

Le pinceau à la main:
The Intertwined Lives and Careers of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Thérèse Reboul
Vien

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Abstract

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Abstract: Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, two artists whose lives intertwined over the course of the eighteenth century in Paris, experienced careers which present fascinating case studies for Enlightenment-era artistic lineage and training, professional obstacles for women, and the placement of women artists in the context of the rococo. Basseporte was a portraitist and botanical illustrator who became the French king's official plant painter at the Jardin du Roi, while Reboul Vien was a painter of natural history subjects and a member of the prestigious Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture. This thesis investigates existing source material and scholarship on these two artists, from their own lifetimes to the present day, and raises new questions regarding the hidden facets of their careers, including the possibilities that Basseporte's early biographers intentionally altered the factual narrative of her early life, and that Reboul Vien actively contributed to her husband's practice as a key collaborator for many years after her own exhibition career had ended. The assumption that Basseporte was Reboul Vien's artistic instructor has been adopted by historians in recent years, but the hypothesis, though compelling, remains unproven. Through comparative examination of Basseporte and Reboul Vien's work and singular professional trajectories, this thesis critically analyzes the theory of their connection and crucially increases the depth and breadth of scholarship on this pair of artists.

Le pinceau à la main:

The Intertwined Lives and Careers of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien

Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701-1780) and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien (1735-1806), two artists whose lives intertwined over the course of the eighteenth century in Paris, experienced careers which present fascinating case studies for Enlightenment-era artistic lineage and training, professional obstacles for women, and the placement of women artists in the context of the rococo. Basseporte was a portraitist and botanical illustrator who became the French king's official *peintre des plantes* at the Jardin du Roi, the only woman ever to hold this position, which she occupied for almost half a century. Reboul Vien was an illustrator of scientific volumes, a painter of natural history, and a member of the prestigious Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, which admitted just fifteen women in its 145-year history. However, though not uncommon in the legacies of early modern female artists, particularly of the French pre-revolutionary era, much of what we might have had in terms of primary source documents and original works of art has been lost to history: destroyed, misplaced, or misattributed, resulting in the now all-too-familiar situation of historical women who were recognized by their contemporaries but then forgotten by succeeding generations. The discovery and reattribution of lost works is a slow process that only comes about when these overlooked artists are provided more space in the scholarly literature, which can trickle down into popular culture and result in increasing public awareness. This process has already begun with women artists of the late-eighteenth century, most prominently Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, and Anne Vallayer-Coster, who have, especially in the wake of Mary Sheriff's 1996 *The Exceptional Woman:*

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art, been the subjects of recent monographs and solo exhibitions.

In the catalogue for the 2012 National Museum of Women in the Arts exhibition, titled *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from the Louvre, Versailles and Other French National Collections*, Melissa Hyde writes that Reboul Vien “may never be more than a footnote in art history.”¹ In an article for the journal *Arts et Savoirs* in 2016, historians Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari claim that Basseporte “often remains nothing more than a footnote even in histories of the ‘*peinture des plantes*’.”² The purpose of this study is to piece together the fragmentary and very often contradictory factual knowledge we possess regarding these two artists, in an effort to provide a more complete view of their lives and careers and rescue them from this undeserved relegation to footnotes. I contribute overlooked biographical details and new sources to the literature, including previously unexamined correspondence. In relation to prevailing accounts of each artist’s career, I offer new theories that consider the ways in which their legacies have been intentionally and unintentionally shaped by scholars from their lifetimes onward.

Through a close reading of a published eulogy of Basseporte, which has often been treated as biography by modern historians, I analyze the ways that its writers and editors carefully contained Basseporte’s life and reputation within the societally permissible confines of womanhood in the eighteenth century. Reboul Vien, who came to prominence in Parisian art circles in her early twenties,

¹ Melissa Hyde, “Looking Elsewhere: Women and the Parisian Art World in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from the Louvre, Versailles and Other French National Collections* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2012), 33.

² Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, “Inhabiting Flower Worlds: The Botanical Art of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte,” *Arts et Savoirs* 6 (2016): 6.

experienced such a brief solo exhibition career that she was quickly swept into the art historical shadows. However, I raise the possibility that her work continued, not under her own name, but in active collaboration with her husband, providing her with the relative freedom to grow and develop in her own practice while negotiating societal expectations for her roles as wife, mother, and professional artist.

The assumption that Basseporte was Reboul Vien's artistic instructor has been adopted by scholars in recent years, but the hypothesis, though compelling, remains unproven. Through this comparative examination of Basseporte and Reboul Vien, I will critically analyze the theory of their connection, as well as contribute to current work by, in particular, Hyde and Nina Rattner Gelbart, to increase the depth and breadth of scholarship on the works of these two artists.³ I will begin by presenting each artist's biography, giving particular attention to each artist's training, and to the contrasting trajectories taken by them personally and professionally as they navigated singular careers as precedent-setting eighteenth-century women artists. In my view Basseporte and Reboul Vien warrant more robust scholarly attention, and it is with this aim that I have undertaken the current study. This thesis offers a basis for future work on these artists by other scholars as well as myself, as I will be pursuing similar lines of inquiry, expanding and developing this project beginning in the autumn of 2021 in the form of a PhD dissertation.

³ Published a mere month before the completion of the present study, Nina Rattner Gelbart's most recent book presents the stories of six women of science in Enlightenment France, one of whom is Madeleine Françoise Basseporte. See specifically Chapter 3, "Botany in the Field and in the Garden: Jeanne Barret (1740-1807) and Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701-1780)" in *Minerva's French Sisters: Women of Science in Enlightenment France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 107-165. While my own findings largely align with Gelbart's, our approaches and primary areas of focus differ markedly.

Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701-1780)

The outlines of Basseporte's history are in large part gleaned from her obituary, published in 1781, the year following her death. The article, printed as a "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi" in *Nécrologe des hommes célèbres de France, par une société de gens de lettres*, vol. XVI, stretches to nearly 4,000 words and in turn allegedly relies on archival and/or anecdotal evidence (it is not specified) provided by a sole contributor.⁴ This source is one Edme Mentelle (1730-1815), a prolific scholar on geography and, though not a major figure in the history of the discipline in early modern Europe, certainly a prominent member of his field in late-eighteenth-century France.⁵ At the closing of the obituary, Mentelle is credited by the editors, Jean Castilhon and Louis Poinset de Sivry, who list his engagements as "historiographer of Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, *pensionnaire du roi*, professor emeritus of history and geography at the *école royale militaire*, the academies of science and letters in Rouen, etc., author of comparative geography, and of several other useful works." It is stated that M. Mentelle provided the editors "with the information which composes this article, as a testimony of his gratitude towards Mademoiselle Basseporte." Given Mentelle's presence in both scholarly circles and at court as the historiographer to the younger brother of Louis XVI, as well as our knowledge from his correspondence that he maintained close friendships throughout his life

⁴ Jean Castilhon and Louis Poinset de Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi" in *Nécrologe des hommes célèbres de France, par une société de gens de lettres*, vol. XVI (Paris: Chez Moutard, 1781), p. 159-187. See also "Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre," in the *Revue universelle des arts*, vol. 13 (Paris: Veuve Jules Renouard, 1861), p. 139-147. Both Gelbart and Anne Lafont have credited Mentelle as Basseporte's biographer, presumably under the assumption that he is in fact the writer of the "Notice." See Anne Lafont, "Basseporte," in *1740, Un abrégé du monde: Savoirs et collections autour de Dezallier d'Argenville*, ed. Anne Lafont (Lyon: Fage éditions, 2012), 53.

