

# Gathering Likenesses

## Quentin de La Tour at the Salon of 1753

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In the summer of 1753, Maurice Quentin de La Tour presented 18 portraits in pastel at the Salon of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in Paris. At first sight, there is nothing unusual about that. The Académie was the most established and prestigious art institution in France, and exhibitions of works by its members had taken place regularly in the Salon Carré of the Louvre beginning in 1737. That same year, La Tour had been admitted into the Académie as *agrée*, had been asked to produce two reception pieces—portraits in pastel of fellow painters and senior academicians Jean Restout (1746) and Jacques Dumont le Romain (1750)—and had made his debut at the Salon, attracting attention with his own laughing likeness (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> He staged himself bareheaded without the attributes of his profession; solely his face and expression vouched for the artist. It is hard to resist the artist's whimsical smile, and the engaging quality of the pastel itself acts as proof of La Tour's painterly skills. Striking resemblances and the liveliness of pastels were exactly the qualities for which La Tour was celebrated whenever he exhibited at the Salon. He was among the artists taking advantage of this exhibition format, and unlike some of his slightly younger colleagues, such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, he never turned his back on it.

In the following, however, I will argue that La Tour challenged the art system of the Ancien Régime from within the royal institution. While successful and popular, he nonetheless specialised in a genre—portraiture—that never gained the esteem enjoyed by history painting, and he worked in a medium—pastel—often described as fragile or compared to make-up and thus regarded as feminine by

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1 See on the biography of La Tour *Le voleur d'âmes: Maurice Quentin de La Tour*, Xavier Salmon (ed.), exh. cat., Versailles, Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, 2004, and Christine Debie and Xavier Salmon, *Maurice Quentin de La Tour, prince des pastellistes*, Paris, 2000. The most comprehensive recent monograph is Rena M. Hoisington's PhD dissertation: *Maurice Quentin de La Tour and the triumph of pastel painting in eighteenth-century France*, New York University. Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 2006. On the *morceaux de réception* Hannah Williams, *Académie Royale. A History in Portraits*, Farnham/Burlington, 2015, for those by La Tour, pp. 37, 96–97.



- 1 Maurice Quentin de La Tour, *Self-portrait with Index Finger*, 1737, pastel on blue paper, 59 × 49 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre

association.<sup>2</sup> There is also a historiographic argument to be made: portraiture has not received the same attention as history painting in art historical accounts of the transformations in mid- to late-18th-century French art. This essay aims to test this approach by stressing the social and collective rather than the individualistic dimension of portraiture. Focussing on the 1753 exhibition, it demonstrates that this gathering of portraits is more than the sum of its parts and addresses interconnected issues of affectivity, touch, materiality, gender, sociability, and resemblance.

Resemblance was not always considered the principal yardstick for measuring the success of a portrait during the 18th century. A good decade after La Tour's 1753 Salon entrance, Fragonard produced a suite of portraits: the *Portraits de fantaisie*, well known today but never publicly displayed during the 18th century. It is worth considering Fragonard's constellation of portraits in relation to La Tour's to examine how they enact social bonds and establish connections. Here, it suffices to say that the key difference is that Fragonard foregrounded a lively

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<sup>2</sup> See most recently Marianne Koos, "Malerei als Augentrug. Alexandre Roslins Selbstporträt mit Marie-Suzanne Giroust-Roslin an der Staffelei", in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 83, 2020, pp. 506–533, here in particular p. 518.

brushstroke while caring little about the easy recognisability of the sitters.<sup>3</sup> Denis Diderot even mocked resemblance in his *Salon de 1763*, arguing that the merit of likeness is fleeting, whereas the brushstroke inspires contemporaries and posterity alike.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the philosopher suggested that only “gens du monde” would be able to appreciate resemblance due to their privileged position of knowing the sitters. However, this is precisely the point with La Tour’s portraits and their display: the public appearance of the sitters in effigy—as I hope to demonstrate—goes hand in hand with the resemblance of the portraits and addresses, first and foremost, an audience of acquaintances. In this spirit, I will begin by introducing some of the portraits and their sitters.

If we are to follow the sequence in which the portraits are listed in the catalogue of entries to the Salon—the so-called *livret*—the likeness of Marguerite Le Comte commences the ceremony.<sup>5</sup> The pastel, kept today at the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, addresses its audience directly via the figure’s smile and open expression (fig. 2).<sup>6</sup> Sheet music in the sitter’s hand is positioned right at the edge of the painting and seems to extend beyond the pictorial space. With these pictorial strategies, La Tour invites the viewer to encounter the likeness as if it were a real person. The sitter was a remarkable 18th-century woman, herself an *amatrice* by whom several etchings survive: landscapes, portraits, and natural history illustrations. She was the lover of the tax farmer and amateur Claude-Henri Watelet, who is—a little further along in the exhibition—also among the portrayed and who lived with her and her husband for many decades in an apparently harmonious ménage à trois. Watelet and Le Comte acted out much of their artistic interests and social activities at a retreat called Moulin Joli, situated on the shores of the Seine at Colombes near Paris. Jacques-Roger Le Comte,

3 The rich literature on Fragonard’s *Portraits de fantaisie* includes Mary Sheriff’s pathbreaking chapter in her book *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism*, Chicago/London, 1990, pp. 153–184; Carol Blumenfeld, *Une facétie de Fragonard: Les révélations d’un dessin retrouvé*, Montreuil, 2013; Mechthild Fend, *Fleshing out Surfaces. Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1650–1850*, Manchester, 2017, pp. 64–104; *Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*, Yuriko Jackall (ed.), exh. cat., Washington, National Gallery of the Arts, London, 2017; Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *The Painter’s Touch: Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard*, Princeton/Oxford, 2018, pp. 212–223.

4 Diderot, *Salon de 1763*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Herbert Dieckmann et al. (eds), Paris, 1975–1990, vol. 13, pp. 352–354: “Le mérite de ressembler est passager; c’est celui du pinceau qui émerveille dans le moment, et qui éternise l’ouvrage”.

5 *Explication des peintures, sculptures et autres ouvrages de Messieurs de l’Académie royale*, Paris, 1753, pp. 19–21.

6 Jan Lauts, *Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe: Neuerwerbungen Alter Meister 1966–1972*, Karlsruhe, 1973, p. 66. My interest in the portrait was initially prompted by an invitation from the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe to contribute a short essay to a catalogue for an exhibition of their own remarkable collection of portraits: “Begegnung mit Fingerspitzengefühl: Maurice Quentin de La Tours Bildnis der Marguerite Le Comte”, in *Unter Vier Augen. Sprachen des Porträts*. Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (ed.), Bielefeld/Berlin, 2013, pp. 140–153, 389. I would like to thank the colleagues from the Kunsthalle—in particular Kirsten Voigt and Astrid Reuter—for this kind invitation and their continued help with research on the project. I discuss this portrait and the artistic activities of the sitter in more detail in my article “Marguerite Le Comte’s Smile: Portrait of an *Amatrice*”, forthcoming in Mechthild Fend and Melissa Hyde (eds.), *Thinking Women: Strategic Reinterpretations of Eighteenth-Century Art*.



