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RA

Royal Academy of Arts
Exhibition in Focus



Jean-Etienne
Liotard

An Introduction to the Exhibition for Teachers and Students

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For the Learning Department
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Jean-Etienne Liotard

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1805 PICTET

FRONT COVER: Cat 21, Laura Tarsi, c.1741 (detail)

BACK COVER: Cat 14, Sir Everard Fawkener, 1738–40 (detail)

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‘You know Mr Liotard is the Painter of Truth.’

PIERRE CLÉMENT, *Les cinq années littéraires*, 1754

Introduction

Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702–1789), the Swiss master of pastel portraits, was a peripatetic artist who captured the imagination of the art lovers of eighteenth-century Europe. An eccentric figure, with his eye-catching oriental attire and waist-length beard, he was first and foremost an exceptionally gifted artist. He was highly admired during his lifetime, causing a stir wherever he went and amassing a huge fortune. Yet today, his superb portraits and works in other media are little known. This exhibition at the Royal Academy seeks to redress the balance, and restore him to his rightful place in the public eye.

Throughout his long career, Liotard moved over twenty times, living in many of the great cities of Europe and visiting the then relatively less well-known Levant. He encountered and painted some of the most significant rulers and aristocrats of the era, as well as actors, authors, philosophers and men and women of fashion. During his four years in Constantinople (now Istanbul), he adopted the local style of dress, which he continued to wear after his return to Europe, earning himself the nickname ‘The Turk’. During his time in the Near East, he also found inspiration for the highly distinctive use of colour and attention to detail that came to define his work. His success owed much to his versatility; his preferred medium was pastel on vellum, but he also worked in oils and chalks, produced exquisite miniatures, enamels and engravings, and in later life became a collector, dealer and writer.

Liotard’s work should be viewed within the context of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, a period of universal questioning of social, scientific, cultural and political norms that brought with it the violence of the French Revolution. The ‘Age of Reason’, as it was also known, advocated among other things an engagement with realism, which Liotard interpreted in his portraits as a truthful imitation of nature rather than a more flattering style. The result is an extraordinary level of verisimilitude in his works, which capture the living presence, the personalities, fashions and tastes of his sitters. His smooth and highly detailed naturalistic style fell out of favour by the time of his death, but in recent years Liotard has gradually been reassessed and it seems fitting now that he should be returning to the Royal Academy of Arts, where his work was first shown in 1773.

A life on the move

Liotard's parents were Huguenots – Protestant religious refugees who had fled from France to Geneva, then a tiny independent republic, at the end of the seventeenth century after persecution by Louis XIV. As a young man, Liotard briefly studied with the Genevan miniaturist, Daniel Gardelle (1673–1753). From the outset he far outshone his fellow students in skill and enthusiasm. He moved to Paris in 1723, and, after a three-year apprenticeship with Jean-Baptiste Massé (1687–1767) he worked independently between Paris and Geneva as a miniaturist and oil painter. However, Liotard became increasingly interested in the medium of pastels, which had been popularised by the Venetian Rococo painter Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757). After rejection by the French Academy, known for its idealised classical style, but encouraged by his teacher François Lemoyne (1688–1737) Liotard chose a career as a pastel portraitist and, in 1736, set out on his travels to seek fame and fortune.

His first journey was to Italy, where a chance encounter with some young English aristocrats proved to be one of the most significant turning points in his life. He was invited by William Ponsonby, 1st Viscount Duncannon, to join his party on an extended Grand Tour, which took Liotard to Constantinople and the Levant. Here he stayed for nearly five years. His unique standing as a European artist, the protégé of the British Ambassador, Sir Everard Fawkener (1694–1758), and, later, of the Moldavian court (present-day Romania), brought him professional success and personal self-confidence, which in turn led to introductions, commissions and friendships in the most elevated social circles throughout Europe.

From Moldavia, Liotard travelled overland to work in Vienna; from there his travels took him to Venice, Germany, Lyons and Paris, where he lived for seven years, and twice to London. In the Netherlands he visited The Hague and Amsterdam where, in 1756 he married Marie Fargues, the daughter of a French Huguenot merchant. He established his family very comfortably in Geneva and had five children. However, he was still much in demand as an artist, travelling extensively to centres of wealth and patronage to fulfil commissions, collect Old Master paintings and organise sales. In 1781 he published his treatise entitled *Traité des principes et des règles de la peinture*, which revealed some of the secrets behind the 'effects' of his paintings. After his wife's death in 1782 he turned to producing outstanding still-lives, continuing to work until two years before his death in Geneva in 1789.