⁵ Michael Heffernan, "Edme Mentelle's Geographies and the French Revolution" in *Geography and Revolution*, ed. David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 273.

with both men and women, in particular with the novelist, *mémoriste*, and educational theorist Stéphanie Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis (1746-1830), the two clearly ran in close circles.

Eighty years after its first appearance, in 1861, the obituary was reprinted in vol. 13 of the *Revue universelle des arts*. For the purposes of this study, the obituary will serve as a productive framework for setting out the details of Basseporte's biography, and I will draw in additional sources where necessary and available, in order to fill in the gaps left by the "Notice." However, in examining this document we must be aware of the possibility that Mentelle, with or without the collaboration of the editors, or Basseporte herself, in relating facts and tales to her geographer confidant, could have intentionally altered the narrative, and I will interrogate some of these possibilities in the pages that follow.

The nineteenth-century scholar Augustin Jal, while writing his *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire*, had access to the civil and parochial records stored in the Hôtel de Ville in Paris, a great many of which he managed to copy before a Communard fire destroyed much of the archive in 1871. We know from his citation of Basseporte's birth certificate that she was born and baptised on 28 April 1701 in the royal and parish church of St. Louis.⁶ Her mother was Madeleine Guyon, and her father was Jean Basseporte, a wholesale wine merchant. The *petit bourgeois* family, at the time of Basseporte's birth, were living in the rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île, at the very heart of Paris on the Île Saint Louis. Present at the baptism were Basseporte's chosen godparents, Estienne Morlot, a clerk, and Françoise Guyon, wife of M. Bazard le jeune, also a wine merchant. Jean, son of Pierre

⁶ Basseporte's given name is spelled "Magdelaine Françoise" on the birth certificate. Société de l'histoire de l'art français, *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français* (Paris: F. de Nobele, 1875), 49-50.

Basseporte and Perette Chaporte, and Madeleine Guyon, daughter of wine merchant Pierre Guyon, married on the first of February 1689.⁷ The couple had their first child, Marie-Madeleine, four years later, on 7 October 1693. Three more children were to follow: Claude, on 19 August 1696, Edme, on 10 October 1698 (d. 11 May 1700), and Madeleine-Françoise. Referring to the *Nécrologe* article, which he calls long, detailed, and curious, Jal expresses trust in the account, saying that “one must believe it to be true, because it was made from the notes provided by the geographer Mentelle, friend of Mademoiselle Basseporte.”⁸

Basseporte is introduced in the “Notice” as a “painter and draughtswoman of plants of the King’s garden, born in Paris in the month of April 1701,” who “deserves a distinguished place in the obituaries of artists and people of letters.”⁹ This praise is immediately qualified however, with the claim that her particular merit comes not so much from “extraordinary” talent as from her virtue, which serves “as an example to others.”¹⁰ Following the premature death of her father, an “honest merchant” fallen on unanticipated hard times, young Madeleine Françoise and her mother were left destitute.¹¹ The “Notice” remarks that her lack of financial support or male parental guidance, as well as her physical beauty, were pitfalls that she overcame with her “wisdom, her love for her mother, and her penchant for the arts.”¹² Though the article leaves out the means by which she was initially trained, it states that “no sooner had she learned the first elements of drawing” than an artist of some renown,

⁷ Augustin Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d’histoire* (Paris: H. Plon, 1867), 124.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ For the full source text and a complete English translation, see Appendix I. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

¹⁰ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 162-163.

¹¹ Presumably her siblings as well, though no mention of them is made in the “Notice.”

¹² Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 160.

Monsieur Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert de Séry (1686-1733), “took it upon himself” to begin giving her lessons. Robert was the appointed painter to Armand Gaston Maximilien, Cardinal de Rohan (1674-1749), and as such had been granted a studio in the Cardinal’s residence, the Hôtel de Soubise. Though the identification of this particular building, now the home of the Archives nationales, is a matter of debate, it is certain that Madame and Mademoiselle Basseporte acquired lodgings in a building adjacent to the Cardinal’s residence and Robert’s studio, in the 3ème arrondissement of Paris.¹³ Robert was additionally given leave to train students from his palace *atelier*, thereby giving pupils access to copy and learn from the rich collection of paintings and pastels filling the Cardinal’s vast apartments. Prior to holding this position, Robert had spent an estimated eighteen years working in various capacities as an artist in Rome. It was there that he first became acquainted with noted collector and financier Pierre Crozat (1665-1740), antiquarian and amateur artist Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus (1692-1765), and the Cardinal de Rohan.¹⁴

The “Notice” states that Basseporte and her mother resided in the neighboring building while she was between the ages of ten and twelve; however, Robert returned with the Cardinal de Rohan from his long sojourn in Rome only in the year 1724, when Basseporte would have been 23. In 1727, Pierre Crozat appears to have referred to Basseporte as a talented student of Robert’s in a letter to Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757), a renowned Venetian *pastelliste* and member of the French Académie

¹³ Robert’s early-twentieth-century biographer counters the attribution of this specific building: “Tous les documents contemporains indiquent qu’il logeait à l’hôtel Soubise; en réalité, ce n’est pas dans le palais occupé aujourd’hui par les Archives nationales qu’il fut hébergé, mais bien dans celui qu’on allait appeler l’hôtel de Rohan et qui abrite pour quelques jours encore les services de l’Imprimerie nationale; mais cette demeure, édifiée par l’évêque de Strasbourg sur les jardins de l’hôtel Soubise et communiquant d’ailleurs avec lui, n’avait pas encore de nom particulier.” See Henri Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Séry), peintre du cardinal de Rohan (1686-1733)* (Paris: Librairie A. Picard, 1907), 8.

¹⁴ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Séry)*, 3-6.

royale de peinture et de sculpture. If this is the case, then Basseporte began her formal instruction under Robert sometime between 1724 and 1727, whilst in her mid-twenties, and any previous training would have been with other tutors. Basseporte's obituary is, as was custom in the early modern period, often subjective and even hagiographic in its portrayal of an individual's singularity. The style of writing, particularly in regard to her early life, tends towards hyperbole and mythologizing. The authors write that she only abandoned her work each day when the setting of the sun left her with no choice, that she ate and slept very little out of dedication to her learning, the maintenance of the housekeeping, and the need for economy, and that "until the age of 60 she maintained the habit of rising with the day, and not leaving her work until nightfall."¹⁵

According to Robert's biographer, Henri Bourin, Robert and Basseporte developed a close working relationship. It is clear that early in her training an open-door policy was maintained so that Basseporte had nearly unfettered access to the studio. Over time, and very remarkably for the period, Robert established a drawing school particularly "reserved for young girls" (*spécialement réservée aux jeunes filles*). Whether this was a subset or offshoot of his teaching studio or if he in fact only registered young women as pupils is uncertain, but we do know through Bourin that Robert placed Basseporte at the head of this institution.¹⁶ Robert's lectures were held in a large room set up as a workshop in the same nearby house and on the same floor as the apartments in which Madame and Mademoiselle

¹⁵ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 160-161.