2 Maurice Quentin de La Tour,  
*Portrait of Marguerite Le Comte*,  
1752-1753, pastel on paper,  
64,8 × 52,5 cm, Staatliche  
Kunsthalle Karlsruhe

Marguerite's husband, had purchased the property in various segments, which were joined and transformed into a landscape garden after Watelet's designs beginning in 1750.<sup>7</sup>

La Tour's pastels at the Salon also comprised the portrait of Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, a close friend of Watelet known as the co-editor of the *Encyclopédie*, the publication of which had just begun when La Tour painted the philosopher and mathematician (fig. 3). He is presented, despite his wig, in an informal manner with his body angled slightly to the left and face turned toward the viewer. The emphasis is on his lit forehead and distinctive features; his eyes trained on a point at an undefined distance, the sitter encounters the viewer with a gentle smile. D'Alembert is followed by philosopher and fellow-encyclopaedist Jean-Jacques Rousseau, mentioned in the livret simply as "citoyen de Genève". The suite is completed by the portrait of Pietro Manelli, who, at the time, was playing the role of impresario in the opera buffa *Le maitre de musique* at the Théâtre de l'Opéra. The singer sports his stage gown and a facial expression that fully lives up to the comic opera. One critic held it impossible to look at the

<sup>7</sup> On their biography, see Françoise Arquière-Bruley, "Watelet, Marguerite Le Comte et le Moulin joli d'après les Archives Nationales", in *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français*, 1998, pp. 131-157.

- 3 Maurice Quentin de La Tour, *Portrait of Jean le Rond d'Alembert*, 1753, pastel on grey paper, 55 × 45,8 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre



“gay and animated” portrait without bursting into laughter,<sup>8</sup> thus stressing the affective and interactive potential of the likenesses.

La Tour’s portraits distinguish themselves in the way they foreground the sitter’s face. They are all slightly smaller than life-size, ranging from 45 × 36 cm (Manelli) to 73.5 × 60 cm (Élisabeth Ferrand), and usually present the sitters in bust or half length. While elaborating on the sitters’ dress and, at times, accessories, such as a book or musical instrument, they predominately engage viewers via the sitter’s countenance. La Tour’s existing studies suggest that he built his portraits beginning with the face. This is also true for the imposing, large format pastel of Madame de Pompadour on public display at the Salon of 1755. While La Tour’s focussed work on the face can be explained by the sitter’s limited availability, especially in the case of a member of the court, it seems there was more to it—making a face emerge from the paper was a crucial part of his artistic process. The fact that several of these studies have been preserved suggests they were significant to the artist, not only because they demonstrate the almost mystical appearance of a face made of pastel but also because they signal the artist’s power to strip the marquise of her accoutrements and envisage her face to face. Be this as it may, looking at the finished portraits,

<sup>8</sup> Jacques-Gabriel Huquier (le fils), *Lettre sur l’Exposition des tableaux au Louvre. Avec des notes historiques*, Paris, 1753, p. 31 : “Ce dernier [Manelli] est peint en riant, & sa figure est si animée & si gay, qu’il est impossible de l’envisager sans éclater de rire aussi”.



4 Maurice Quentin de La Tour, *Portrait of Louis de Silvestre*, 1753, pastel on paper, 63 × 51 cm, Saint Quentin, Musée Antoine Lécuyer

the ones presented at the Salon of 1753 belong to a larger group of more informal likenesses by the artist. Their facial expressions, poses, and clothing—while elegant, especially in the case of the women sitters—are rather casual. Many of the portrayed, including d’Alembert and Rousseau, do not bear any attributes hinting to their occupation or status. By looking at La Tour’s portrait of his colleague Louis de Silvestre, for example, it is impossible to tell that the artist had just been appointed director of the Académie (fig. 4). With a scarf covering his bare head, he turns his back to his canvas, addressing the viewer with a scrutinising look as if they were a potential sitter. In contrast, a slightly earlier oil portrait by Jean Valade underlines Silvestre’s rank and profession via his garment and tools: wearing a wig and an elegant robe, he holds a palette and brush but merely as attributes that do not suggest the artist is about to paint.

Their relatively modest proportions lend the portraits an intimate quality and invite viewers to approach them. The portrayed address their vis-à-vis directly, often with an affectionate look, and their mostly unbuttoned jackets make them appear even more accessible. The artist accentuates smiles in endless variations: often, the position of the lips is almost imperceptible, subtle yet legible as an expression of wit—a peculiar mixture of humour and intelligence highly valued during the 18th century and referred to as *esprit* in French. La Tour simulates encounters as if among friends, educating viewers in forms of sociability in which differences in rank are downplayed and personality is enhanced. Facial features become the persona; social skills are exercised through setting the face in motion and having its expression understood.

The portraits' interactive candour is enhanced by their medium: pastel. The powdery nature of the crayon produces a porous surface—a quality contemporaries described as velvety (*velouté* or *de velours*), bringing it in immediate correlation with the liveliness (*vivacité*) of the pastels.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, they praised pastel's brilliant colours and lustre as well as its ability to mimic the properties of various materials, such as silk and lace, skin and hair. Furthermore, pastel was seen as highly evocative, as having the ability to stimulate the sense of touch via the eye in the interplay of lifelike imitation and powdery finish. La Tour was highly regarded for bringing the medium to its full potential. The lifelikeness of his portraits is heightened by their liveliness, a sense of animation in the way they address the viewers, which seems to give the sitters a soul.

The medium itself is sensitive, and its fragility has frequently been a topic of discussion. Due to the crumbly nature of the pigments pressed into crayons, which are then rubbed on paper, pastel possesses an ephemeral quality, which is both an asset and a problem. Prone to smudging and abrasion, works in pastel must be protected by fixatives or glass, and their conservation remains an issue today.<sup>10</sup> In his art theoretical poem *L'Art du Peindre*—published in 1760 but written earlier and read at the Académie in a series of lectures between 1752 and 1755<sup>11</sup>—Watelet intimates that the powdered crayons are able to generate the luminosity of flowers. Pastels, he elaborates, possess lustre and fragility and thus must be “defended” by glass.<sup>12</sup>

The delicacy attributed to the medium contributed to its coding as feminine. Beginning in the late 17th century, Roger de Piles had associated paint with make-up, thus underscoring the feminisation of colour and paint already implicit in Italian Renaissance art theory.<sup>13</sup> Even more than paint, the powdery consistency of pastel was generally compared to make-up and at times was even made of the same material: rouge, for example, often consisted of the same

9 See, for example, Antoine-Joseph Pernety in the entry “Pastels” in his *Dictionnaire portatif de peinture, sculpture et gravure*, Paris, 1757, p. 445: “La Peinture au pastel a une grande vivacité & un velouté qui approche de plus près celui du naturel que dans les autres espèces de peinture”.

10 On the material pastel, its use in the 18th century, and questions of conservation, see Thea Burns, *The Invention of Pastel Painting*, London, 2007.

11 Jacqueline Liechtenstein et Christian Michel (eds.), *Conférences de l'Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, vol. 6, Paris, 2015, pp. 37–38. Chant 4 of the poem, which contains the passage on pastels, was read on 10 September 1755.

12 Claude-Henri Watelet, *L'art de peindre, poëme avec des Réflexions sur les différentes parties de la peinture*, Paris, 1760, p. 52: “La, c'est un moyen prompt, dont le facile usage / Des traits de la beauté rend la fidelle image. / Les crayons mis en poudre imites ces couleurs, / Qui dans un teint parfait offrent l'éclat des fleurs. / Sans pinceau, le doigt seul place & fond chaque teinte; / Le duvet du papier en conserve l'empreinte; / Un crystal la defend. Ainsi, de la beauté / Le Pastel a l'éclat & la fragilité”.