'You should always paint "after Nature", because I know nobody who imitates better than you do.'

FRANÇOIS LEMOYNE, quoted by François Fosca, *La vie, les voyages et les œuvres de Liotard, citoyen de Genève, dit le Peintre Turc*, 1956

'One winter's evening in a café in Rome, Liotard heard some Englishmen discussing a miniature after *La Vénus de Médicis*, who declared it to be the most beautiful they had ever seen. He went up to them and asked them if this was the miniature, measuring such-and-such which belonged to M. Hickman who had bought it from the painter, Liotard. They answered "Yes" to all these questions. "Well, sirs, I am the painter, Liotard."

FRANÇOIS FOSCA, *La vie, les voyages et les œuvres de Liotard, citoyen de Genève, dit le Peintre Turc*, 1956

Painting in dry colours

When the young Liotard arrived in Paris as an apprentice in 1723, pastel portraits were already popular. The Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera had captivated the Parisian élite in 1720, but although Liotard was inspired by her work, he never adopted her flamboyant technique and often-allegorical subject matter (fig.1). Instead it was the master, Maurice Quentin de la Tour (1704–1788) who established beyond doubt the acceptability of pastel for portraiture.

Liotard worked in both pastel and chalk. He used chalk for the majority of his small sketches, mostly red and black, as favoured, especially in his early drawings, by the artist Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). Liotard is, however, particularly associated with pastels, which are a combination of powdered pigments combined with a filler such as plaster of Paris or chalk to solidify them, and a binder, usually a vegetable gum (gum arabic), used to form them into sticks of various widths which, for ease of use, can be inserted into a holder ('porte-crayon'). Pastels come in an enormous variety of colours: for instance, Liotard used dozens of different shades of white. Since no thinner is required, the unadulterated pigment reaches the page directly as pure colour, with powerful effect. Soft pastel can be painted on in layers and 'stumped' or rubbed with the finger, a piece of paper, cloth or leather to produce large areas of smooth, luminous colour. Hard pastels, which have more gum, can be sharpened to produce the finest of details, such as the iris of an eye or the intricacies of a lace shawl. In his treatise, Liotard strongly advised against the loose application of pastels in the form of 'touches'; he sought instead to conceal entirely the process of application, declaring, 'One should never paint what one doesn't see.'

'Crayon pictures when finely painted are superlatively beautiful and decorative in a very high degree [...] and [seen] by candlelight are luminous [...] beyond all other pictures. The finest examples [...] are by Rosalba, and certain portraits by Liotard.'

FRANCIS COTES (1726–1770), English artist

Fig. 1

Rosalba Carriera
Self-Portrait as 'Winter',
1730–1731
Pastel on paper

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Photography: Hans-Peter Klut



Pastels were popular with artists and sitters alike because, unlike oils, they were clean and easy to transport and use, and the work could be accomplished with a minimum of sittings. Liotard favoured working in pastel on vellum, which is calfskin carefully prepared so that the surface is free from bumps and imperfections. He also used high quality blue paper pasted on to canvas. We know that Liotard experimented with various fixing methods, and present-day conservators and curators of his work have to take great care in ensuring that no pastel particles are lost (if not carefully protected, pastels will revert to powder).

Self-portraits and the family

Self-portraiture can be an important tool for an artist, and one that Liotard employed throughout his life. It can be a convenient way of practising skills and trying out new techniques, or a useful means of self-promotion. It often reflects a certain vanity on the part of the artist, and an appreciation of their own appearance in different moods and at different stages of life.

There are some seventeen known self-portraits by Liotard, including miniatures, oils, chalks and pastels, which provide a map of his progress through life. The first known portrait is a small oil made in Paris in his twenties, which shows his face described by Fosca as, 'sensual [...] radiating an intense life with an unwavering gaze'. In a striking pastel from 1744, we see him in Turkish dress with a bushy beard, staring boldly from the frame. There are self-portraits of the artist at work, which point to the fact that he was left-handed. Others are in a distinctly meditative mood, especially the last known self-portrait, a full-length seated study in chalk from 1782, inscribed 'still drawing and drawn'.

