick whose magic is only revealed by viewing the work in person: it does not work from a photograph, however high the resolution. As you approach the pastel, the expression suddenly changes – at a distance of about one metre – from a wry,



Figure 1

quizzical, almost cynical ambiguity, to one of pure pleasure. This is effected by the inclusion of the sitter's two top front teeth in the slightly opened mouth: they are virtually, but not completely, invisible in the pastel, but are not perceptible at a distance or in reproduction. The trick was used by other artists – notably by Vigée Le Brun, one of whose hallmarks it became, but never with quite so much subtlety.³

How accurate was La Tour's description of

¹ This essay may be cited as Neil Jeffares, "La Tour, *Duval de L'Épinoif*", *Pastels & pastellists*, http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/LaTour_Duval.pdf.

² Among the other La Tour pastels exhibited that year, the portrait of Philibert H. Orry, directeur des Bâtiments du roi has similar dimensions and a reverse composition, so that they may almost be considered pendants. The subjects' social positions were however quite distinct.

³ For a broad discussion of this topic, see Colin Jones, *The smile revolution in eighteenth century Paris*, Oxford, 2014; at p. 130, the author notes that La Tour made "numerous subtly animated portraits, in which the teeth floated tantalisingly in and out of focus", but brackets the dental exposure in his Democritian self-portrait with those by "odd-ball artists" such as Liotard and Ducreux. In fact there are numerous smiles with visible teeth in earlier portraiture, from Boucher to Perronneau and Mme Roslin.

the 49-year old Louis Duval, sieur de L'Épinoy, “sans profession déclarée” at the time of the pastel? Surprisingly little is known about this financier and his origins. His father Jean Duval was a marchand en gros in Amiens; even his dates are uncertain.⁴ He rose to be an échevin of the town, a position sufficient for Chaix d'Est-Ange to declare that the family came from the haute bourgeoisie; but the fact remains that when exhibited, La Tour's masterpiece was of a wealthy roturier whose ennoblement was only achieved two years later by the purchase of the office of secrétaire du roi. The commission of this pastel may be seen as a stepping stone on the path of de l'Épinoy's social advancement, which had clearly come a long way from wholesaling in Amiens. The official line was that “[il] a fait pendant longues années le commerce de mer avec exactitude”,⁵ but the key step is revealed in a typically snide remark in Barbier's *Journal*:⁶ Duval made his money in John Law's Mississippi bubble. He subsequently invested his money in numerous maritime adventures, notably those of the baron d'Huart,⁷ who endeavoured to finance various activities linked with trade routes to the West Indies via Canada, and the fly-by-night timber companies run with Philippe Seichepine and Antoine-François Angevin. By 1731 he was in a position to make a reasonably good marriage (contract of 30.v.1731), to a Marie⁸ Bersin (1699–1780), related to another Amiens négociant, Jean-Baptiste Bersin (1691–1772) and also Duval's own cousin. Bersin had arrived somewhat earlier than Duval, as he had bought his position of secrétaire du roi in 1720 and was to become a grand audencier de France.

In 1741 Duval was one of nineteen financiers awarded a nine-year contract for the tax farm in Tuscany.⁹ One of his partners was Jean-Baptiste Philippe, of whom La Tour would make a superb portrait in 1748. The syndicate was managed by an obscure banker, Gabriel-Louis Boët de Saint-Léger (the La Tour preparation in Saint-Quentin is either of his wife or sister), whose fraudulent arbitrage operations led to a scandal in which Duval and Philippe were expelled from the Lombart farm.

As for Duval's friendship with La Tour,¹⁰ this may have dated from 1739 since it has been suggested that he owned one of the best versions of La Tour's portrait of Dupouch (now in Washington) which was exhibited that year.¹¹ In any case the frame was said to be engraved with the verses:

La peinture autrefois naquit du tendre amour
Aujourd'hui l'amitié la met dans tout son jour.