¹⁶ The passage reads, "...il avait ouvert en effet à proximité, une école de dessin, spécialement réservée aux jeunes filles, où il avait placé une de ses nièces, Françoise Robert, sa filleule, qu'il avait fait venir de Reims; elle bénéficiait aussi de l'hospitalité du Cardinal. Mlle Basseporte, dont il fut le premier maître, avait été mise par lui à la tête de cette institution..." In a footnote Bourin notes regarding the school reserved for young girls that, "Il est intéressant de noter cette manifestation de féminisme artistique que nous croyons sans précédent." Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 9-10.

Basseporte lived. Though the house appears to have been owned by a certain Madame Gozet, the connection indicates that the space was rented by the Cardinal or Robert, and that Basseporte and her mother acquired accommodations there through her position as a student of Robert rather than independently.¹⁷

The “Notice” neglects the active role Basseporte played in the administration of Robert’s studio, and indeed shies away from any acknowledgement of their close collaborative relationship. Instead, the obituary goes on to say simply that she, having “exhausted all that the Hôtel de Soubise contained of value in painting,” obtained entry to the galleries and apartments of the Palais-Royal and began assiduous study of the works there, as she had done before. She developed a particular affinity for pastel portraiture and seems to have become known for producing paintings which could hold their own next to those of the masterful Rosalba Carriera.¹⁸ Carriera, celebrated for her innovative pastels and miniatures, traveled extensively throughout Europe over the course of her career and had spent the year 1720 in Paris, where she was actively patronized by the royal family. She had been encouraged to come to France by the collector Pierre Crozat, and it was as his guest that she passed her Parisian sojourn. During her stay she was formally named a member of the Académie, and a number of her works entered the collection held at the Palais-Royal, where Basseporte would have been able to copy them. Basseporte clearly drew the attention and regard of Crozat, who, as mentioned above, wrote to Carriera in 1727 to inform her that her works were being copied by a great many artists, and

¹⁷ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 10. Nina Rattner Gelbart reports that these apartments were located “in the block of houses now numbered 71-85 rue du Temple.” See Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 115.

¹⁸ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 162.

that in particular “there is a young lady, a student of M. Robert’s, who is beginning to make some progress.”¹⁹

Basseporte’s earliest known picture, characteristically executed in pastel, is her *Portrait of a Young Girl* (fig. 1), now in the Rijksmuseum collection and inscribed ‘*Peinte par Madeleine Basseporte 1727*’.²⁰ Thus painted within the first three years of her training under Robert, and in the year of Crozat’s writing to Carriera, according to the dated inscription, many elements of the work are indeed reminiscent of Carriera’s pastel portraits (fig. 2). Basseporte’s youthful sitter, as yet anonymous, looks outward and meets the viewer’s gaze head-on, with an expression that communicates feeling without sentiment, and reticence without resignation. She is captured in three-quarter profile, her body positioned at a 45-degree angle away from the viewer, and her head turned slightly to the right towards us. Visible strokes of color indicate a kind of playful and expressive mark-making, in which we see the shimmering, striped patterning on the subject’s gauzy wrap, or the individual curls surrounding her face, as singular lines and traces of the artist’s hand.

The portrait resembles in some ways works of Carriera that Basseporte would have seen in the Palais-Royal. Carriera’s reception piece, which she sent from Venice to the Académie, was received on 31 January 1722 and accepted on 28 February 1722. Titled *Nymph from Apollo’s Retinue* and now

¹⁹ Quoted in Neil Jeffares, “Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte,” in *Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800*, London, 2006, updated 8 February 2021. The source text statement reads, “Il y a une damoiselle, élève de M. Robert, qui commence a y faire quelque progrès.”

²⁰ This pastel was originally incorrectly attributed to Rosalba Carriera. As Ratouis de Limay noted, “Les pastels de Mlle Basseporte sont à peu près inconnus aujourd’hui. Le Rijks Museum d’Amsterdam en a acheté un en 1910, à la vente C.-F. Roos et Cie, où il passa sous une attribution à la Rosalba, attribution erronée, M. van Riemsdyck, conservateur de ce musée, ayant découvert, crayonnée au revers du pastel, cette mention: « Peint par Madeleine Basseporte, 1727. » Ratouis de Limay, *Le pastel en France au XVIIIème siècle* (Paris: Éditions Baudinière, 1946), 158-159.

held in the collection at the Musée du Louvre, Carriera's reception piece contains characteristic elements of her oeuvre that we can see clearly emulated by Basseporte in the 1727 portrait. The light, rosy pinks, chalky sky blues, and softly shining ivories against a grey background are present in Basseporte's work, as well as a sort of halo of light emanating from the sitter's outline, particularly about the neck. Thin, transparent fabrics drape around the shoulders of each figure, which appear iridescent in the pool of light.

During the same period, alongside his teaching, Robert was one of a handful of prominent artists employed by Crozat to produce engravings of the principle pieces in his personal collection of art and artifacts, as well as a few of those held by the king and the duc d'Orléans. The subsequent publication, *Cabinet Crozat*, included plate engravings by Charles-Nicolas Cochin (the Elder, 1688-1754), Nicolas-Henri Tardieu (1674-1749), Claude Audran III (1658-1734), Jacques-Philippe Le Bas (1707-1783), Nicolas Le Sueur (1690-1764) and the Comte de Caylus, in addition to Robert, and appeared in print in 1729.²¹ One such work is a print executed by Basseporte after the Italian artist Sebastiano Conca (1680-1764), and engraved under Basseporte's supervision by Nicolas Le Sueur (fig. 3).²² Bourin, citing parish records, reports that Robert and Basseporte were together made godparents

²¹ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 10.

²² The series title for the prints is *Recueil d'estampes d'après les plus beaux tableaux et d'après les plus beaux desseins qui sont en France dans le Cabinet du Roy, dans celui de Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans, & dans d'autres cabinets, divisé suivant les différentes écoles avec un abrégé de la vie des peintres, & une description historique de chaque tableau* (Collection of prints after the most beautiful paintings and drawings which are in France in the Cabinet of the King, in that of the Monseigneur le duc d'Orléans, and in other cabinets, organized according to the different schools with a compendium of painters' lives, and a historic description of each painting). One copy of the work to which Basseporte contributed (printed originally in 1729) is held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, another at the British Museum, and two later copies are held in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

to Robert's nephew on the occasion of the child's birth in the same year, 1729, though they were unable to attend the ceremony and their names were signed by proxy.²³

Emmanuel Bénézit, the author of a prominent early-twentieth-century artist dictionary, writes that as an engraver, Basseporte produced several portraits, including those of *St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen*, *Félix Esnault*, and the deacon *François de Paris*.²⁴ Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée notes that Basseporte engraved two of Robert's paintings in 1730 and 1731.²⁵ A tender and enchantingly executed portrait of a *Young Girl Caressing a Rabbit* was engraved after her by Marie Jeanne Renard Dubos (fig. 4). If we may trust that this is a faithful copy, we see that in the period between *Portrait of a Young Girl* and *Young Girl Caressing a Rabbit*, Basseporte's technique shows much greater mastery of line and overall dexterity, particularly in the handling of the drapery and the subject's facial structure. The charming tendrils of flyaway hair and the marked attention to nuances in bodily form remain constant, but a noted sharpness prevails in this depiction. Though the original and its date of production are now lost to us, it is tempting to consider this picture as a transitional work in Basseporte's professional practice, as she gradually moved away from the portrayal of human subjects to that of plant and animal species.²⁶

²³ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 10.

