

# Book Reviews

This issue's reviews are Dictionary of pastellists before 1800; The Tudor House and Garden; Culinary Pleasures; Curry: A biography; and Real Flavours: The handbook of gourmet and deli ingredients



Dictionary of pastellists before 1800

## Dictionary of pastellists before 1800

Neil Jeffares

Unicorn Press £125

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The pastel is a hybrid art form, being neither a painting nor a drawing. Yet, in some respects, it shares certain features in common with both. The medium itself is difficult to use and the results fragile, not just on account of its friable surface but also because of the dangers of exposure to light. Its advantages are ease of application, intense luminosity and variety of texture. Arguably the pastel was at its most popular in Europe during the 18th century when it was closely linked to the dominance of portraiture. Indeed, the vast majority of surviving pastels are portraits. At the time, these were usually glazed and hung in small private rooms in palaces or grand houses. Sometimes today they can be seen displayed in groups in cabinet rooms in museums – Berlin, Dresden, Geneva – where they overwhelm the viewer by their vivid characterisation, fresh colour and close technique.

For many people, however, the beauty of pastels, or what Claude-Henri Watelet so aptly described as '*l'éclat des fleurs*', remains to be savoured. Even so, several pastels have passed through the

salerooms in recent years and the increase in prices indicates that they are again becoming desirable items.

This *Dictionary*, compiled by Neil Jeffares, is a formidable achievement and constitutes a landmark in the subject. Such a publication was much needed and fortunately, in so far as the sustained and dedicated scholarship demonstrated by the author is matched by the highest standards of book production brought to the project by Unicorn Press, the result is a triumph in more ways than one. Just to list what is packed between the covers indicates the scale of the undertaking: a survey outlining the development of pastels in Europe and America together with a summary of technical considerations entries on 1250 individual artists lavishly illustrated with over 5000 reproductions (2000 in colour) from a huge number of sources, a list of those exhibitions that included pastels between the dates of 1704 and 2005 with transcriptions of the relevant entries from those catalogues dating from before 1800, and yet other indexes of collections and sitters plus a bibliography. Furthermore, biographies of artists are detailed and fulsome and include pithy and illuminating observations on stylistic evolution. The great names – Maurice-Quentin de la Tour, Jean-Baptiste Perroneau, Rosalba Carriera, Jean-Étienne Liotard, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun, John Russell, Hugh Douglas Hamilton, Francis Cotes – are analysed alongside other less well-known but significant artists such as Pierre Bernard, Joseph Boze, Joseph Ducreux, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Simon-Bernard Lenoir, Gustaf Lundberg, William Hoare of Bath, Katherine Read, Jean Valade and Louis Vigée. Thanks to this *Dictionary* the work of these and other fine pastellists will become better known and their work more readily identifiable. Neil Jeffares is refreshingly trenchant in some of his judgments and he is careful to retain a sense of proportion when regarding the place of pastels in the

overall hierarchy of 18th century art. His personal preference is clearly for French artists and on occasions he can adopt a fairly harsh tone towards British pastellists.

The use of pastel continued into the 19th century with the Barbizon school, the Impressionists and the Post-Impressionists, in addition to the activities of the Société des Pastellistes Français founded in 1885. There is easily enough material for another, perhaps less capacious, volume, but we shall have to wait to see if Neil Jeffares has either the energy or the inclination to continue his quest. But, in the meantime, he is to be heartily congratulated on completing the present task.

Christopher Lloyd