It is said by some of the early sources¹² that La Tour strained this friendship by enlarging the commission, presumably from the standard bust length, in order to be able to secure a larger price. It is certainly true that the artist gave himself the enormous challenge of depicting the fullest expanse of watered silk in the coat, matching breeches and complementary waistcoat, contrasting the stiff reinforcements of the side pleats with the softness of the lace, while the colour and texture of the outfit is set against the plump pink silk damask of the upholstery. For evidence of La Tour's mastery of colour, note the catchlights on each upholstery tack, depicted

⁴ The otherwise reliable Favre Lejeune 1986 gives them as 1684–1730, but it is hardly plausible that he was 12 when his son was born.

⁵ AN V² 42.

⁶ Edmond-J.-F. Barbier, *Journal historique et anecdotique du règne de Louis XV*, Paris, 1851, III, p. 262, 1751: “Le second fils de M. de La Garde est est maître des requêtes et a épousé une fille de M. Duval, homme de fortune du Système et dans les affaires, dont il a eu cent mille écus en mariage. Celui-ci est plus convenablement marié.”

⁷ See J. F. Bosher, “A fishing company of Louisbourg, Les Sables d'Olonne, and Paris: La société du baron d'Huart, 1750–1775”, *French historical studies*, IX/2, 1975, pp. 263–77.

⁸ Not Jeanne-Françoise-Marie, as in most sources, nor Marie-Anne, as in others, including here to 2024.

⁹ For details of this episode, see Jean-Claude Waquet, “La ferme de Lombart (1741-1749). Pertes et profits d'une compagnie française en Toscane”, *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XXV/4, 1978, pp. 513–29.

¹⁰ This might have dated from 1739 if, as has been suggested, Duval owned one of the best versions of La Tour's portrait of Dupouch which was exhibited that year (now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington). Unknown in 1928 when Besnard & Wildenstein was published, the pastel was acquired by Jean Cailleux from Soffrey de Beaumont-Beynac before its sale to Samuel Kress in 1956. The suggestion appears in Colin Eisler, *Paintings and sculptures from the Samuel Kress collection*, Washington, 1959, p. 321 (repeated in Debrie & Salmon 2000, p. 207 but is prudently omitted from Washington 2009); it appears to derive from Jean Cailleux but is not repeated in the firm's *Cailleux 1912-1962, album jubilaire* which appeared in 1963. I suspect the suggestion was simply based on a confusion between of marquis de Beaumont, born both by the Beaumont-Beynac family and Duval's descendants, the family of Bonnin de La Bonnière, which do not in fact seem to be closely related.

¹¹ However the suggestion (by Jean Cailleux in 1963) seems to have been based on a confusion between Beaumont-la-Ronce and château de La Roque.

¹² Mariette, *op. cit.*

with tiny dots of pink gouache. As with a number of the larger La Tour pastels, Duval consists of a number of irregularly shaped sheets of paper joined for the most part imperceptibly, although in a few places the edges can now be detected.

Duval de l'Épinoy's elevation, within two years of the Salon, coincided with a number of further marks of arrival. Among these were the acquisition of the château, lands and title (a marquisate) of Saint-Vrain (fig. 1) which went back to the 13th century. Until 1735 it was in the de Broglie family, but it was acquired that year by the flamboyant and fabulously wealthy fermier général Alexandre Le Riche de La Pouplinière.¹³ Its location, only 36 km south of Paris, made it possible to hold the fêtes in which La Pouplinière delighted, involving the numerous artists, musicians and dancers whom he supported so lavishly. This was the world of Voltaire, Rousseau, Rameau and Casanova – and also of La Tour whose portrait of La Pouplinière's young wife is one of the best-known pastels at Saint-Quentin. Both Duval and La Pouplinière remained among the artist's friends, as we know from a letter to La Tour by the abbé Le Blanc (8 April 1751) sending his regards to the two financiers. There were clouds over La Pouplinière's enjoyment of the property, notably an interminable law suit with the neighbours which was only finally settled in 1762. By 1747 he decided to sell Saint-Vrain to de l'Épinoy and his wife, for 210,000 livres, payable in instalments (and to La Pouplinière's creditors) over 22 years, with the contents sold for 30,000 livres in cash.