²⁴ Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays par un groupe d'écrivains spécialistes français et étrangers* (Paris: Éditions Gründ, 1999), 14:221.

²⁵ Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée, "The 'Painters in Miniature to the King'," in *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, ed. Pascale Heurtel and Michelle Lenoir (New York; Paris: Rizzoli International Publications; Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2018), 51.

²⁶ A somewhat rougher copy of this work, a print after a print of the original entitled *A Woman Holding a Rabbit*, can be found in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It was produced in Munich at the end of the eighteenth century by Bartholomäus Ignaz Weiss (1740-1814/15) after Johann Friedrich Bause (1738-1814) after Basseporte.

In 1731, now aged 30, the “Notice” tells us that Basseporte entered what would be her place of employment for the rest of her life: the Jardin du Roi. Though her eulogist gives the date exactly, Anne Lafont writes that it was “around” 1731, and Gelbart has it that she had begun lessons at the Jardin “when she reached her legal age of majority in 1726,” though no source is provided.²⁷ The decision to shift her practice from pastel portraiture to plant painting is described in the “Notice” as being one of financial necessity. Faced with the daunting prospect of constant, obligatory networking and searching for clients, Basseporte chose instead, with what amount of sadness and regret we may never know, to specialize in a form of art-making that would provide a steady income and allow her to continue to support her aging mother.²⁸ At this time, artist and illustrator Claude Aubriet (1665-1742) occupied the position of *peintre des plantes* to Louis XV. The role held a salary of 400 *livres* per annum, plus 800 *livres* for the twelve works on vellum that the artist was obliged to produce each year for the collection of the royal library.²⁹ Mademoiselle Basseporte in 1731 made an arrangement with Aubriet, who agreed that she would take his place, in exchange for a waiver of income for eight years, becoming what Lafont has called “his direct though exploited collaborator.”³⁰ The writers of the “Notice,” who continually come to her defense in instances when she was slighted or undervalued, proclaim that “during this long interval, her fruitless zeal was no less active.”³¹ It makes little sense that she should engage upon this arrangement by which she would earn no salary, after making the decision to leave

²⁷ Lafont, “Basseporte,” 51; Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 116.

²⁸ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 162.

²⁹ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 164.

³⁰ Lafont, “Basseporte,” 51. Strange as it may seem, this type of arrangement was common practice, at least at the Jardin du Roi. Aubriet himself was held under a similar contract while he was working under his predecessor, Jean Joubert.

³¹ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 164.

portraiture behind for the assurance of a more steady income, and there is no mention as to how she was able to pay her living expenses. Whatever the case may be, this circumstance was seized as one of many opportunities for mythologizing the artist's virtue, as the "Notice" writers claim that she could well have appealed to Monsieur le Comte de Maurepas (1701-1781), a statesman and the minister of the royal household, who, in his role overseeing the Jardin "would not have been deaf to the request she might have made of him for monetary compensation: but no longer having to share the fruit of her talents with her mother, whom she had had the misfortune to lose, she found herself sufficiently wealthy not to implore the government for assistance which could be more useful to others; she regarded the obtaining of rewards by those who could do without as petty theft from those less fortunate."³²

Our bewilderment is in part relieved, however, in learning that it is during this period that Basseporte received her first commission for botanical illustration, a source of income and artistic achievement that the "Notice" fails to include. Following his return to Paris in 1724, Robert had become reacquainted with the scholar and clergyman l'abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche (1688-1761).³³ From 1732-1750, l'abbé Pluche published a popular series of natural history studies, released in eight volumes, titled *Le Spectacle de la nature*. Robert, who created the frontispiece for the first volume, connected Pluche and Basseporte.³⁴ A fruitful collaboration emerged, and a number of Basseporte's

³² Ibid.

³³ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 10. Bourin claims that the two men were former classmates, and following their reunion Robert named l'abbé Pluche as the executor of his will.

³⁴ Some scholars have speculated that as l'abbé Pluche identified as a Jansenist, Basseporte had ties to the sect as well. For these claims, see Françoise Gevrey, "Avant-Propos," 10, and Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen, "Les planches du *Spectacle de la nature* de l'abbé Pluche," 142-143, in *Écrire la nature au XVIIIe siècle: autour de l'abbé Pluche*, Lettres françaises Série XVIIIe, ed. Françoise Gevrey, Julie Boch, and Jean-Louis Haquette (Paris: PUPS, 2006).

paintings (mostly gouache illustrations of trees and a variety of plant species) were reproduced as engravings in the first and second of this series, in 1732 and 1735 (figs. 5-7).³⁵ This series of works closely resembles in style and subject matter the commissions she was expected to produce for the Jardin du Roi. The plates of her work stood alongside engravings after drawings by François Boucher (1703–1770), Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755), and Louise-Magdeleine Horthemels-Cochin (1686-1767).

Robert died in the year following the publication of the first volume, 1733, after several years of illness, during which he was cared for by Basseporte and her mother.³⁶ Thus, the reference in the “Notice” to the death of Madame Basseporte could not have occurred until after 1733. Out of gratitude for their services, Robert bequeathed to Basseporte his pastel works, including his portrait, half of his drawings, both copies and originals, and a small quantity of books and materials. This document was drawn up by the artist on the 14th of December, and on the 25th, “in order to avoid any contention between his family members and his student,” he drew up a list of his belongings, all of which were located in Basseporte’s apartments.³⁷ These consisted of two apartments that were on the third floor of the house owned by Madame Gozet, on the rue Vieille du Temple, and Robert’s lodgings in the hotel of the Cardinal de Rohan, both of which are designated as “represented by” Madame and Mademoiselle Basseporte in the artist’s inventory.³⁸ Curiously, Bourin writes that Basseporte “herself reports” that the aforementioned items “were left to her by M. Robert in

³⁵ Meeker and Szabari, “Inhabiting Flower Worlds,” 7; Lafont, “Basseporte,” 52.

³⁶ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 8-11.

³⁷ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 13-14.

³⁸ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 47.

recognition of the services she had rendered him during an illness of several years.”³⁹ It is unfortunate that Bourin did not provide a source here with further information as to when, where, and how Basseporte recorded these details.

The omission in the “Notice” of Basseporte’s true age when she became Robert’s student, as well as any explanation of the relationship’s origin, or of the truly remarkable connective tissues that signal their level of intimacy, reveals a calculated decision on the part of her biographer. By no means do I presume to suggest that Robert and Basseporte shared a romantic relationship, or, as could almost as easily be argued, that both parties did not conform to the heteronormative strictures of sexual orientation in place in the eighteenth century. However, I consider both scenarios a possibility, and acknowledge that at the very least, Robert and Basseporte were, not long after a connection was formed between them, working in the capacity of equal, collaborative colleagues rather than within the traditional instructor-pupil mold. The facts are these: Basseporte was permitted access to the residence of Robert’s employer in her twenties, acquired lodgings nearby, in the same building and on the same floor as Robert’s studio, and then began teaching his school of young female students, as well as collaborating with him in the production of prints and engravings. Basseporte was named godmother to one of Robert’s nephews, and after she had entered the employ of the Jardin du Roi, she cared for Robert on his deathbed, and he left her many of his works, books, and materials in his will. As has just been mentioned, at the time of his death all of Robert’s belongings were to be found in Basseporte’s apartments. Lastly, and significantly, neither Robert nor Basseporte ever married. Upon

³⁹ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 8.

close reading of the “Notice,” we are alerted immediately that something is potentially amiss with the fashioning of Bassporte as a child under Robert’s tutelage, when in fact the historical record reveals that she was an adult, leaving open the possibility that the writers were motivated to sanitize Bassporte’s biography; that the writers either saw a measure of impropriety where it did not exist, or knew about something that would have left a stain on Basseporte’s legacy should it be included.