13 Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics*, Los Angeles, 2006, especially pp. 83–105; Patricia Reilly, “Writing out Gender in Renaissance Theory”, in *Genders* 12, 1991, pp. 77–99; Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Eloquence of Colour: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, Berkeley, 1993, in particular pp. 205–211.

pigments as red pastel crayon.<sup>14</sup> These connotations aside, pastel was indeed a genre in which women excelled. Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera's work was held—in France and throughout Europe—as the benchmark of what could be achieved with pastel. Several French women followed in Carriera's footsteps, including Marie-Suzanne Giroust, also known as Madame Roslin after her marriage to Swedish artist Alexandre Roslin. Both Giroust, a student of La Tour, and later Adélaïde Labille-Guiard managed to tease out the medium's potential for meta-pictorial reflections on portraiture. Giroust emulated La Tour's mocking facial expression in her 1769/70 self-portrait, in which she presents herself copying the teacher's smirking portrait of himself. Labille-Guiard used the format of the *morceau de réception* and the medium of pastel to turn sculptor Augustin Pajou's likeness into a complex interplay of artistic genres and portraits within a portrait.<sup>15</sup>

Interesting, however, is that contemporary commentators compared La Tour to Carriera while distinguishing between their painterly manners. While they found the velvety quality of her pastels second to none, they saw La Tour as surpassing her with his drawing. If we consider the gendering of colour and drawing in 18th-century French art discourse, this sounds like an implicit attempt to claim pastel not only as a 'male' medium for La Tour but also as one that can be judged within a more traditional academic framework. Looking at the overall picture of the work produced by members of the Académie, pastel remained—throughout the 18th century—a marginal material with oil paint regarded as a superior and more durable medium that allegedly required more sophisticated painterly skills.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the medium was popular and officially recognized, and in 1746, La Tour was accepted into the Académie as *peintre en pastel*.<sup>17</sup> He was, however, not the first artist to be granted this title: as early as 1663, pastellist Nicolas Dumonstier was admitted to the Académie, and

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- 14 Ibid., pp. 67, 135; Burns, 2007 (note 10), pp. 82–84, 89–94; for a material history of makeup, see Catherine Lanoë, *La poudre et le fard: Une histoire des cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, Seyssel, 2008. See also Marianne Koos, *Haut, Farbe und Medialität: Oberfläche im Werk von Jean-Étienne Liotard*, Munich, 2014, and in particular her chapter on painting and *le fard*, pp. 195–214, in which she argues that Liotard, committed to truth in art works, was equally reluctant to associate pastel and make-up in his portraits and downplayed make-up even when sitters, like Pompadour, wore it.
- 15 On Giroust-Roslin's self-portrait, see Koos, 2020 (note 2), pp. 524–531 and for Labille-Guiard's *morceau de réception*, a pastel portrait of the sculptor Augustin Pajou Laura Auricchio, "The Laws of *Bienséance* and the Gendering of Emulation in Eighteenth-Century French Art Education", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36, 2003, pp. 231–40.
- 16 See for example La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France. Avec un examen des principaux ouvrages exposés aux Louvres le mois d'Août 1746*, Paris, 1747, p. 104. On La Font and the hierarchy of history painting and portraiture, see Dorit Kluge, *Kritik als Spiegel der Kunst: Die Kunstreflexionen des La Font de Saint-Yenne im Kontext der Entstehung der Kunstkritik im 18. Jahrhundert*, Weimar, 2009, pp. 155–162.
- 17 Albert Besnard and Georges Wildenstein, *La Tour: La vie et l'œuvre de l'artiste. Catalogue critique*, Paris, 1928, p. 37.



in 1698, Joseph Vivien was the first to be made a member as a painter of portraits in pastel.<sup>18</sup>

While the distinction commentators made between Carriera and La Tour might have had a mainly strategic function, they are not entirely wrong. La Tour complemented the blending of the powdery pastels with visible, unblended markings, especially in portraits of his friends and acquaintances among the Parisian *gens de lettres*. A generation younger than Carriera, La Tour was among the artists, including painters in both pastel and oil, who employed the visible ‘touch’ or ‘make’—referred to as *la touche* and *le faire* in French art literature—to animate his portraits. The visible traces of the hand, seen as immediate signs of the artist’s enthusiasm, were much discussed and largely appreciated in mid 18th-century France, especially among amateurs.<sup>19</sup> Leaving discernible marks with his crayon, even on the faces of female sitters, La Tour did not emphasise the association between painting and make-up the way other artists did. Red colour on the cheeks is not to be understood as rouge: in the portrait of Jean-Anne Cassanea de Mondonville, née Boucon, for example, a few dots animate the face, while in Madame Le Comte’s likeness, short visible strokes highlight her cheeks. Departing from the general assumption that portraits of women should be about beauty and those of men about likeness, some contemporaries deplored this handling of women’s portraits. The Abbé Garrigue, for instance, reported that La Tour was reproached of having a “choppy touch”, a lack of caress, spoiling the grace in the portraits of women.<sup>20</sup>

The women are, no less than the men, distinguished through individualised traits, the openness of their facial features, and their artistic and intellectual interests. Especially in the portrait of Marguerite Le Comte, the marks on her cheeks and her smile, unusually offering a glimpse of her teeth, refer to her status as an amatrice and printmaker. It aligns her likeness with de Silvestre’s, whose traits are produced by clearly visible crayon marks. Élisabeth Ferrand is shown pensive and with the hint of a shrewd smile (fig. 5). Presented in

18 Audrey Adamczak, “Présence du pastel au Salon: étude sur l’émergence d’un art”, in Isabelle Pichet (ed.), *Le Salon de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture: Archéologie d’une institution*, Paris, 2014, pp. 173–193; Burns, 2007 (note 10), pp. 62–64.

19 This was initially discussed by Sheriff, 1990 (note 3), especially pp. 137–149; see further Fend, 2017 (note 3), pp. 39–42, 65–82; on notions of *le faire*, see also Christian Michel, *Charles-Nicholas Cochin et l’art des Lumières*, Rome, 1993, pp. 257–278, and more recently Lajer-Burcharth, 2018.

20 Abbé Garrigue, *Sentimens d’un amateur sur l’Exposition des tableaux du Louvre et la critique qui en a été faite*, 1753–1754, deuxième lettre, p. 20: “On lui reproche encore, & peut-être n’a-t-on pas tort, une touche trop heurtée, ou plutôt trop peu caressée dans ses portraits de femme; on ajoute que cette touche nuit au gracieux”.



- 5 Maurice Quentin de la Tour,  
*Mademoiselle Ferrand meditating  
over Newton*, 1752,  
pastel on paper, 73,5 × 60 cm,  
Munich, Alte Pinakothek

elegant *toilette de matin*, this woman of “fairly distinguished birth”<sup>21</sup> and independent means was indeed known at the time as a *femme savante*, with a well-grounded knowledge of mathematics and philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Addressing the viewer, she has turned away from the book she is “meditating” on, as suggested by the pastel’s title provided in the livret. The book’s legible running title (“de Newton”) signalled to the well-informed audience that they were looking at Voltaire’s 1738 *Éléments de la philosophie de Neuton*, a publication with which the philosopher made Newton’s scientific ideas accessible to a broader educated audience in France. Ferrand has been described as a modest and undogmatic follower of Newton, who, well beyond her acquaintance with Voltaire’s *Éléments*,

21 On the portrait Neil Jeffares, see “La Tour, M<sup>lle</sup> Ferrand méditant sur Newton” (issued/updated 7 February 2021) on his *Pastels & pastellists*, URL: [http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/LaTour\\_Ferrand.pdf](http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/LaTour_Ferrand.pdf) [accessed: 25.02.2022]. The portrait was also the subject of Ulrike Boskamp’s MA dissertation *Mademoiselle Ferrand méditant sur Newton von Maurice-Quentin de la Tour: Zur Rezeption von Newtons Opticks in Frankreich vor 1760*, unpublished Master’s thesis, FU Berlin, 1994. I thank Ulrike Boskamp for generously sharing her insights into the portrait.