Among the few facts about de l'Épinoy vouchsafed by the main sources are his daughters' marriages – the clearest indicators of social progress. In 1751 the nineteen-year-old Marie-Marguerite was a suitable match for François-Pierre Dedelay de La Garde, baron d'Achères et de Rougemont (1712–1789), maître des requêtes, and son of a secrétaire du roi. Mme de Pompadour witnessed the marriage;¹⁴ the bride brought a dowry of 100,000 écus and the Saint-Vrain estate. She died a year later; her widower soon remarried, into the Fénelon family, but de l'Épinoy had the foresight to draft provisions into the contract allowing him to recover Saint-Vrain: "M. Duval aimoit beaucoup cette habitation où il avoit un des premiers appelé le genre anglais pour rompre la monotonie de nos anciens parcs. Des bosquets d'arbres verts lui rappeloient ceux d'Italie où il avoit voyagé."¹⁵ According to Marie-Marguerite's posthumous inventory,¹⁶ carried out 23 February 1753, located in the chambre à coucher du sieur de La Garde was a "tableau pastel représentant le sieur Duval, garni de glace dans sa bordure, portrait de famille, pour mémoire." While this might be a repetition of the La Tour, no contemporary copy is known, and it is quite likely that Duval recovered the work with other family property.

Duval de l'Épinoy left his mark on the gardens, which contained important botanical specimens such as a laurier à fleurs de tulipes (*Arbor tulpifera*, recently imported from Louisiana and described by Père Charlevoix¹⁷). He created a number of paths, at the intersection of which he placed a 12-metre-high obelisk which has puzzled specialists ever since. Was it a monument to Cassini who had recently commenced his work of mapping France by establishing the Paris meridian? The obelisk is in fact slightly off this meridian, but the inscriptions *Geographia incremento* and *Oblectationi publica* surely reflect the same

VENTE aux enchères publiques
AU CHATEAU DE BEAUMONT
C^{te} de Beaumont-la-Ronce (INDRE-ET-LOIRE) par
M^r Chauvia, notaire à Tours, les 19, 20, 22, 23, 24,
26, 27, 28 avril 1903 et jours suivants de :
MEUBLES ANCIENS ET DE STYLE
Objets d'art, Diamants, Argenterie, Tableaux
(Pastel de Latour, portrait par le baron Gros)
Gravures, Miniatures, Suite de quatre très
Belles tapisseries de Beauvais XVIII^e siècle
(Scènes chinoises); Ecran Beauvais, Bronzes, Por-
celaines, Armes, Voitures, Orangerie, Vins de
Château-Latour, Bibliothèque. Exposition les 18 et
21 avril de 1 h. à 4 h. — On peut consulter le Cata-
logue à Paris chez M. Amard, 23, quai de l'Horloge.

Figure 2

¹³ Georges Cucuel, *La Pouplinière et la musique de chambre au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 1913, p. 84ff.

¹⁴ Archives nationales MC ET XCVII/329, 22.v.1751.

¹⁵ *Mémoires historiques de Jeanne Gomar de Vaubernier, comtesse du Barry*, Paris, 1803, III, pp. 2–5.

¹⁶ Helpfully signalled in Wildenstein 1967, p. 173.

¹⁷ *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*, Paris, 1744, II, p. 6.

interests as La Tour's globe – and the book of maps of North America in the English language found in de l'Épinoÿ's estate inventory,¹⁸ and which relate to his adventures with d'Huart.

There is other evidence of de l'Épinoÿ's interest in books: he is, for example, listed among the subscribers to a 12-volume edition of Corneille published in 1764. Saint-Vrain was not of course his main residence: that was the substantial house at 1, rue d'Antin, constructed by another beneficiary of the Law scheme, Bourgeois de Boyne, between 1715 and 1725.

The marriage in 1753 of de l'Épinoÿ's second daughter Marie-Jeanne (1733–1823) was to last far longer. The contract this time was signed by the king himself, and the groom was the very wealthy Jean-Jacques Gallet de Beauchesne, comte de Pleuvault, marquis de Mondragon (1711–1796), maître des requêtes, maître d'hôtel du roi, son of a secrétaire du roi. This time however de l'Épinoÿ was unable to pay his daughter's dowry, as a result of the default by the Société d'Huart in the Canadian business. A *séparation des biens* ensued, but information about de l'Épinoÿ's subsequent affairs becomes very scarce. By 1770 he had sold his office as secrétaire du roi. Saint-Vrain was sold, and was acquired by Mme du Barry after the death of Louis XV.