Cat. 1 *Self-portrait Laughing*, one of Liotard's largest works, is painted in oils, perhaps to display his unflagging competence in this medium. Controversially, but consistent with his love of truth, the artist shows himself gap-toothed as he approaches old age, and, most unusually for portrait practice of any period, confronting surprised viewers with a huge grin. Throughout his life Liotard had shocked people with his appearance, and he may have meant mischievously to record this aspect of himself. It has been suggested that he is portraying himself as Democritus, the ancient Greek philosopher who laughed at the absurdities of life. Indeed, there is an avuncular, waggish humour about his crinkly eyes, and the strange, unusually long finger pointing directly off the very edge of the canvas makes the viewer wonder what is hidden 'offstage' which so amuses the all-knowing artist.

This work did not achieve the success Liotard had hoped. It was turned down when offered in a list of his favourite works to the French

Cat. 1
Self-portrait Laughing,
c. 1770
Oil on canvas,
84 × 74 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire,
Geneva, inv. 1893-9
Photo Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.
Photography: Bettina Jacot-
Descombes





Cat. 4

Marie Liotard-Fargues
with Her Eldest Son,
1761-62

Black and red chalk,
with watercolour washes
on the verso,
24.5 × 19.6 cm

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva. Gift
of the Société auxiliaire du Musée, inv.
1934-32
Photo Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.
Photography: Bettina Jacot-
Descombes

king, Louis XV, and remained in the artist's possession until his death. However, appropriately, it is now one of the treasures of the Musées d'Art et d'Histoire in his native Geneva.

What was your first reaction on seeing this painting?

Can you tell that this is an oil painting and not a pastel? How?

Liotard also depicted his wife, children and family members. We know that he prized these pieces, as he included some of them in a list of his favourite works in around 1760. This beautiful chalk drawing (Cat. 4) is a tender study of a mother and her beloved first child, Jean-Etienne the younger. Here, aged about three, he is wearing the dress and bonnet which small boys at that time wore until the age of about six or seven. Perched on his mother's knee, the boy stares boldly out at his father, the artist. Marie looks serious, attired in an ornate dress with ruffles up to the neck and a hood. This study is a striking example of how Liotard painted strong watercolour, his favoured pink, on the reverse of the paper to bring out the detail of the red and black of the chalks.

What differences do you notice in Liotard's treatment of the faces and clothes of his sitters?

How has the artist conveyed a sense of the relationship between the two sitters?

Orientalism

Liotard reached Constantinople in 1738. As the capital of the vast Ottoman Empire and a large, rich, urban centre, it was also a hub of trade, including the buying and selling of fabulous silks and aromatic coffee. Liotard was intoxicated by the colours, the costumes and the novelty of the place, and enjoyed a sense of freedom that was then unknown in Europe. It was common for foreigners living in the Empire to adopt Turkish dress for comfort and in order to be more readily accepted, and Liotard soon followed suit. He undoubtedly saw Turkish and Persian miniatures, which further inspired his already fine skills in this genre. He quickly started to portray the European residents in the city, but he was also fascinated by local subjects, meticulously studying furnishing, customs and dress through his drawings. He excelled in depicting the many-layered 'fancy dresses' of the Sultan's harem – elaborately ornamented costumes which juxtaposed colour and texture in unimagined ways – and he took away with him a set of costumes in which he would later dress his sitters in Europe. He also produced a series of perceptive chalk studies of the local Turks themselves



Fig. 2
Two Turkish Musicians,
1740–42
Red and black chalk
on paper, 18.3 × 23.3 cm

Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen
zu Berlin, inv. KDZ 1624
Photo bpk, Kupferstichkabinett, SMB.
Photography: Jörg P. Anders

(fig. 2, cat. 25). Liotard's work was a manifestation of *turquerie* – a distinctive strand of orientalism that distilled the fascination that Europeans had for what they regarded as the exoticism of the Ottoman Empire.