22 For a biography of Elisabeth Ferrand, see Nina Rattner Gelbart’s chapter “Mathematician and Philosopher: The ‘Celebrated Mlle Ferrand’ 1700–1752” in her book *Minerva’s French Sisters: Women of Science in Enlightenment France*, New Haven, 2021, pp. 16–61; as well as the foundational article by Laurence Bongie, “Diderot’s *femme savante*”, in *Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century* 166, 1977, pp. 5–235, here pp. 148–162.

had first-hand knowledge of his physical theories.<sup>23</sup> Voltaire's *Éléments* fostered the debate of Newton's ideas in France, not least his theories on colour and light, which were significant for the making and perception of art.<sup>24</sup> Several of La Tour's sitters were involved in these conversations, for example, the Abbé Jean-Antoine Nollet, who demonstrated experiments from Newton's optics in his prominent Parisian lectures and served as a physics teacher to the dauphin.<sup>25</sup> As a member of the Académie royale des sciences, he was granted lodgings at the Louvre, where he lived among artists and, in fact, next door to La Tour. The pastellist befriended Nollet and shared his interest in physics.<sup>26</sup> The debate on light and colour, shades and demi-shades, also entered the discourse on art and impacted, for example, Watelet's *L'Art du peindre* as well as his reflections on the topic in his entries to the *Encyclopédie* and later the *Dictionnaire des Arts*.<sup>27</sup> It also formed the sensibilities of the critics of the pastel at the Salon of 1753. The Abbé Le Blanc, in particular, praised La Tour's "science of light and intelligence of painting" in the portrait of Madame Le Comte,<sup>28</sup> indicating that pastels themselves could be considered a contribution to the exploration of light.

Ferrand was not only well acquainted with Newton's physics; she also furthered the dissemination and understanding of British Sensualism—a philosophy according to which sense perception is the basis of any human knowledge—in France. A careful and critical reader of John Locke,<sup>29</sup> she played a vital role in the development of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Traité des sensations*, published in 1754, two years after her death. Condillac acknowledges Ferrand's role in the introduction to his treatise, presenting it as a result of the conversations they

23 Ibid., p. 160.

24 For a methodologically focused account of the reception of Locke and Newton in France and its influence on artistic practices, see Michael Baxandall, "Pictures and Ideas: Chardin's Lady Taking Tea", in id., *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*, New Haven/London, 1985, pp. 74–114.

25 Paola Bertucci, "Les leçons de physique expérimentale de l'abbé Nollet", in *Sciences et curiosités à la cour de Versailles*, Béatrix Saule and Catherine Arminjon (eds.), exh. cat. Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, Paris, 2010, pp. 188–191.

26 Jean Torlais, "L'Abbé Nollet (1700–1770) et la physique expérimentale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Les conférences du Palais de la Découverte*, série D, no 60, 1959, p. 21.

27 Boskamp, 1994 (note 21). On Watelet, Newton and the racial connotations of definitions of light and darkness, see Anne Lafont, "How Skin Color Became a Racial Marker: Art Historical Perspectives on Race", in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, 2017, pp. 89–113, here in particular pp. 89–90.

28 Jean-Bernard (Abbé) Le Blanc, *Observations sur les ouvrages de MM. de l'Académie de peinture et de sculpture, exposés au Salon du Louvre, en l'Année de 1753*, 1753, p. 35: "[...] c'est qu'en effet il y a dans ce Portrait [Mme Le Comte] une science de Peinture & une intelligence de lumière qui surprend les Maîtres de l'Art. Jamais on a traité les ombres & les reflets avec plus de force et de vérité: la main qui tient le papier de Musique sort entièrement du Tableau. Il y a dans ce bras une harmonie de clair-obscur et de couleurs dont on ne voit que peu d'exemples dans les Ouvrages des meilleurs Maîtres".

The critical comments on La Tour's work are also reprinted in Besnard and Wildenstein, 1928; on the Salon 1753, see pp. 52–58.

29 Bongie, 1977 (note 22), p. 149.

had and admitting that “his clearest and finest insights are due to the precision of her mind and liveliness of her imagination”.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the interest in art, optics, and sense perception shared by at least Ferrand, Nollet, and Watelet as well as by the artist, made these sitters and their social circles the ideal audience for La Tour’s colourful pastels, praised for their intelligent work with light and shade. La Tour’s sitters had esprit, and they knew how to converse about the senses, savour a multisensory experience, appreciate the visual and tactile qualities of the portraits, and make their musical themes resonate. In the portraits, the women—no less than the men—are portrayed and addressed as *gens d’esprit*.

One of the critics of the Salon of 1753, Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne, explicitly points out the equal treatment of male and female sitters. Initially rehearsing the prejudice that women are rarely happy with their portraits and more interested in beauty than in resemblance, he concedes that there are exceptions, among which he counts La Tour’s portrait of Madame de Geli.<sup>31</sup> In a letter written to thank the artist, the sitter speaks more casually about her judgment of her likeness:

You have elevated my portrait to the height of perfection. It is the admiration and pleasure of all of Paris; the echoes resound even here on my mountain. I will leave it one of these days to go to the Louvre and show my face to the public, to join my acclamation to theirs, to reassure them [...] that they have never been so right in their lives.<sup>32</sup>

The letter suggests that Geli liked boasting about her portrait, identified with the applause it elicited, and cheerfully anticipated offering proof of its resemblance by showing herself next to it. Going to see one’s portrait—and being seen with it—was an event. We can safely assume that the other sitters and their acquaintances enjoyed their visits to the Salon in a similar way. The group of persons La Tour portrayed belonged to the same circles that formed the audience of the

30 Étienne Bonnot Abbé de Condillac, *Traité des Sensations, à Madame la Comtesse la Vassé*, London, 1754, p. 5: “Les vues les plus exactes & les plus fines qu’il [his treatise] renferme, sont dûes à la justesse de son esprit & la vivacité de son imagination”.

31 Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Sentimens sur quelques ouvrages de Peinture, Sculpture et Gravure. Écrit à un particulier en Province*, 1754, pp. 161–162. See also the recent commented edition by Étienne Jollet (ed.), *La Font de Saint-Yenne. Œuvre critique*, Paris, 2001. The portrait of Madame de Geli is listed among the portraits La Tour showed at the Salon of 1753, but its whereabouts are unknown today.

32 Letter by M<sup>me</sup> de Barbaut-Gelly to Quentin de la Tour, quoted from Charles Desmaze, *Le Reliquaire de Maurice Quentin de la Tour*, Paris 1874, p. 22, “Vous avez élevés mon portrait au comble de la perfection, c’est l’admiration et le plaisir de tout Paris ; le bruit en a retantit jusque sur ma montagne, ausy vai-je la quitter des ces jours, pour aller au Louvre montrer ma figure, au public, joindre mes acclamation au leurs, les assurer, et les convaincre, que de leur vie, ils n’ont jamais eut tant de raison”. On the significance of this letter, see also Marlen Schneider, “‘Vous avait fait de moi un chef-d’œuvre’: le portrait et sa présentation publique aux Salons de l’Académie royale”, in Pichet, 2014 (note 18), pp. 153–172, especially p. 161.