Duval de l'Épinoÿ died in Paris on 22.I.1778, in what circumstances we can only surmise. The building at rue d'Antin, which had already passed to de l'Épinoÿ's son-in-law Gallet de Mondragon and was now known as the hôtel Mondragon, was confiscated¹⁹ when he emigrated in 1792; it was valued at Fr164,000. Here Joséphine and Napoléon were married in 1796, within weeks of Mondragon's death in exile in Germany. The house and contents were restored to his widow by an *arrêté des consuls*, 19 fructidor an X [6.IX.1802].

La Tour's pastel seems to have stayed with the house in the rue d'Antin during this period. When Mondragon emigrated in 1792, the hôtel was visited by the painter Lemonnier, who designated the portrait of “Duval l'oncle, peint au pastel par La Tour” to be put in reserve for the benefit of the nation. It was then returned to the family, and descended to de l'Épinoÿ's great-great-granddaughter Eulalie (1828–1892), who married the marquis de Beaumont. At some stage before 1869, when the hôtel Mondragon became the seat of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas, the pastel was removed to the château de Beaumont, Beaumont-la-Ronce, where in April 1903 it suffered the indignity of public auction conducted by M^c Chauvin, notaire à Tours, advertised under the headline “Meubles anciens et de style” in the small print of the *Revue des deux mondes*.²⁰ The promised “pastel de Latour” (fig. 2) was described in the catalogue²¹ as a presumed portrait of the marquis de Mondragon, and fetched the insignificant sum of Fr5210. The matter of the sitter's identity was quickly resolved by Maurice Tourneux,²² and the pastel was very soon snapped up by the famous couturier Jacques Doucet, who paid a more respectable sum of Fr120,000. Here, in the rue Spontini, it took pride of place among one of the very greatest collections of pastels of all time, as can be seen in the 1905 watercolour by Alexander Karbowski (fig. 3).

It was lent to the famous Exposition de Cent pastels in 1908, where is inspired Armand Fourreau to a detailed description in his review:

Parmi les premiers celui de M. Duval de l'Épinoÿ comme celui d'Étienne Perrinet sieur de Jars, représentés tous deux de pied et grandeur nature, étaient remarquables par la virtuosité de l'exécution outre qu'ils offraient de curieuses analogies de nature à renseigner à souhait l'observateur à la fois sur le peintre habile et sur l'habile homme que fut Latour. Assis de côté dans un fauteuil, la jambe droite croisée sur la gauche, M. de l'Épinoÿ a devant lui sur une table un livre ouvert dont il vient d'interrompre la lecture pour se tourner vers le spectateur et ainsi montrer son visage de trois quarts à droite tandis que, cédant à une habitude, il entrouvre machinalement sa tabatière. Il porte une riche casaque de moire grise dont le revers

¹⁸ Inv. p.m., Archives nationales Y 10913; MC XCvii 499.

¹⁹ H. Monin & L. Lazard, *Sommier des biens nationaux de la ville de Paris*, Paris, 1920, pp. 257, 269, 276.

²⁰ 1903, p. 718.

²¹ Of which no copies are known; the sale is not listed in Lugt.

²² “Études d'iconographie française: identification de deux modèles de La Tour”, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xxxi, 1904, pp. 275ff. In fact the subject had been identified in a contemporary critique of the 1745 Salon published in the *Jugemens sur quelques ouvrages nouveaux* and usually attributed to the abbé Desfontaines, although Fréron and Mairault collaborated on this short-lived literary periodical. The review, and the subsequent letter to the editor, have been unaccountably overlooked in the literature of salon criticism.

bleu vient jeter à gauche du tableau sa note franche et vive à laquelle fait équilibre de l'autre côté, à droite, la belle soie rose recouvrant le dossier de son élégant fauteuil. Le fond se divise en trois parties: celle de droite tend au bleu franc et est équilibrée à gauche par une surface à peu près de même dimension où l'on entrevoit, dans une pénombre douce et grise, les casiers d'une bibliothèque, enfin au centre la surface intermédiaire est d'un ton bleu très sombre. Cette sommaire mais rigoureuse description peut s'appliquer à peu près entièrement au portrait non moins important du sieur de Jars qui, sauf quelques variantes il est vrai dans les accessoires et dans la pose du personnage qui est non plus assis mais debout, offre avec le premier portrait une curieuse similitude d'arrangement et d'éclairage une analogie frappante enfin dans la disposition et dans la couleur même des fonds.