On 30 April 1735 Basseporte received the *survivance* of *peintre des plantes du Jardin du Roi* from Aubriet, which guaranteed that she would officially obtain the post upon his death.⁴⁰ That event would actually occur on 19 July 1741, one year prior to Aubriet’s death in 1742, when he was no longer able to execute the responsibilities of the position. Thus, from 1735 to 1741, Basseporte held the title of *peintre en miniature de sa Majesté*, a role that certainly came with prestige if not a pension, and thereafter until her death she was the royally-appointed *peintre des plantes*.⁴¹ In this station, Basseporte was charged with capturing the likenesses of plant and animal species in royal collections, and with assisting the botanist administrators of the Jardin with their close scientific examination of these specimens. In her botanical studies, she was generally tasked with drafting, on a single sheet, “intricately drawn representations” of all parts of the plant, from seed, root, and bud, to stem, leaf, flower, and fruit.⁴²

The “Notice” jumps from the commencement of Basseporte’s employment in the Jardin du Roi in 1731 to the year 1744, when Basseporte was summoned to Versailles on the orders of the

⁴⁰ Ratouis de Limay, *Le pastel en France au XVIIIème siècle*, 158-159; Pinault-Sørensen, “Les planches du *Spectacle de la nature* de l’abbé Pluche,” 142; Jeffares, “Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte.”

⁴¹ Meeker and Szabari, “Inhabiting Flower Worlds,” 2; Lafont, “Basseporte,” 51.

⁴² Nina Rattner Gelbart, “Adjusting the Lens: Locating Early Modern Women of Science,” *Early Modern Women* 11, no. 1 (2016): 125.

Comte de Maurepas to paint a group of several different species of birds and monkeys that the king wished to have portrayed.⁴³ It is noted that Basseporte had to bear the cost of her own travel to and from the royal residences, and the “Notice” writers here condemn the thoughtlessness of the lower-level officials who, fully aware of her low salary and inability to afford these fees, neglected to tell their superiors, the Minister M. le Comte de Maurepas and his successor, the Minister M. le Comte d’Argenson, who would in turn not have failed to notify the king of her need for additional support. While we can appreciate that the writers did not place the onus on Basseporte herself, it seems that this brief tirade serves as yet another in a string of examples of Basseporte’s exceptional virtue, as it is said that she responded to these setbacks with no less enthusiasm, and never voiced a word of complaint.⁴⁴ We must read these sentiments in the contextual moment of the writing of the “Notice” at the beginning of a fateful decade in France’s history. Those, like Basseporte, of bourgeois or working class stock with ties to Versailles, found themselves equally placed within an *ancien régime* culture and a society on the verge of dramatic upheaval. We find the “Notice” writers seemingly caught up in this tension as well. On the one hand, allegiance to the crown is possibly expressed via the repeated emphasis on the generosity of the monarchy, and the innocent ignorance of government ministers as to Basseporte’s plight. On the other, there may be a strong social justice element at play, in which

⁴³ Errors regarding dates are still present in recent scholarship. For example, in 2002 Marianne Roland Michel mistakenly records this instance of Basseporte being summoned to Versailles as taking place in 1774 rather than 1744. Later in the same essay, the year of Basseporte’s sale of some of Robert’s work, which occurred in 1754, is incorrectly given as 1745. See Marianne Roland Michel, “Vallayer in Her Time,” in *Anne Vallayer-Coster, Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette* (Dallas, TX; New Haven: Dallas Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2002), 14.

⁴⁴ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 166. Basseporte’s pension file (August 21, 1774), cited by Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée, provides further testimony for these financial hardships, stressing “the harsh conditions of serving the Crown,” which included “close to thirteen years of work at one’s own expense being obliged to go to all the different places where were found the objects one desired...” See Brejon de Lavergnée, “The ‘Painters in Miniature to the King’,” 53.

Basseporte's fiscal humility and self-sacrifice for those in even greater poverty than herself is celebrated. However, these virtues are not antagonistic to monarchy; in fact, they fit well into the contemporary rhetoric of aristocratic (and bourgeois) duties of charity. While modesty in regards to finances and sympathy for the poor might not amount to a call for systemic social justice reform, they do signal a wish on the part of the eulogists to communicate that Basseporte was motivated by a natural urge to be of service to her community rather than by any desire for monetary gain.

Eventually, in 1749, Basseporte's pension was increased to 800 *livres*, presumably amounting to a total of 1,600 *livres* per year with the inclusion of payment for the quota of works she was obliged to produce.⁴⁵ The "Notice" includes the transcription of a letter from the Comte d'Argenson, dated 1750, in which he asks the artist to make great haste to Compiègne "to paint a singular fruit from the Indies, that was just given to His Majesty and retains all of its freshness...a type of pineapple."⁴⁶ How extraordinary it must have been, as a more or less lower middle class woman in the mid-eighteenth century to be rushed to the side of the king and to see firsthand the newly arrived specimens of exotic plants and animals, from the farthest flung corners of the earth, is quite beyond our imagining in the twenty-first century. Amidst these developments, Basseporte truly exercised her dual training in portraiture and scientific illustration to produce an accomplished anatomical study of the human head (fig. 8), reproduced in the naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon's forty-four volume *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière avec la Description du Cabinet du Roi* (1749-1804).

⁴⁵ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 169.

⁴⁶ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 166-167.

Basseporte's single contribution to these volumes is found in vol. III, published in 1749.⁴⁷ Buffon (1707-1788) had been named superintendent of the Jardin du Roi in 1739, and the *Histoire Naturelle* is foundationally, as its title suggests, a descriptive catalogue of the specimens held in the King's cabinet. Basseporte's designs are drawn from wax models presented to Louis XIV in 1701 by the Italian artist and modeller Gaetano Giulio Zumbo.

One primary role held by the *peintres des plantes* in the Jardin du Roi was the production of gouache paintings on vellum for the collection held in the royal library. This tradition was begun in the seventeenth century, under the tenure of miniaturist Nicolas Robert (1614-1685), who was employed by the brother of then-king Louis XIII, Gaston d'Orléans (1608-1660).⁴⁸ From this period up until very nearly the present day, the format for this collection of works on vellum has been roughly the same, each portrait approximately 46 x 32 cm (18 x 12 in).⁴⁹ During the *ancien régime*, the subjects would be drawn from live plant and animal species under royal ownership, and generally a species was represented but once. On each sheet of vellum, the frame surrounding the subject is gilded in fine gold. As mentioned above, Basseporte's mentor and predecessor in the role of *peintre des plantes*, Claude Aubriet, resigned and ceded the position to her on 30 April 1735, though she would not take over his responsibilities fully until July 1741. In the decade stretching from 1730 to 1740, their artistic

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Liebman, *Painting Natures: Buffon and the Art of the "Histoire Naturelle"* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2003), 53-54, 71, 223.