Cat. 21 In about 1741, Liotard painted this tiny but extraordinarily detailed miniature of Laura Tarsi as an exquisite example of his skill. No patience or care has been spared in representing the layers of her garments, with their complex combination of rich textiles, glossy sheen, embroidered fringes and patterned buckles. Her dark caftan stands away from her body, emphasising her tiny waist. The heavier textiles are contrasted with the lace inset, which softly covers her bosom. The headdress with its many jewels and flowers is a *tour de force*, with myriad tiny white dots picking out the sparkling highlights. The brilliance of the colours of her costume contrasts with the ivory tones of Laura's face, neck and arms, and the markedly arching eyebrows and strong shadow on her face ensures that her striking beauty is not eclipsed by the fascination of her costume. This powerful miniature was understandably very popular and Liotard made three copies of the composition.

How has Liotard maintained a sense of his sitter's character, despite the elaborate nature of her attire?

**Why do you think Laura Tarsi might have been attracted to this costume?
Why might she have chosen to be depicted wearing it?**

Cat. 21
Laura Tarsi, c. 1741
Watercolour and
bodycolour on ivory,
9.6 × 7.7 cm

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam
Museum, Cambridge, inv. PD9-2006
Photo © Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge





Cat. 14

Sir Everard Fawkenner,
1738–40

Black and red chalk on
paper, 22.6 × 17.4 cm

Norwich Castle Museum and Art
Gallery, inv. NWHCM 2008.247.4
Photo Norfolk Museums Service.
Accepted by HM Government in lieu of
Inheritance Tax and allocated to
Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery

‘Those who are not capable
of judging for themselves
I think might smell
something of the Quack
from his appearance, the
long beard, Turk’s dress,
which as well as his
behaviour is of the very
essence of Imposture.’

JOSHUA REYNOLDS,
quoted by F.W. Hilles in
*The literary career of Sir
Joshua Reynolds*, 1936

Sir Everard Fawkenner was the British Ambassador to the ‘Sublime Porte’, as the Ottoman government was then known, from 1737 to 1744. He came from a family of silk and cloth merchants who had considerable interests in the Levant. In 1716, his father sent him to Constantinople where he remained for nine years. It was later, in his capacity as British Ambassador that Fawkenner came into contact with Liotard, and having introduced him to the British expatriate community, it appears to have been Fawkenner who convinced Liotard to remain in Constantinople for four years, rather than travel on with Ponsonby to Egypt. He met Liotard again in England, and there are at least three portraits from this friendship, including this drawing, an enamel miniature and a medallion-like *trompe-l’œil* in pastel. Fawkenner was also a major collector of Liotard’s work.

Cat. 14 In this beautifully-balanced drawing in black and red chalk, Sir Everard is seen relaxing in his oriental coat, with his feet casually crossed. Shadows fall across the floor, and Liotard, true to style, has paid particular attention to the patterns of the textiles. Rather than his customary wig, Fawkenner is wearing a Turkish hat, which gives added weight to his rather small head. The hands are carefully drawn with drooping fingers, and the slippers, often difficult to depict, are convincingly portrayed. The sitter wears the contented expression of a successful man at peace with the world, and his cane chair (brought by him from England) has a comfortable solidity which adds to the impression that we are in the presence of a grand personage.

Why do you think Liotard chose to make this drawing of his important patron as a small-scale work in chalk?

British portraits

Liotard made two visits to London, the first from 1753 to 1754 when he painted the Royal Family, and the second twenty years later. By 1753, he had already painted some British sitters on their trips to Europe, notably the actor David Garrick. (Garrick’s wife was painted in London a few years later.) With his two old friends William Ponsonby and Sir Everard Fawkenner now in London to promote him, Liotard did not lack for customers. His novel appearance – not least his soft, curly, waist-length beard – intrigued Londoners, although inevitably it also irked some, especially the artist Joshua Reynolds RA (1723–1792), who saw Liotard as a dangerous competitor.