But back in the rue Spontini its stay was again short-lived, as Doucet decided to dispose of his entire collection of XVIII^e art in favour of the modern school. According to Matilda Gay's diary, this was provoked by a *chagrin d'amour* – the woman he wished to marry had died suddenly: “It is the act of a spoilt child who, having been deprived of his favorite toy, breaks all the others.”²³ The full circumstances were more sordid: Doucet lived in the hôtel in the rue Spontini with a Mme Raimon, née Jeanne Ruaud who died suddenly on 28 February 1911, allegedly at the hands of her husband. Doucet's response was to abandon his house, his collection and his library.²⁴

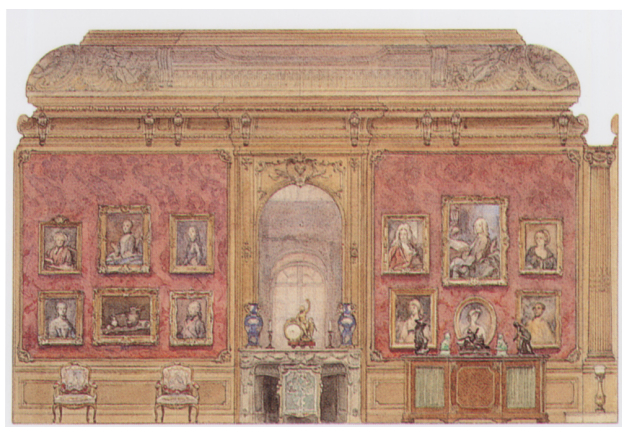


Figure 3

Doucet's sale, in 1912, was one of the most spectacular in a period in which pastels enjoyed their second era of fashion; and, at that sale, “le roy des pastels de La Tour” reigned again. According to a contemporary journalist,²⁵

It was offered at the very first session of the sale and from the time of its appearance created a frenzy of excitement such as is rarely seen even at Parisian art sales. Apparently more than two dozen people scattered through the crowded Georges Petit Gallery coveted the work. Bids came from everywhere in the auction room. ...The price ... mounted the scale with astounding rapidity. Each new offer put one or more prospective buyers out of the competition. At \$100,000 the battle had become a duel between Henri de Rothschild and a woman who has successfully kept her identity secret. At \$132,000 the auctioneer's hammer fell.

It was bought by baron Henri de Rothschild²⁶ for £600,000, double the estimate, and a world record price for a pastel. (At 1912 exchange rates this was £24,000, equivalent²⁷ to £2.5 million in 2015.) “What were we coming to when pastels brought more than paintings?” was the gossip reported by Pène du Bois. Writing in the *Burlington magazine*, Robert Dell, its first editor, although an ardent francophile, revealed typically British incomprehension of the medium: “Is it in accordance with common sense that a masterpiece by Fragonard [*Le Songe du mendiant*] should fetch 137,500 francs, and a masterpiece by Latour, who can hardly be counted the equal of

²³ Quoted in William Rieder, *Charmed couple: the art and life of Walter & Matilda Gay*, 2000, p. 92.

²⁴ See Jérôme Delatour, “Doucet chez Rothschild”, in *De la sphère privée à la sphère publique: Les collections Rothschild dans les institutions publiques françaises*, ed. Pauline Prevost-Marcilhacy, Laura de Fuccia & Juliette Trey, Paris, 2019. The episode is also mentioned in René Gimpel's journal, 16 February 1918.

²⁵ Guy Pène du Bois, *Hearst's international*, XXII, 1912, p. 129.

²⁶ Baron Henri (1872–1947) was a doctor, playwright, entrepreneur and philanthropist. The most recent study, by Harry W. Paul (Ashgate, 2011), concentrates on his medical career and makes no mention of the La Tour.

²⁷ Using Bank of England figures for consumer price inflation.