art exhibition. The livret—in which all of the sitters’ names are listed along with, in most cases, their occupations, positions, or membership in academies of art and science—is evidence that the who’s who mattered. We learn, for example, that the Marquis de Voyer not only occupied a high military rank but was also an associate member of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, an affiliation he shared with Watelet.<sup>33</sup> Four of the sitters were members of the Académie royale des sciences, and several contributed to the *Encyclopédie*. Besides Rousseau and Watelet, this includes Charles-Marie de la Condamine,<sup>34</sup> who wrote articles about South America based on his extensive travels to the continent. Introduced in the livret as “chevalier de Saint-Lazare, de l’Académie royale des sciences, de la Société royale de Londres et de l’Académie de Berlin”, he is portrayed by La Tour in informal, but elegant clothing, bearing the cross of his order and a slightly whimsical smile. Several of the sitters were involved in the *querelle des bouffons*, a controversy about the respective merits of the French and Italian operas that took place around the time La Tour painted the portraits in question. Rousseau defended Italian opera, represented in the suite of pastels by Manelli. On the contrary, d’Alembert and Madame de Mondonville, along with her husband, composer Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville, whose portrait by La Tour was displayed at the Salon of 1747, belonged to the faction that championed French opera.<sup>35</sup> Many of the sitters were thus part of the same conversation, which was likely more important than being of the same opinion. Through this circle of friends and acquaintances and attending philosophical and literary salons—including the more intimate circle that congregated at Mademoiselle Ferrand’s to the Monday dinners at which Madame Geoffrin hosted artists and amateurs<sup>36</sup>—the artist and his sitters also encountered the critics. Anne Claude de Caylus was not the only critic in the group of those represented and was thus in a position to understand the portraits’ significance:

This year, resemblance joined with other important aspects of art, has fulfilled everything the public had the right to expect from the beautiful pastels of M. Delatour: this artist, citizen, and philosopher has given the

33 Watelet had been made *associé-libre* of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in 1747 and became an *amateur honoraire* in 1766. See Charlotte Guichard, *Les amateurs d’art à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 2008, p. 9.

34 Frank E. Kafner and Serena E. Kafner, *The Encyclopedists as Individuals: A Biographical Dictionary of the Authors of the Encyclopédie*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 184–188.

35 Salmon, 2004 (note 1), pp. 48–49 and 175–176.

36 Paula Rea Radisich, *Hubert Robert: Painted Spaces of the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1998, see in particular her chapter “Making Conversation: Hubert Robert in the Salon of Madame Geoffrin”, pp. 15–53; on La Tour’s eagerness to be part of the intellectual elite and to attend salons such as the one of M<sup>me</sup> Geoffrin see Hoisington (note 1), pp. 184–188; more generally on the Monday dinners at which Geoffrin hosted artists, amateurs, and *gens de lettres* and the mundane, financial dimension of these social networks, see Antoine Lilti, *Le monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanté à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 2005, especially, pp. 170–173; on the amateurs and Madame Geoffrin, see also Guichard, 2008 (note 33), p. 268.

whole of Europe a spectacle by which it seems to me we have not been sufficiently struck. He prefers the consolation of making portraits of illustrious men to the advantage of making those of opulent people.<sup>37</sup>

Highlighting the sitters' illustriousness rather than their wealth (even though some of them were very well-to-do), Caylus stresses the idealistic aspect of portraiture and the fact that artists and sitters liked to see each other as friends. Still, most of the portraits (except the portrait of de Silvestre, which La Tour kept in his studio, and a copy of the portrait of Rousseau, which the artist gifted to the philosopher) were not primarily tokens of friendship but merchandise, paid for by the sitters or their friends and family.

Claudia Denk has drawn attention to the significance of Caylus's comment in her book *Artiste, Citoyen et Philosophe: Der Künstler und sein Bildnis im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*. With his portrait of himself as a laughing Democritus, La Tour would have targeted an audience that identified with the ancient philosopher's mocking world view: France's enlightened elite, a group with which the artist became acquainted via portrait commissions.<sup>38</sup> With the likenesses on display at the Salon of 1753, La Tour assembled exactly the kind of people Denk discusses. It is thus not surprising that Caylus recognised the quality of the individual likenesses and the import of their constellation. This constellation was more than simply the result of the artist's shrewd selection; it was a manifestation of social practices: these illustrious people liked to see their portraits recognised at the Salon, and the fact that the artist was on amicable terms with them helped secure the works' inclusion in the exhibition. This configuration enabled La Tour to paint himself with—as it was put at the time—all the “intelligence of his art” into the enlightened circle he had convened. At the same time, he was creating a stage on which they could present and see each other as intellectuals, scholars, amateurs, and amatrices.<sup>39</sup> The latter were defined not least by their acquaintance with artists and their own artistic practices. Etching and, to a lesser degree, engraving played a vital role in the activities and sociability of amateurs and amatrices. In this regard, Le Comte and Watelet are a case in point: their love for each other was seen as complementary to their love for the

37 Caylus, “Exposition des ouvrages de l'Académie Royale de Peinture & de Sculpture, faite dans une sale du Louvre le 25 Août 1753”, in *Mercure de France*, Paris, October 1753, pp. 158–165, here p. 162: “La ressemblance jointe aux autres grandes parties de l'Art, a rempli complètement cette année tout ce que le public étoit en droit d'attendre des beaux pastels de M. Delatour: cet Artiste, Citoyen, Philosophe, donne à l'Europe entière un spectacle, dont il nous paroît qu'on n'est pas assez frappé ; il préfère la consolation de faire le portrait des hommes illustres, à l'avantage de faire celui des gens opulens”.

38 Claudia Denk, *Artiste, Citoyen & Philosophe: Der Künstler und sein Bildnis im Zeitalter der französischen Aufklärung*, Munich, 1998, in particular pp. 21–22; on La Tour's self-portraits, see pp. 41–64. On this quote and the notoriety of the sitters, see also Salmon, 2004 (note 1), pp. 121–123.

39 According to Martin Schieder, La Tour satisfied this particular group's desire to show their faces publicly: Martin Schieder, “‘Les portraits sont devenus un spectacle nécessaire à chaque Français’. Le discours esthétique sur le portrait au milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in Christian Michel (ed.), *Penser l'art dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: théorie, critique, philosophie, histoire*, Paris, 2013, pp. 41–58, p. 45.

arts, they were both active printmakers, and they exchanged their etchings with friends such as Caylus, himself an ardent etcher and collector of prints.<sup>40</sup> The circulation of pastel portraits can be seen in a similar light: some were gifted between friends, particularly in the case of copies of the initial portraits and engravings made after them.

La Tour's gathering of pastels at the Salon of 1753 was practised sociability. The artist assembled portraits like guests in a salon, opening the circle to the viewers, most prominently those who composed written commentaries on the exhibition. The particular way this set of portraits came together invites new ways of thinking about the relation between likenesses and social constellations. Similarly, Hannah Williams has argued that the portraits painted or sculpted as *morceaux de réception* for admission to the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, which typically represented more senior artists who were already members, negotiated the complex institutional hierarchies and served as a powerful performance of the collective body when hung in the Académie's meeting room.<sup>41</sup> While, in the case of the display at the Salon of 1753, the gathering was temporary, the portraits more informal, and the grouping of people less institutional, La Tour's pastels were no less social actors.

In this constellation, lifelikeness has a social dimension: not only is it a demonstration of the artist's skill or a personal affair, but it is also essential to the ability of the portraits to work in the ways described. Visitors to the Salon had to recognise the sitters to greet them as friends or acknowledge their illustriousness. Whether they were displayed as a group at the Salon is not entirely certain, though likely.<sup>42</sup> They were listed jointly in the livret and discussed as a group by the critics or, to use Le Blanc's words, a "suite nombreuse de Portraits".<sup>43</sup> According to the 18th-century editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, this term suggests a sequence—"one after the other, uninterrupted"<sup>44</sup>—and could be applied to both humans and things. Since smaller-format paintings like portraits were typically hung lower than larger history paintings,<sup>45</sup> La Tour's

40 Guichard, 2008 (note 33), pp. 281–286, and Charlotte Guichard, "Amateurs and the Culture of Etching", in *Artists and Amateurs: Etchings in 18th-Century France*, Perrin Stein (ed.), exh. cat., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/New Haven, 2013.