Liotard could command extremely high fees for his portraits. At the same time however, he succeeded in raising the status of pastel painting in England, which had formerly been viewed as the poor relation of oil painting. While in London he found time to hold private exhibitions in his home and continued

to promote his work through engravings. This mezzotint of Lord Mountstuart (fig. 3, cat. 43) is a copy by an outstanding London engraver, John Raphael Smith, in which the intricate details of the work's exotic setting, with its Chinese-style screen, are finely shown. The original, an ambitious full-length pastel made in Geneva in 1763, commissioned by Mountstuart's father, the Earl of Bute, was one of Liotard's greatest professional successes.

On Liotard's second visit to London in 1773, he stayed with William Ponsonby at his mansion in Richmond near the River Thames. He painted several of Ponsonby's friends, demonstrating to his own satisfaction that at the age of 71 he was in full command of his powers. He showed five pastels at the Royal Academy of Arts, including an affectionate portrait of William's son, Frederick Ponsonby, aged sixteen with pastel in hand, and two oils in the following year.

Cat. 42 Harriet Churchill (1726–1777) married Sir Everard Fawkener in 1747, aged 21 to his 53 years. As her portrait suggests, her manners were described as 'so cheerful, elegant, amiable and winning, that, while she was admired, she was beloved'. Liotard's large and beautifully proportioned work, with its subtle combination of muted tones, gives a strong impression of a 'beloved' woman at ease with herself. Unlike many of Liotard's portrayals of society women, he catches her with her elegant hands in action, just looking up for a moment as she prepares to sew, a reference perhaps to her husband's former activity in the cloth trade. She has not been idealised as a beauty, with her rather full neck and chin and large nose, but Liotard captures the calm, direct gaze of her clear, thoughtful eyes and the curve of her generous mouth.

Her pose is set off by the unusual 'country hat' she wears, a contrast to the rather formal hairdos of many of Liotard's other female sitters. Worn at a perky angle over a lace cap, with its bows and ribbons hanging loose, and in combination with her simple black neck band, it makes a perfect foil for this comfortable but elegant figure. Liotard always took a great interest in the clothes worn by his sitters and excelled in depicting dress and texture. He was surely drawn to Lady Fawkener's intricate black lace shawl arranged casually but cunningly to emphasise the statuesque curves of her shoulders. We have here an outstanding example of Liotard's skill in making his pastels work to depict



Fig. 3
John Raphael Smith
(1752–1812), after
Jean-Etienne Liotard
The Right Honourable
John Lord Viscount
Mountstuart, 1774
Mezzotint, 45 × 35 cm

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, inv.
P.11063-R
Photography © Fitzwilliam Museum,
Cambridge

Cat. 42
Harriet Churchill, Lady
Fawkener, 1754
Pastel on vellum,
73.6 × 58.5 cm

Compton Verney
Photo © Compton Verney. Photo by
Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

the folds and threads of whirling floral design, with hints of the light dress and bosom beneath the heavier work of the fringing. We can almost feel its crisp surface contrasted with the soft creamy silk of the gathered skirt and fine lace cuffs. It is interesting to note here that the silkiness of the dress is achieved through the use of soft pastel, while the delicate detail of the lace is achieved using dry pastel; the two types of pastel used here are working harmoniously to create varied effects.

How does Liotard suggest this sitter's attractive character?

Consider the contrasts in tone and texture in this work. Where are they best displayed?



Royals

It is a tribute to Liotard's skill and charisma that despite his lack of formal academic status as a painter, he gained the confidence of the three most powerful royal dynasties of Europe: the Austrian Habsburgs, the French Bourbons and the British Hanoverians. One of the most significant introductions of his career was to the young Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa in 1743, after his departure from the Levant. During his first two-year stay in Vienna he made several portraits of her, returning in 1762 to draw the celebrated series of red and black chalk drawings of eleven of her sixteen children, which she would carry on her travels as mementos. Liotard named his own third daughter Maria Theresa. The Empress became her godmother and gave the Liotards some splendid gifts. From 1746, Liotard lived and worked for seven extremely successful years in Paris; he was named *Peintre Ordinaire du Roi* and painted members of the royal family, including Louis XV and his son the Dauphin (who died before ascending the throne). Moving on to London for a two-year stay in 1753, he soon secured an introduction to the British royal family.