⁴⁸ For an extensive study on the vellums, see *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, ed. Pascale Heurtel Michelle Lenoir (New York; Paris: Rizzoli International Publications; Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2018).

⁴⁹ For a fascinating account of the technique used in this practice, see Monique Ducreux's short essay, "The Vellum Technique," in *The Art of Natural History*, 609-610.

practices were collaborative and “closely interrelated.”⁵⁰ Archival documents from the Royal Library, now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, reveal a somewhat sporadic process of submission for these vellum works. Aubriet and Basseporte submitted 84 new plates (50 on vellum and two on paper by Aubriet, with 32 miniatures by Basseporte) on 25 April 1741.⁵¹ Séverine Lepape writes that “the comparison between the plate titles cited and attributed to Basseporte on that list, and the vellums conserved today show that she systematically signed the vellums submitted to the Royal Library in 1741. Even so, one wonders if she was paid for this work, because a memorandum attached to the list names Aubriet as the sole beneficiary of the 2,520 *livres*. He went in person to the Royal Library on 14 November 1741 to collect his fee.”⁵² Lepape adds that this may have simply been standard practice, as Aubriet’s predecessor, Jean Joubert, continued “to receive his salary even after delegating the execution of the plates.” Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée reports that apparently Basseporte “expressed opposition” when, upon Aubriet’s death, authorial seals were to be placed on the works in the royal collection he left behind.⁵³ Though she withdrew her opposition the following day, 14 December 1742, permitting the posthumous inventory to proceed, one may be led to believe that this portfolio included works by her hand.⁵⁴ We know of only two more documented submissions of

⁵⁰ Brejon de Lavergnée, “The ‘Painters in Miniature to the King,’” 51.

⁵¹ Brejon de Lavergnée, “The ‘Painters in Miniature to the King,’” 51; Séverine Lepape, “The Vellums and the King’s Library,” in *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, ed. Pascale Heurtel Michelle Lenoir (New York; Paris: Rizzoli International Publications; Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, 2018), 57.

⁵² Séverine Lepape, “The Vellums and the King’s Library,” 57.

⁵³ Brejon de Lavergnée, “The ‘Painters in Miniature to the King,’” 51. Aubriet died on 3 December 1742.

⁵⁴ See Léon Bultingaire’s commentary on this event, in which he chalks Basseporte’s protestations up to a “temporary mood swing”: “Il n’en est pas moins vrai qu’il y avait entre les deux peintres [Aubriet et Basseporte] une situation délicate et peut-être un peu tendue, comme le prouvent les faits qui se produisirent à la mort d’Aubriet. Alors que les gens de loi se préparaient à mettre les scellés, à la requête de Bernard de Jussieu, sur les objets laissés par le peintre, Mlle Basseporte intervint pour faire opposition à cette mesure. L’acte, date du 14 décembre 1742, ne nous donne pas d’explications précises

vellums during Basseporte's tenure (one in 1744, when Buffon delivered 121 new plates, and one in 1751, of 93 plates) and thus can assume that other occurrences were not recorded.⁵⁵ In total, Basseporte would introduce more than three hundred vellums into the collection (figs. 9-15), including four anatomical plates, as well as starfish and corals, showing "a real talent for representing shells, to which she dedicated six vellums."⁵⁶ It is likely that there are more works by her hand in the collection that remain amongst the anonymous, unsigned vellums.

Castilhon and Sivry proceed in the "Notice" to shed light on the close relationship Basseporte shared with Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764), great patron of the arts as well as the king's mistress. This passage, while brief, conveys the details of a truly devoted friendship. Madame de Pompadour "knew how to appreciate" Basseporte's talents, according to the "Notice" writers, and played a large role in the frequency of Basseporte's journeys to the royal residences.⁵⁷ Basseporte worked tirelessly for

pour l'excellente raison qu'elle n'en donna pas elle-même, se contentant de dire qu'elle s'opposait aux scellés 'pour les causes et raisons qu'elle déduira en temps et lieu'. Elle n'en donna pas non plus le lendemain, puisqu'elle se désista purement et simplement de son opposition. Nous sommes autorisés, néanmoins, à interpréter ce mouvement d'humeur passager et à croire que, si Mlle Basseporte avait protesté contre la mise des scellés, c'est qu'elle considérait, à raison ou à tort, que certains dessins exécutés par elle ne pouvaient être compris dans la succession d'Aubriet. Dire quels sont exactement les vélins que Madeleine Basseporte dessina au lieu et place de son prédécesseur est une chose qui ne serait possible que si toutes les pièces étaient datées et signées." Léon Bultingaire, "Les Peintres du Jardin du Roy au XVIIIe siècle," *Archives du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle*, tome III, sixième série, 1928, 29-30.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée references two receipts for Basseporte miniatures dated 1765 and 1767, and a statement of works painted by Van Spaendonck from January 13, 1784, both of which are housed in the Archives Nationales.

⁵⁶ Brejon de Lavergnée, "The 'Painters in Miniature to the King'," 53; Pascale Heurtel, "The Diversity of the Collection during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, ed. Pascale Heurtel Michelle Lenoir (New York; Paris: Rizzoli International Publications; Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2018), 98. Anne Lafont writes that, regarding each vellum, "Bernard de Jussieu, professeur de botanique au Jardin du roi jusqu'en 1777, puis Buffon, intendant de l'établissement à partir de 1739, devaient approuver la ressemblance de l'image avec l'objet naturel avant que la feuille soit déposée avec l'ensemble de la collection dans la bibliothèque royale." See Lafont, "Basseporte," 52.

⁵⁷ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 167-168. The writers claim that these visits happened over the course of thirteen years. The reason for this specific duration is not given, and it strikes one as odd, since Pompadour held a large influence at court for almost two decades, from her ascent in 1745 to her death in April of 1764. It

Pompadour in her gardens at Bellevue, painting outdoors even in the heat of the day “in order to capture the most favorable moment for certain flowers.” It appears that she also began working on various interior design projects for Pompadour, and on one occasion, still unjustly saddled with a low salary, mounting debts, and fatigue, Basseporte was pressed by workmen for considerable advances towards some “very rich” wall borders that she had ordered for Pompadour’s apartments. It would appear that Basseporte was expected to pay for these improvements out of her own pocket, at least in this instance if not in others. However, it seems unlikely that Basseporte would have offered these borders as a gift if she couldn’t afford them, even if she considered Pompadour an intimate friend, as well as it seems unlikely that Pompadour would have asked Basseporte to make such an expenditure on her behalf. Whatever the case may be, this relationship presents fruitful ground for further study, should additional documentation be discovered; however, we do know from the “Notice” that Basseporte had recourse to appeal to the Minister M. le Comte de Saint-Florentin, who awarded her only with an annual bonus that would come into effect in the near future. As Basseporte was in need of immediate, emergency financial support, Madame de Pompadour, who had been informed of the appeal by the minister, stepped in and took Basseporte’s request straight to the king, while in the meantime reimbursing her for the payments she had made on her behalf.⁵⁸