41 Williams, 2015 (note 1).

42 Isabelle Pichet, *Le Tapissier et les dispositifs discursifs au Salon (1750–1789). Expographie, critique et opinion*, Paris, 2012, pp. 71–78. Pichet has reconstructed the hanging of works at the Salon exhibitions, but existing sources have not allowed her to establish the exact display of all the works at the 1753 exhibition. However, she quotes (p. 71) one commentator who observed that the portraits by Nattier hang above those of La Tour. A commentator of one of La Tour's previous displays at the Salon of 1748, the abbé Gougenot, even complained that the portraits were "placé à la file l'un de l'autre", which he felt was boring. See Schieder, 2013 (note 39), p. 43.

43 Le Blanc, 1753 (note 28), p. 37.

44 *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, vol. 2, 1694, and vol. 2, 1762: "De suite: l'Un après l'autre, sans interruption", quoted from Artfl project: <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaires-dautresfois> [accessed: 25.02.2022].

45 Pichet, 2012 (note 42), p. 139.

portraits were probably seen more or less at eye level by visitors to the Salon. The amateur audience would have appreciated the porous, open quality of the pastels along with the markings, which brought them in touch with the artist's hand. Their sense of touch sensitised, they were able to connect with both the artist and the portrayed—all the more so as the latter addressed them with their smiles, gestures, and becoming facial features.<sup>46</sup>

Looking at La Tour's likenesses from this perspective is also a way of reconsidering the role and significance of the medium and the portrait as a genre in Ancien Régime France. As Marlen Schneider has already pointed out, La Tour turned his display of pastels at the 1753 Salon into something comparable to a *galerie de grands hommes*.<sup>47</sup> Such a role for ensembles of portraits of illustrious people was already foreseen in contemporary discussions concerning the Salon. Caylus, for example, mentions another suite of portraits at the end of the same *Explications* in which he applauds La Tour and his pastels. He is speaking of likenesses that draughtsman and engraver Charles-Nicolas Cochin—well connected with writers and amateurs, not least through his work as an illustrator<sup>48</sup>—had “drawn from nature with his habitual taste and ease”. As Caylus details,

this charming artist drew and exhibited a great number of portraits of artists and art lovers in profile that are all of the same size and striking resemblance. One cannot help but wish very much these drawings be engraved and made into a suite: [...] this enterprise promises to be all the more agreeable, as it would form a kind of tableau through which one could know without fault those [...] who lived in the same century. One would desire that this idea would have been put into practice in previous centuries—one would have been more easily transported into past societies, the imagination would draw from it, and the best works would have been embellished by it.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> On the notion of “contact” as a literal “touching together” and a form of intersubjectivity mobilised by the interaction of sight and touch, see Fend, 2017 (note 3), p. 95. See also Natalie Binczek: *Kontakt: Der Tastsinn in Texten der Aufklärung*, Tübingen, 2007, in particular pp. 250–251.

<sup>47</sup> Schneider 2014 (note 32), pp. 162–163.

<sup>48</sup> On Cochin, see Michel, 1993 (note 19), here p. 51. Despite Caylus's friendly comments, the artist and the amateur had actually considerable disagreements, see *ibid.*, pp. 112–115.

<sup>49</sup> Caylus, 1753 (note 37), p. 164, “Ce charmant Artiste [M. Cochin, le fils] a donc dessiné & exposé un très-grand nombre de profils des Artistes & des Amateurs des Arts, qui sont de la même grandeur & dont la ressemblance est frappante. On ne peut s'empêcher de souhaiter vivement qu'ils soient gravés & qu'ils forment une suite: [...] cette entreprise [...] sera d'autant plus agréable, que c'est une espèce de tableau, par lequel on pourroit connoître sans erreur ceux qui donnant dans le même goût ont vécu dans le même siècle; il seroit à désirer que cette idée eût été mise en pratique dans les siècles antérieurs, on se trouveroit plus aisément transporté dans les sociétés passées, l'imagination en tireroit des secours, & les meilleurs ouvrages en seroient embellis”.



Caylus thus envisages the suite of prints as a collective portrait and sees Cochin's project as leading to a *tableau* in which contemporary history is commemorated via a society's most illustrious people. Such an enterprise was of course not unprecedented: in 1697, Charles Perrault had assembled *Les Hommes illustres* (indeed without a single woman among them), a book with short biographies and engraved "portraits au naturel" of, among others, eminent politicians, military leaders, poets, and historians representing the period of Louis XIV.<sup>50</sup> This idea was revived during the 18th century in the form of literary portraits and engraved, painted, and sculpted effigies of *grands hommes*—an undertaking very much encouraged by philosophers including Voltaire.<sup>51</sup>

While other critics might not have praised the prints with quite this level of enthusiasm, they agreed about the value of the drawings. Le Blanc finds them to bear a "most striking resemblance" and of no lesser quality than painted portraits. He stresses the intelligence with which they were drawn and their ability to express "life and soul", similar to La Tour's pastels. He specifies that they represent "*gens de lettres*, painters, sculptors and art lovers"<sup>52</sup>—in other words, a group very similar to the one La Tour gathered at the same Salon, which, as far as I can see, even included some of the same personalities. Caylus's desire that these portraits might one day be turned into prints was, as was to be expected, realised. Once again, the act of printmaking was a performance of friendship among amateurs: the portrait of d'Alembert, for example, was one of several drawn by Cochin and etched by Watelet (fig. 6), a mutual friend of the philosopher and the draughtsman.<sup>53</sup>

Cochin's suite of drawings and La Tour's assemblage of portraits differed, of course, in terms of their medium, their size, and the rationale under which they were brought together. It is more than likely that Cochin collected these likenesses of illustrious people with the prospect of engraving them, while La Tour assembled a selection of pastel portraits he happened to have painted, mainly on commission, in the months leading up to the Salon of 1753. Still, the grouping that resulted from the occasion was far from accidental, given the commonalities and relations between La Tour's models. Cochin's and La Tour's

50 Charles Perrault, *Les hommes illustres qui ont paru en France pendant ce siècle, avec leurs portraits au naturel*, Paris, 2 vol., 1696–1700.

51 Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Gregor Wedekind, "Le culte des grands hommes—du Panthéon au Walhalla", in *ibid.* (eds.), *Le culte des grands hommes 1750–1850*, Paris, 2009, pp. 1–12. In the same volume, see Thomas W. Gaehtgens "Du Parnasse au Panthéon: la représentation des hommes illustres et des grands hommes dans la France du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", pp. 135–171. The article includes a discussion of La Tour (pp. 145–150) as a portraitist of illustrious men.

52 Le Blanc, 1753 (note 28), p. 46–47, "Les Gens de Lettres, les Peintres, les Sculpteurs & les Amateurs des Arts que M. Cochin à dessinés [...] sont de la ressemblance la plus frappante. [...] Il n'en est aucun [among Cochin's drawings] où l'on ne trouve le caractère particulier à celui qui y est représenté: d'où il résulte que les couleurs ne sont pas nécessaire pour exprimer ce qui est essentiel à la nature, l'ame & la vie".