Cat. 60 This work depicts the young Marie Antoinette (1755–1793), who some years later, in 1770, would wed the Dauphin of France, becoming Queen of France in 1774. Of all Maria Theresa's children depicted by Liotard, this little girl, despite her tender years of six or seven, is judged to be the most regal, staring haughtily at the viewer, a cool half-smile almost imperceptibly curving her lips. Maria Theresa is said to have liked this portrait best of all the eleven drawings and kept it on her writing desk. In the series, all the sons and daughters, as true children of the Enlightenment, are engaged in laudable pursuits: Maria Christina has her watercolours, Maria Josepha is at her harpsichord, while Peter Leopold is busily designing fortifications. Marie Antoinette holds her knotting, an elegant pastime designed to show off her graceful hand movements which Liotard has caught to perfection. She sits proudly erect, her posture emphasised by the straight shadow behind her. Her silk skirts are carefully arranged and the frills and overblown bows up the front of her bodice have been exquisitely picked out in contrasting shades of rose-pink chalk, and watercolouring on the reverse of the page enriches the tones of her dress. She wears a cross pinned on with a black bow, simple hair ornaments and earrings, and a modest ruff of ribbon round her tender neck, a detail which, with knowledge of her unfortunate end at the guillotine, might make us shudder.

What characteristics can we discern from Liotard's portrayal of Marie Antoinette?

Why do you think this was Maria Theresa's favourite portrait of the series?

Cat. 60

Archduchess Marie Antoinette of Austria, 1762

Black and red chalk, graphite pencil, watercolour and watercolour glaze on paper, heightened with colour on the verso, 31.1 × 24.9 cm

Cabinet d'arts graphiques des Musées d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.
On permanent loan from the Gottfried Keller Foundation, inv. 1947-0042
Photo Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva.
Photography: Bettina Jacot-Descombes





Cat. 31
Princess Louisa Anne,
 1754
 Pastel on vellum,
 40 × 30.5 cm

The Royal Collection, RCIN 400900
 Photo Royal Collection Trust. ©
 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015

'I assure you that without travel we (at least men of the arts and sciences) are miserable creatures. A man of mediocre talent will remain mediocre whether he travels or not; but one of superior talent (which I cannot deny that I am, without doing wrong) will go to seed if he remains continually in one place.'

WOLFGANG AMADEUS
 MOZART (1756–1791), in a
 letter to his father in 1778

Cat. 31 Liotard also painted a set of children's portraits for Augusta, Princess of Wales, who had recently lost her husband, Frederick, son of George II. A portrait of Augusta, slightly larger in format than those of her children, shows her looking rather wan in a fabulously drawn blue figured silk dress with ermine trimming. It is interesting to look for family likenesses in the portraits of the children, including that of the future George III aged around 16. Here, the endearingly fragile five-year-old Princess Louisa Anne, who, like her older sister, Elisabeth Caroline, died at the age of nineteen, has the staring Hanoverian eyes and the hint of a cleft in her small chin. Being a very young child, she fixes her gaze on the viewer in confiding innocence. The treatment of the eyes, especially the irises with their highlights and several subtle shades of blue-grey, is a fine example of Liotard's uncompromising attention to detail, as is the wispy yellow hair under the lace cap, which invites us to stretch out a hand to stroke it. Likewise, the skin of the cheeks and chin, a combination of pinks and creams rubbed smoothly into the vellum, when examined closely through a magnifying glass, reveal a naturalness of surface suggesting the soft vulnerability of a small child. Her dress is not overly fussy, with its plain ruching at the neck and rather sombre design of grey and white on pink. In his determination to draw what he sees, Liotard has even drawn in her right nipple, which has somehow escaped from the stiff bodice, which seems just a trifle too big for her. This set of portraits has been displayed in the private apartments of the British Royal family since 1755.

How do Liotard's chalk portraits differ from his pastels?

What do these two portraits tell us about the contrasting attitudes the Austrian and British royal families have to their children?

Continental and society portraits

In spite of almost continuous war and unrest between the European powers, the eighteenth century was an age when luxurious living and fashions reached great heights of extravagance. The aristocracy was joined by the newly rich professional and merchant classes, who commissioned portraits to demonstrate their wealth and status. Portrait painting itself was a fast expanding and very competitive industry, demanding a peripatetic lifestyle from its artists as they responded to developing demand. Liotard was probably one of the most widely travelled of them all and is thus sometimes described as a European artist.