Throughout her time at the Jardin du Roi, Basseporte was additionally protected by the Académie royale des Sciences and particularly by Henri-Louis DuHamel du Monceau (1700-1782),

is also not clear whether this thirteen-year period is attributed to her visits to Pompadour, or her visits to the royal residences in general.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

plant physiologist of the Académie.⁵⁹ In her capacity as the institution's *dessinatrice*, Basseporte was tasked with creating the illustrations published in the *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des Sciences*.⁶⁰ In 1747 Basseporte contributed two plates to DuHamel du Monceau's *Traité de la fabrique des manoeuvres pour les vaisseaux, ou l'Art de la corderie perfectionné* (*Treatise on the manufacture of ropes for ships, or the Art of rope-making perfected*). Of the two plates, both engraved by Pierre Soubeyran (1709-1775), one displays the parts of the male *chanvre* (hemp) plant, the other the female (figs. 16-17). Marianne Roland Michel writes that physician and naturalist Pierre-Joseph Buchoz (1731-1807) also called on Basseporte to illustrate his *Histoire universelle du règne végétal ou nouveau dictionnaire physique & économique de toutes les plantes*, released in a series of volumes from 1775-1780.⁶¹ However, the only reference to Basseporte in the *Histoire's* preface is in relation to one of her students, a Madame Pinard, who was credited for her involvement in the production, though Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée also writes that Basseporte, with botanist Antoine Nicolas Duchesne, executed plant drawings for Buchoz.⁶² In 1754, Bourin reports that Basseporte's need to support the establishment of a niece led her to take the decision of selling the works by Robert handed down to her upon his death.⁶³ The purchase was made in May of that year by M. de Vandières, directeur général des Bâtiments, as a royal acquisition on behalf of the king, for 8,000 *livres*. The drawings were then handed over to Charles-Nicolas Cochin (the Younger, 1715-1790), then *garde des dessins* of His

⁵⁹ Jeffares, "Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte."

⁶⁰ Lafont, "Basseporte," 52.

⁶¹ Roland Michel, "Vallayer in Her Time," 28.

⁶² Brejon de Lavergnée, "The 'Painters in Miniature to the King'," 53

⁶³ Bourin, *Paul-Ponce-Antoine Robert (de Sery)*, 8.

Majesty, and they were later submitted for conservation to the Cabinet des dessins du musée du Louvre.

Basseporte very clearly garnered immense respect and admiration from her contemporaries, irrespective of status or discipline. In reference to the previous monarch (Louis XV lived from 1710-1774, and was the sole ruler of France from 1723, when he came of age, until his death), Castilhon and Sivry include a poignant and meaningful footnote regarding his close relationship with Basseporte, of which they write that “the late king had exempted her from all etiquette when she worked before his eyes. His Majesty asked that she respond to his questions as she would to those posed by a commoner.”⁶⁴ The level of informality and intimacy sustained between Basseporte, the king, and Pompadour is, without a doubt, astounding. The “Notice” writers go on to declare that “no foreign prince came to Paris who did not want to see her works and know their author.”⁶⁵ The “renowned Jean-Jacques [Rousseau], an enlightened judge in this matter,” said that “nature gave plants their existence, but Mademoiselle Basseporte preserves it for them.”⁶⁶ Her paintings were equally revered by painters and by naturalists. Individuals who set out to paint flowers sought her lessons, and she was approached by artists whom the state wished to employ. According to Ratouis de Limay and Jeffares, in a letter to the Marquis de Marigny (1727-1781), *surintendant des bâtiments du Roi* (roughly the equivalent of a minister of culture), dated 22 February 1757, the Rococo painter Charles-Joseph Natoire (1700-1777) wrote, “I am aware that you have spoken with the famous Mlle Basseporte,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 169.

⁶⁶ “La nature donnoit l’existence aux plantes, mais que mademoiselle Basseporte la leur conservoit.” Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 170.

whom I esteem infinitely...”⁶⁷ The network of friendships cultivated by Basseporte speak to, in Gelbart’s words, “her understanding of scientific sociability,” a sentiment echoed by twentieth-century historian Léon Bultingaire who writes of her involvement in both the intellectual and social life of her time, as well as that of the Jardin, and that “with her the position of *peintre du cabinet* took on a social importance that it never had previously.”⁶⁸ She apparently enchanted Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), whom she had met during his visit to Paris in the late 1730s, and ever after he would continually mention her in his letters to Basseporte’s close colleague, Bernard de Jussieu, the head naturalist employed at the Jardin du Roi.⁶⁹ Her work was preciously valued by her scientific colleagues, who relied upon her intricate visual documentations of plant species in the pursuit of their own research.

In 1763, when Basseporte was in her early sixties, she faced questioning by one of the royal gardeners regarding her capability for continued work. Bernard de Jussieu deftly quashed the rumors in response, from which the following is an excerpt:

...Sa Majesté vous ayant chargé, comme vous me le marqués, de faire venir un des messieurs de l’Académie pour dessiner et peindre la plante qui est en fleur à Trianon, je crois que, pour exécuter les ordres que vous avez reçus, il conviendrait que vous vous adressiés à M. de Marigny (1); il connaît mieux que moy les personnes à talents qui composent cette académie, et il n’y a pas lieu de douter que le choix qu’il fera ne soit très bon et ne réponde parfaitement aux vues de Sa Majesté. Si Mlle Basseporte (2) avait été agréée elle se serait rendue aussitôt qu’elle aurait été avertie; son âge n’a pas mis jusques icy aucun obstacle à ses travaux: elle vient

⁶⁷ Whether coincidental or not, the writing of this letter comes just before two major events relevant to this study: the death of Rosalba Carriera in April 1757, and the admission of Reboul Vien to the Académie in July 1757. The source text quote from Natoire reads, “Je suis sensible que vous vous soyés entretenus de moy avec la sélèbre Mlle Basseporte que j’estime infiniment...” See Ratouis de Limay, *Le pastel en France au XVIIIème siècle*, 158-159, and Jeffares, “Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte.”

⁶⁸ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 115; Bultingaire, “Les Peintres du Jardin du Roy au XVIIIe siècle,” 29, 30.

⁶⁹ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 118.

de représenter en couleurs naturelles, la Sabotière ou Calceolaria à feuilles de Scabieuse, que le Père Feuillie a observée dans le Pérou, et que nous avons élevée, de graines envoyées par mon frère. Je ne sais sur quel fondement on a pu dire qu'elle se faisait aider par ses élèves; il n'en est pas à ma connaissance qui puisse la seconder, encor moins la remplacer. Elle vous est très sensiblement obligée de la bonté que vous avés eue de la proposer à Sa Majesté, et d'assurer ce que vous connoissés et avés vu touchant la continuité du travail de ses mains sans aucun secours de celles de ses élèves...⁷⁰

...His Majesty having charged you, as you have made known to me, with hiring one of the men of the Académie to draw and paint the plant that is in flower at Trianon, I believe that, to carry out the orders that which have received, it would be appropriate for you to address yourself to M. de Marigny (1); he knows better than I do the individuals of talent who make up this academy, and there is no reason to doubt that the choice that he will make will be very good and will correspond perfectly to the needs of His Majesty. If Mademoiselle Basseporte (2) had been admitted, she would have volunteered as soon as she had been informed; her age has not yet been an obstacle to her work: she just drafted in natural colors the *Sabotière* or Calceolaria with Scabious leaves, which Father Feuillie observed in Peru, and which we have raised from seeds sent by my brother [Joseph de Jussieu]. I do not know on what basis it was said that she was assisted by her students; to my knowledge there is no one who can rival her, much less replace her. She is very much obliged to you for the kindness with which you have proposed her to His Majesty, and for assuring what you know and have concerning the continuity of the work of her hands without any help from those of her students...