Fragonard, 660,000? The truth is that prices have no sort of relation to artistic value.” Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux, reputedly the model for Proust’s Mme Verdurin, was even more disgusted, writing in her *Journal*: “Les prix atteints par les bibelots de la vente Doucet révoltent les braves gens. Acheter 600 000 francs une tête de Latour, l’accrocher à son mur, immobiliser de tels capitaux est une manière de rendre les infortunés criminels.”²⁸

It seems however that Henri de Rothschild also thought he had “paid too much for the whistle”, and reports soon circulated that he had refused to accept the purchase on the grounds that the work was “not authentic”, a view apparently endorsed by experts he had employed. A referral to the Tribunal de Commerce was threatened, but the baron seems to have thought better of this.

But Duval de l’Épinoy was not yet at rest, disturbed this time, in Henri de Rothschild’s splendid hôtel at the corner of the rue de Berri and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, by the constant stream of new omnibuses that trundled down the faubourg. Every pastel collector’s nightmare: the vibration caused the picture to shake, and the experts predicted that no pigment would remain if the situation persisted. Rubber pads and every type of insulation were tried in vain, before the baron implemented a Rothschild solution:²⁹ he built a new house on the Avenue du Bois (now the Avenue Foch). The pastel today³⁰ remains in a remarkably good state: the colours are amazingly fresh; while some of the joins in the paper sheets are now visible, they are far less evident than in some other La Tour pastels. There has been some mould, the traces of which remain most evident (but only on careful inspection) on the book and on the skirts of the coat. The top right background has an unusual texture that may suggest later intervention. But none of this is significant, and the miraculous treatment of the face seems as fresh today as ever.

By 1930 Rothschild was happy to lend the picture to an exhibition in Paris devoted to recreating the artists who had exhibited at the Salon of 1737. Among pictures by Boucher, Natoire, Tocqué, Chardin, Aved, Jean-François De Troy, Tournières, Jean-Baptiste and Carle Van Loo, it was, according to one critic, *La Tour* who stole the show:³¹

M. Duval de l’Épinoy, assis à son bureau, jambes croisées, se retourne et sourit. Je ne sais s’il va nous offrir une pincée de l’excellent tabac dont il vient de se barbouiller les narines, mais il est visiblement satisfait de son bel habit de moire grise, dont les pans, rejetés sur les bras du fauteuil, insultent par leur chatoiement à nos costumes tristement étriqués.

During the war, forces of a different kind came into play; the baron was obliged to sell the pastel, which was acquired by the oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian, where, in keeping with his motto “only the best is good enough for me”, it joined La Tour’s beautiful but restrained portrait of the dancer Marie Sallé. Gulbenkian assembled a collection of antique, oriental and Western art of the highest quality in his house on the Avenue d’Iéna in Paris where he lived from 1927. With the outbreak of war he moved to Vichy France, and as a result lost his British passport in 1940. By 1942 Gulbenkian and Henri de Rothschild were both living in Lisbon (Rothschild too was regarded as an enemy alien, until 10 June 1943).³² Negotiations commenced concerning a number of works of art which Rothschild wanted to sell, then stored in London. Gulbenkian sought advice on the items from Sir Kenneth Clark, the then director of the National Gallery in London, writing on 22 April 1943:

²⁸ For a detailed analysis of all the reaction to the sale, see Roch 2025.

²⁹ The report appeared in the *New York times*, 27.X.1912. In Louis Aragon & Jean Cocteau, *Entretiens sur le musée de Dresde*, 1957, p. 134. Cocteau tells the story, but suggests that Rothschild successfully persuaded the préfet de police to change the bus route. It is possible that Rothschild consulted Charles Moreau-Vauthier, whose *La Peinture* appeared the following year, and contained a discussion of the effect of vibration on pastels mounted on stretched canvas, noting (p. 106) that the resultant “tambourine” “vibre même aux bruits des rues voisines.”

³⁰ Inspected *in situ* in June 2015.

³¹ André Pératé, “Les salons”, *Revue bleue*, LXVIII, 1930, p. 377.