Liotard was very fortunate in that, having made his mark in the Levant, he settled into the highest circles of European genteel society with comparative ease, making new patrons wherever he went. One of these was the Venetian critic and collector, Count Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764), who in 1745 purchased *La Chocolatière*, perhaps Liotard's most celebrated work, for the



Cat. 66
Julie de Thellusson-
Ployard, 1760
Pastel on vellum,
70 x 58 cm

Museum Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur, inv.
278, Rodolphe Dunki, Geneva; acquired
1935
Photo SIK-ISEA. Photography:
Philipp Hitz



Cat. 67
Issac-Louis de
Thellusson, 1760
Pastel on vellum,
70 x 58 cm

Museum Oskar Reinhart, Winterthur, inv.
277, Rodolphe Dunki, Geneva; acquired
1935
Photo SIK-ISEA. Photography:
Philipp Hitz

collection of Augustus III in Dresden. Algarotti's admiration was such that he described it as 'a Holbein in pastel' and, interestingly, also compared the technique to Chinese painting.

While living in Paris for seven years from 1746 to 1753, Liotard established a studio which also functioned as a salon, where members of high society gathered to be painted and to discuss the issues of the times. He also made his mark in Germany and Amsterdam where he started collecting Old Master paintings. After his marriage and when he was more settled in Geneva, he was the centre of a wide and scintillating social circle, including the Tronchin family. He painted old Dr Théodore Tronchin (1709–1781), a medical doctor who was much in demand among ailing society women, some of whom sat for the artist. He also made a celebrated and sympathetic portrait of Tronchin's elderly mother.

Cat. 66 and 67 The practice among aristocrats and society couples of commissioning 'pendant portraits' – two separate, formal likenesses of a couple, of the same size and format to hang side by side, perhaps flanking a fireplace – was very popular. This happy pair is unusual for two reasons. Firstly, the customary positions of the man and wife are reversed, with Madame Thellusson on the left. Secondly, the couple is shown gazing flirtatiously into one another's eyes with obvious mutual love and admiration. The striking blue of their outfits emphasises the unity of their relationship. Instead of the usual static poses, there is an attractive sense of movement as Madame Thellusson prepares to put aside her fabulous cape, and her husband's nonchalantly placed hand seems poised to reach out and assist her. It comes as no surprise to learn that these pendants were commissioned to celebrate the occasion of their marriage earlier that year.

We see Liotard here at the height of his powers. There is no trace of the flatness, for which he is sometimes criticised, in the modelling of Madame Thellusson's attractively plump face and her bare forearm and foreshortened hand. A humorous half-smile curves her lips, giving her an expression at once animated but calm. We can feel the softness of her hair carelessly intertwined with matching blue ribbon. The simply knotted black necklet and black wrist-band both serve to emphasise her shapely neck and wrist. Liotard has used all his skill to indicate the rich formality of her ruched and beribboned gown and the elaborate lace and trimmings of her cape, which falls naturally in a pyramid shape that throws our attention back to its apex – her pretty face.

In contrast, Monsieur Thellusson's robe, with its embroidered flowers, and the inevitable touch of lace at neck and cuffs, gives him a much more casual air. Here is a man full of self-confidence, hailing from one of the most prominent Genevan families, and one who will become Mayor of the Republic. His satisfied expression matches the good humour of his new wife. Liotard's attention to detail is particularly apparent at the neck where he shows us exactly how the blue collar sits and how the collar of the undershirt 'works' with its two

'Without wanting to exaggerate Liotard's intellectual capacities, we can think that although he didn't altogether follow the drift of his friends' debates, he found himself in agreement with those who opposed eighteenth-century classicism and also, with their cosmopolitan tendencies [...] took more interest in the Europe of the North Sea and the Rhine rather than the Mediterranean and sought an art concerned with the True rather than the Agreeable.'

FRANÇOIS FOSCA, *La vie, les voyages et les œuvres de Liotard, citoyen de Genève, dit le Peintre Turc*, 1956

dangling buttons and buttonholes. Commentators have noticed how Liotard's fixation with truth even leads him to depict the signs of mycosis, a fungal condition of the fingernails. Finally, the two are united by their adornments: her wrist-band bears a miniature of her husband, while he wears a ring set with a tiny portrait of his beloved. We cannot help but feel confident that this will be a happy union.