53 Michel, 1993 (note 19), p. 115.

suites of portraits were described in similar terms in respect to not only the ways in which they achieved lifelikeness but also their historical and national significance. These merits were stressed by another commentator on the Salon of 1753, La Font de Saint-Yenne; his comments are particularly interesting because the critic is much better known for his plea in favour of history painting and his dismissal of portraiture. In both his discussions of the Salon of 1746 and his momentous *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* (1747), he deplores the decline of history painting in France, calling for a morally responsible art that would advance the common good of the nation. Putting all his hopes for a renewal of French art into history painting, he had little positive to say about portraiture.<sup>54</sup> He was not the only critic who saw it as a product of *amour propre* and vanity, which had become far too prevalent, with artists taking recourse to it for financial reasons. He speaks of the “rapid opulence” of the portrait painters and particularly the pastelists.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, La Font alleges that portraiture, including allegorical portraiture, is a genre especially popular with women, who tend to seek in it embellishment rather than resemblance. This opinion had already been voiced by de Piles, who generally held portraiture in higher esteem but who also pointed to women who preferred beauty to resemblance.<sup>56</sup>

La Font's politicised view of the arts granted him an important position in the art historical narratives of the 18th century. Especially historians of art emphasising the role of art criticism in the formation of an enlightened public sphere stressed the significance of La Font and tended to pair with the critic in their privileging of history painting.<sup>57</sup> In turn, feminist art historians have pointed out the gendered nature of La Font's critique of portraiture and the work of artists such as Boucher as morally depraved products of female narcissism or women's patronage.<sup>58</sup>

However, with this critique and its feminist interpretation in mind, it is worth taking another look at La Font. He did spare a few portrait painters—and, as we have seen, some women sitters—from his negative evaluation. In his *Réflexions* from 1746, he showed appreciation for some portraitists, among them his friend Louis Tocqué. Tocqué voiced views on portraiture similar to La Font's in his

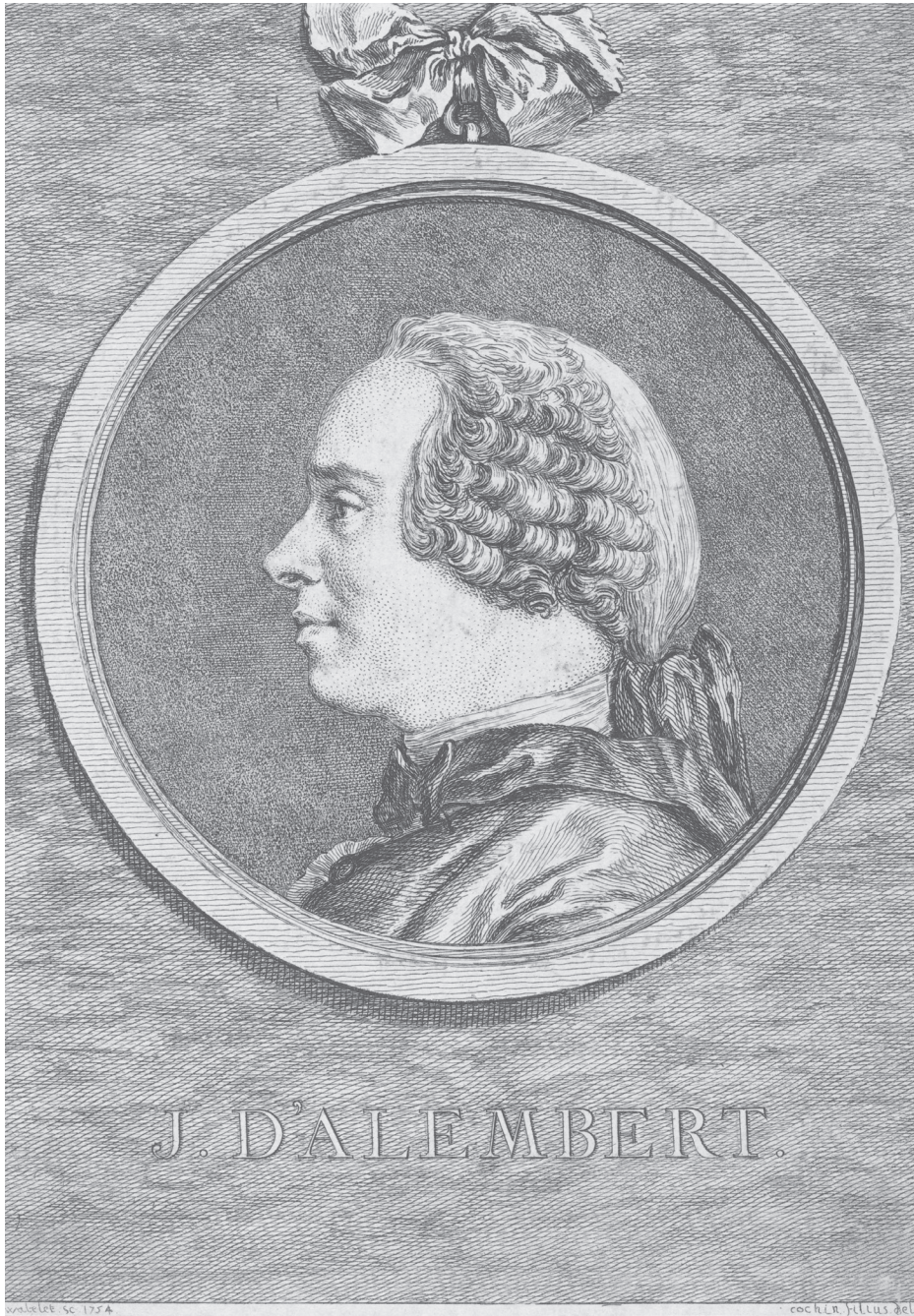
54 La Font, 1747 (note 16). On La Font, see Kluge, 2009 (note 16); Richard Wrigley, *The Origins of French Art Criticism: From the Ancien Régime to the Restoration*, Oxford, 1993.

55 Ibid., pp. 22–23; and on the critique of portraiture in 18th-century France, see Schneider, 2014, pp. 151–154 and Amy Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France*, University Park, PA, 2014, pp. 5–6.

56 Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris, 1708, pp. 268–269, and more generally on this discourse, see Kathleen Nicholson, “The Ideology of Feminine Virtue: The Vestal Virgin in French Eighteenth-Century Allegorical Portraiture”, in Joanna Woodall (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester/New York, 1997, pp. 52–72, here p. 54.

57 Tom Crow's *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven/London, 1985, is but one prominent example.

58 See, in particular, Hyde, 2006 (note 13), especially, pp. 46–47, 64–67.



6 Claude-Henri Watelet after Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Portrait of D'Alembert*, 1754, etching on laid paper, 17,3 × 12,5 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art

lecture on the topic at the Académie in 1750.<sup>59</sup> La Font's comments about La Tour, whose portrait of Restout he discusses in detail, are also comparatively positive. Already more inclined towards portraiture and pastels in the revised version of the *Réflexions* (1752), in his *Sentimens*, in which he responds to the Salon of 1753, he is full of praise for La Tour's pastels, including portraits of women.<sup>60</sup> As discussed, he considers the portrait of Madame de Geli one of the artist's most beautiful pastels and applauds the sitter for her "esprit and fair reasoning", which enabled her to feel that the "expression of truth in the traits" are preferable to any false embellishment as long as they "paint a beautiful character".<sup>61</sup> This assessment of a single portrait aligns with La Font's general esteem for the suite of pastels, the value of which is increased by their grouping. It is as an ensemble that the portraits aroused in La Font a patriotic attitude otherwise reserved for history painting. Together, the portraits become *a tableau*, a term typically used for the more highly ranked genre in La Font's critiques.<sup>62</sup> That they seem to enliven the sitters and give them a soul—as almost every commentator emphasised—also elevates the portraits. It is, as La Font writes, La Tour's "love and zeal for the honour of the nation that makes him add to the immortality of the writings of our illustrious authors that of their portraits, which will transmit to posterity the wit of their physiognomies and the life of their traits engraved after his renderings at the front of their works".<sup>63</sup> The combination of the artist's commitment to the nation and the sitters' eminence lends the suite of portraits a significance comparable to that of history painting. La Tour must have been pleased with this account given that he frequently complained about the lower esteem for and remuneration of portraitists compared with history painters.<sup>64</sup>

59 Reprinted in Louis Tocqué, "Réflexions sur la peinture et particulièrement sur le genre du portrait" [1750], in Arnauld Doria (ed.), *Le Discours de Tocqué sur le genre de portrait*, Paris, 1930 ; on Tocqué and La Font, see Kluge, 2009 (note 16), p. 104.