³² The most detailed account of these negotiations is given in José de Azeredo Perdigão, *Calouste Gulbenkian: collector*, Lisbon, 1969, pp. 124–27. I am also grateful to Luisa Sampaio for kindly making available documents in the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, consulted 17 June 2015; and to Richard Wragg of the National Gallery, London for providing information from their files, 22 June 2015. Other National Gallery files were consulted in 2010 and 2015. It appears that Henri de Rothschild approached Gulbenkian, although it is possible that they were introduced Lisbon’s leading lawyer José Azeredo de Perdigão, who was to become a trustee of the Gulbenkian Foundation and numbered both men among his clients (see Jonathan Conlin, “Philanthropy without borders: Calouste Gulbenkian’s founding vision for the Gulbenkian Foundation”, *Análise social*, XLV/2, 2010).

I do not recollect all of them, but I know his *la Tour Baron de l'Épinoy* which is considered as one of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the master, and is illustrated in colours, in Nohac's book. It was sold in the Doucet sale, at the time, for 700,000 francs, which was then a tremendous price. It is an exceedingly fine portrait and the only criticism I can offer is that it is a little *maniéré*. I do not think there is anything so fine in the national collections in London or in any private collection. The Baron told me that he is wiring to his cousins, to let him know whether the picture is at present in good condition, because some of his works of art that had been sent to London have apparently been damaged by bombs. I told him that if the picture is in perfect condition, I will apply to you to examine it and if it has not suffered in any way, then I shall be very pleased to negotiate. I believe that if we can come to terms it will be a fine acquisition.

This was followed by a telegram to Clark which Gulbenkian sent on 19 May expressing particular concern about the state of the pastel which he feared might have suffered damage during the war, adding that (as he had emphasised before on different occasions) he was only interested in acquiring works of art of the very highest quality and in good condition. Sir Kenneth telegraphed back two days later (having it seems inspected the pastel at the offices of N. M. Rothschild in St Swithin's Lane), saying that although the *La Tour* had a small blemish in the lower part,³³ it had not suffered any damage in its general appearance and that it was an excellent picture. All the pictures under consideration could be moved to the National Gallery where they could be examined.

Rothschild's need for funds was now pressing, and on 23 June 1943, before Gulbenkian had received Clark's full report on all the pictures, a first sale was agreed, including the pastel as well as a jasper and gold ewer with gold mounts once thought to be by Gouthière based on a design by Boucher. Formerly in Hamilton Palace, it was sold to the dealer Samuel Wertheimer in 1882 for 2350 guineas (about £266,000 in 2015 money); Gulbenkian had already offered £2500 for it (say £100,000 today). The combined price, which was not broken down (but must be largely attributable to the pastel), was 1 million Portuguese escudos (£100,000 in 1943 money, equivalent to about £4 million in 2015). The transaction was completed by instruction to Clark. Clark's report on the remaining items reached Gulbenkian in July, and congratulated him on the purchase of the *La Tour* which Clark considered "quite exceptional", although he was more lavish in his praise of the other item: the jasper ewer "could only be compared with the jewels in the Treasure House of St Mark's." The purchase of the pastel was in fact Gulbenkian's own judgement and taste rather than Clark's.

Gulbenkian's pastel of Marie Sallé was also at the National Gallery and documents show that it was stored in the Manod slate quarry in Wales during the war (they do not however mention Duval which presumably stayed in Trafalgar Square).

After the war many of the stars of the Gulbenkian collection, including Duval de l'Épinoy, were exhibited in the central hall³⁴ of the National Gallery in London before moving to Washington in 1950. After his death in 1955 the collection was moved to a specially built museum in Portugal. There it remains, and there you must go if you wish to enjoy its magic.

It is difficult to improve on Maurice Tourneux's description³⁵ of this masterpiece: "Duval de l'Épinoy ne *pose pas*, il vit de cette vie mystérieuse dont *La Tour* – au prix de quelles angoisses et de quel efforts! – surprenait le secret et qu'il fixait en molécules impalpables sur le châssis de papier bleu, muet témoin et muette victime de ses rages et de ses désespoirs, quand il sentait fuir l'insaisissable perfection."

Neil Jeffares

³³ This may refer to the small join in the paper where the back of the chair joins the skirts of the coat. This join is in fact clearly visible in the colour reproduction in Nohac 1930.

³⁴ A photograph in the archives of the National Gallery (NG30/1948/1), taken 18.I.1948, shows Duval on the north wall, to the right of the doorway.

³⁵ *Les Arts*, 36, .XI.1904, p. 6.