How does Liotard suggest the warmth of this relationship?

What can these portraits tell us about the differing presentation of men and women in the eighteenth century?

Still life and genre scenes

Throughout his life, Liotard was interested in experimentation. He occasionally produced breathtaking *trompe-l'œil* paintings which trick the eye into thinking it is seeing an actual object. In his old age, when the realism of his pastel portraits was going out of fashion, he took to painting still-lives and 'genre' subjects (scenes of everyday life). These often show a sophisticated level of play with perspective, planes and spatial relationships. His skill at distilling genre subjects, with incredible finesse, was in part inspired by French artists, notably Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), as well as seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.

Cat. 76 In this large pastel, Liotard devised a scene between a man of substance and his page, taking as his models members of his family: Jacques-Antoine Lavergne, the son of his eldest sister Sara, and a boy who is probably Lavergne's young nephew. The man has sent the boy to bring a lighted candle to melt the wax with which he will seal his letter. The child dutifully guards the flame, slyly casting his eye towards the prominent red stick of wax awaiting use. The candle flame subtly brings out the shine on the blue jacket and the translucent pink of his fingers. But the man gazes into space, still deep in thought, his head resting on his hand, thus drawing our attention to his flashing ring. He is seated by a window with strong daylight reflecting off his forehead. The painting is a fashion plate of casual male clothing. The overall muted coloration of the scene is animated by the blue of the boy's tunic, a blue ribbon and the colours of the cloth beneath the man's elbow. This is typical of the way Liotard brings unity to a diverse subject.

The desktop, a maze of shadows and reflections, is a fine example of the best of Liotard's still-lives. It has a movable panel which can be raised to a comfortable angle for writing, and a book, *L'Art d'aimer et de plaire*, has been pushed under it to prop it open. The blue ribbon may be the pull by which it is raised. A single sheet of letter paper rests on a blotter, and our writer reaches

Cat. 76

L'Écriture, 1752

Pastel on six sheets
of blue paper,
81 × 107 cm

Bundesmobilienvverwaltung, Vienna,
MD 039862
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Photography: Edgar Knaack



out to dip his well-used quill-pen in the inkstand. By his elbow, a shining bell stands next to a piece of striped fabric, and a cloth protects the studded chair-back. All the accessories to a comfortable activity are present, suggesting an orderly, contented life. Liotard has used this combination to display his skill in a similar domestic scene depicted in *Le Déjeuner Lavergne*, from 1754.

What details of costume suggest that the family depicted here is well off?

Why did Liotard choose a larger format for this work?

Conclusion

After his death, Liotard disappeared from the stage almost as suddenly as he had stepped into the spotlight. He left no students to sing their master's praise or to pass on his techniques, and most of his works by their very nature were hidden away, to be enjoyed by their owners in castles, mansions and villas scattered throughout Europe. Other artists, notably Edgar Degas and Eugène Delacroix, used pastel and chalk, and today there is a thriving Pastel Society in the United Kingdom, but there have been few prominent portraitists who have specialised in the medium.

As we consider Liotard's life, we cannot fail to admire this outsider for his courageous energy and optimism, which never failed him on his ceaselessly active journey through eighteenth-century Europe, touching on many striking aspects of mainly upper-class lives, tastes and thought. For some scholars, his work has been of keen interest as a source of information for trends in costume and fashion, but it is only since the 1980s that he has been rediscovered as a brilliant and innovative artist in his own right, a rewarding and inspirational study in this rare field of pastel portraiture, shining a revealing new light onto the eighteenth-century art world.

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Cat. 60

Archduchess Marie
Antoinette of Austria,
1762
detail

'[His art] lives by virtue of the fascinating human encounter that it offers us, through his portraits, with his subjects, and, through them, with the artist. This double dialogue brings the past right into the present and is a source of constant wonder to any receptive viewer.'

ANNE DE HERDT, *Dessins de Liotard, suivi du catalogue de l'œuvre dessiné*, exhibition catalogue, Musée du Louvre and Musées de l'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, 1992