60 Ibid., p. 300; and Dorit Kluge, "La Nouvelle édition des *Réflexions* (1752) et sa version originale (1747)", in *Diderot Studies* 36, 2016, pp. 101–114, here p. 101; Schneider, 2014 (note 32), pp. 156–157; Schieder, 2013 (note 39), pp. 45–48.

61 La Font, 1754 (note 31), p. 162, "Comme elle a beaucoup d'esprit & de justesse dans le raisonnement, elle a senti combien l'expression du vrai dans les traits, quels qu'ils soient, quand ils peignent un beau caractere, est préférable à tous ces agréments faux et empruntés que n'embellissent jamais".

62 Wrigley, 1993 (note 54), p. 301.

63 La Font, 1754 (note 31), p. 160, "C'est son amour & son zèle pour l'honneur de la nation, qui lui fait ajouter à l'immortalité des écrits de nos auteurs illustres, celle de leurs Portraits, qui transmettront à la postérité l'esprit de leurs phisonomies & la vie de leurs traits gravés d'après lui à la tête de leurs ouvrages".

64 La Tour expresses the difficulties of painting in pastel in a letter to Marigny, written 1 August 1763. The main agenda of the letter is to ask for higher esteem for the medium and for better remuneration for his portraits. See "Correspondance inédite de Quentin de La Tour", in Jules-Joseph Guiffrey (ed.), *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 2. Per., 31, 1885, pp. 201–216, 309–321; on La Tour's concern with the status of portraiture in relation to history painting, see also Thomas Kirchner, *L'expression des passions: Ausdruck als Darstellungsproblem in der französischen Kunst und Kunsttheorie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Mainz, 1991, p. 249.

Of course, there is an instance of displacement here, as La Font moves seamlessly from the pastels to prints made after them, engravings which indeed (by that time and in subsequent years) ornamented books by authors such as Rousseau. Not surprisingly, only a few pages further in his *Sentimens*, La Font also discusses the drawings by Cochin and praises them in nearly the same terms as he had La Tour's pastels. For the critic, Cochin's portrait medallion should be considered "public proof of the esteem in which he held not only illustrious men but also the lovers of fine art". Like Caylus, La Font hoped they would soon be turned into prints to "immortalise artist and sitters and delight all those who love to see the true physiognomy of the men whose works they admire".<sup>65</sup> In the eyes of the contemporaries, these likenesses thus increased in significance when brought together. La Tour's pastels and Cochin's drawings were seen as representing a similar circle of "illustrious" people displayed at a moment when this particular group could indeed be seen as representative of the nation in a tableau of their time.

When La Font swiftly moves from a discussion of La Tour's pastels to their reproduction in print, he is not only addressing an issue of dissemination but also implicitly assessing the different qualities of the two media. In line with the new discourse on physiognomy developing at the time, La Font, like Le Blanc, seemed to feel that colour was rather arbitrary or even obstructive in bringing out a person's character. Their hope that portraits of illustrious people could serve a moral purpose, with the portrayed as exemplars, was based on the assumption that a portrait could convey character by giving an accurate visual account of a subject's physiognomy.<sup>66</sup> Stressing how accurately Cochin's drawings bring out the traits that characterise a person—just as they expected the potential prints made after La Tour would—La Font and Le Blanc blend the language of facial features with that of line drawing or engraving.

65 La Font, 1754 (note 31), p. 176, "Cochin [...] nous a donné avec ses crayons exposés au salon une preuve publique non-seulement de son estime singulière pour tous les hommes illustres, mais encore pour les amateurs des beaux arts dans quarante-six petits portraits en médaillons dessinés au premier trait. Je souhaite de tout mon cœur, [...] qu'il puisse dérober quelques heures pour exécuter incessamment un projet qui immortalisera le peintre & les originaux, & qui fera les délices de tous ceux qui aiment à voir l'esprit & la vraie phisionomie des hommes dont ils admirent les ouvrages".

66 See Jacques Perneti, *Lettres philosophiques sur les physionomies*, La Haie, 1746, in particular pp. 9–15, and on colour with regard to the face, p. 188. The publication was the first major treatise on physiognomy in Enlightenment France and, characteristic of the 18th century discourse on physiognomy, Perneti drew connections between aesthetics and physiognomy, arguing in support of the similarities between the judgement of faces and that of paintings or art objects. His nephew Jean-Jacques Pernet was the author of the *Dictionnaire portatif de peinture, sculpture et gravure* (1757), in which he stresses that it is the essence of a portrait to express the temperament, character, and physiognomy of a person (entry "Portrait", pp. 475–476) and also went on to publish on physiognomy while at the court of Frederick the Great. On Pernet and the physiognomic interpretation of art works, see Martial Guéron, *Peaux d'âmes. L'interprétation physiognomique des œuvres d'art*, Paris, 2001; on the "physiognomisation publique", see Willibald Sauerländer, *Essai sur les visages de Houdon*, Paris, 2005.

Thus, from today's perspective, it is crucial to consider the materiality of pastel—a medium not so easily aligned with the potentially oppressive and prejudicial discourse of physiognomy. The comparison of La Tour's portraits with Cochin's drawings and with potential suites of prints demonstrates that it was fully in keeping with 18th-century views to consider the pastels both individually and as a group and envisage their potential to gain the status of a historical *tableau*. Taking up a proposition Marcia Pointon made long ago regarding 18th-century Britain, considering the display and spatial arrangement of the portraits along with issues of resemblance and modes of address allows us to more generally appreciate "portraiture's role in the formation of a sense, not only of history, but also of modern [...] subjectivity".<sup>67</sup> In the case of La Tour, pastel is crucial to how the likenesses tease out specific sensibilities at the heart of Enlightenment subjectivity and to their standing as an intrinsic part of social practices. This sensitive medium stimulates viewers' sensibilities while the portrayed engage them with their open expressions and varying smiles and gestures, testing the social skills involved in polite and witty conversation. The likenesses draw viewers into the circle of *gens illustres*—of which many were already a part—and allude to their shared conversations about music; sensualism; Newton's theories, and with them issues of colour and light; as well as the merits of *le faire*. Perceiving the visible marks the artist used to enliven the pastels, they could enjoy themselves in their status as amateurs and amatrices, which included getting in touch with the artist. La Tour's suite of pastels includes significant portraits of women—Marguerite Le Comte, a printmaker and amatrice; Élisabeth Ferrand, a mathematician and philosopher; and Jean-Anne de Mondonville, a musician—who were vital to the sociability and intellectual debates of their time. Challenging established hierarchies of gender and genre, La Tour's gathering of portraits at the Salon of 1753 allows us to see a historical tableau of mid-18th-century Paris in which *femmes d'esprit* play significant roles.

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<sup>67</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven/London, 1993, p. 4.