Given the nature of Basseporte's closeness with the king that is recounted in her eulogy, this request by His Majesty to hire a plant painter from the Académie for a tasks that seems clearly within Basseporte's remit is rather strange, and again alerts us to a possible liberty taken by the writers of the "Notice."

Basseporte ventured outside of the capital less frequently after Pompadour's death in 1764, and as far as we know based on public records and correspondence, she may never have gone farther

⁷⁰ *Correspondance inédite de Linné avec Claude Richard et Antoine Richard*, translated and annotated by A. Landrin (Versailles: Imprimerie d'Auguste Montalant, 1863), 42-43.

afield than the palaces of Versailles, Bellevue (Pompadour's abode), Fontainebleau, and Compiègne, the site of the previously mentioned exotic pineapple, and in 1765 the host to a Chilean strawberry plant that had just produced several berries, the painted documentation of which had apparently never been done.⁷¹ Within the same year Jussieu and Basseporte welcomed Jussieu's young nephew Antoine Laurent to the Jardin cohort; the seventeen-year-old had come from Lyon to Paris to study with his uncle, and felt himself comfortably at home in Basseporte's company.⁷² He wrote of his appreciation for Basseporte's "warmth and hospitality" to his mother, to whom he would write faithfully for the next fifteen years, occasionally providing updates as to Basseporte's work and well-being. In fact, it is through A. L. de Jussieu's correspondence with his mother that we know Basseporte suffered regularly from bouts of asthma. After he was promoted to professor of botany in 1770, Basseporte wrote to his mother on 21 June, in what Gelbart has described as "a gushing, unpunctuated letter overflowing with delight and pride":

Your son was approved by the king, the minister, M. de Buffon and all the public applauded this choice, although it is only temporary, actually it is the way to make known his merit indeed he gave his first speech Tuesday 19th and his first lesson Wednesday 20th of this month and was applauded by a large assembly including the dear uncle who made clear how satisfied he was. He is right, [the young man] is well worthy of him and you. He combines a real merit, lots of modesty and would not allow that we make the fuss and fireworks that the gardeners wanted, he was obeyed but the joy was universal, I swear to you that it was a great celebration at the Jardin the amphitheater resounded many times with the clapping of hands, applause well deserved I assure you that I felt too much joy to not share it with you, these are the fruits

⁷¹ Specifically the painted depiction of strawberries on their stalk. See Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 121.

⁷² Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 121-122.

of your excellent education and of the great example he received...He will give you much well-deserved satisfaction I congratulate you with all my heart.⁷³

Apart from her teaching and duties within the Jardin, Basseporte produced and sold studies of insects and still-life flower paintings, many of which entered the private collections of the nobility, including the Duc de Chartres and the Prince de Conti.⁷⁴ The “Notice” calls Basseporte “one of the first objects of benevolence of our young monarch” Louis XVI upon his ascent to the throne in 1774, and, “in consideration of her services for forty-seven years, eight of which were without pay, her work, her talents, and the esteem in which the late King held her, His Majesty added four hundred *livres* to her pension, which, despite the deductions, amounted to two thousand *livres*.”⁷⁵

It is quite emphasized in the “Notice” that fame and flattery, in the opinion of those who knew her, meant very little to Basseporte in comparison to the immense pleasure she received from raising up protégés and “contributing to the progress of the arts.”⁷⁶ Echoing the sentiment expressed in the first few lines of the eulogy, the writers proclaim that “whatever reputation she had obtained as an artist, she deserves even more for her benevolent qualities and her sensibility. This fortitude, by which she had surmounted the obstacles that fortune posed against her progress, rooted her against all that which could delay the good that she had planned to do. This goodness did not confine itself to relieving destitution by momentary relief, but to seeking in the class of the destitute the young people of both sexes who seemed to have the greatest aptitude for the sciences, arts, or letters, and when she

⁷³ Translated by Nina Rattner Gelbart. See Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 140-141.

⁷⁴ Getty Provenance Index.

⁷⁵ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 169.

⁷⁶ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 170-171.

had found someone, her heart was no longer tranquil; she put down her brushes, left her studio, and as she could do nothing, because of her modest fortune, she pressed on those of her friends and protectors who did have wealth to spare, and left them only when she had interested them in her projects, being pleased to serve at the same time an unfortunate individual and to provide the State with a useful citizen. We could cite a large number of artists, surgeons, chemists, painters, people of letters, whom she has, so to speak, created, and whose genius and talents bring honor to France.” Well-meaning and truly honorific though these sentiments may be, the repetition of emphasis on Basseporte’s virtue, even over and above her talent as an artist, is unexceptional and certainly gendered. However, the two primary strands of concentration do differentiate her case from those of other early modern women artists, in whom virtue is found through their devotion to family and home. The writers of the “Notice” continually praise Basseporte for her monetary selflessness and her advocacy for the advancement of young students. The virtues of modesty and mentorship act as devices to contain Basseporte within a woman’s acceptable channels of behavior, humble service and maternal care, such that she was still, whilst acting in a professional capacity, fulfilling her traditional role as a woman. In addition, the accentuation of the latter virtue seems to reflect the spirit of Enlightenment humanism in its celebration of education, and even of social mobility. As we shall see, each of the students featured in the “Notice” emerges from a humble background, and goes on to receive royal or institutional appointments.

Most of the second half of the “Notice” (14-15 pages out of a total of 29) belongs to a series of anecdotes recounting Basseporte’s support and promotion of young protégés. The reason for this appears to be twofold: not only does it fit squarely within the narrative being crafted in the eulogy, but

it appears that Basseporte acted in this capacity towards Mentelle himself.⁷⁷ At this midway point the obituary becomes a frame story, in which the narratives and evidential correspondence are meant to provide examples of the different types of mentorship Basseporte graciously supplied, all falling under the overarching theme of her exceptional goodwill. The first is the well-known Swedish sculptor Pierre Hubert L'Archevêque (1721-1778), who had served as the director of the Swedish Academy of the Arts from 1768-1777. L'Archevêque's tale is one of the classic child prodigy. At a very young age, and with no knowledge or training, the boy modeled a skillfully-proportioned figure out of wax, displaying natural artistic ability. However, the "honest and poor" laboring community surrounding the child remained at a loss as to how to encourage his talent, until one day a friend of his mother's took him to see Mademoiselle Basseporte.⁷⁸ Upon his presentation, it is said that she "examined the figure, was astonished by the composition in the proportions, and thought only of finding an able sculptor who wanted to take charge of the young student. The famous Bouchardon, her friend, was the first to come to her mind, but she knew that Bouchardon had refused the most powerful solicitations to receive students. She recalled that this artist had essential obligations to the Comte de Caylus, their mutual friend; immediately she took the young L'Archevêque, conducted him to the home of the Comte, left him in the antichamber, displayed the little figure, who was found to be charming, and presented the author. Caylus sent out a plea for Bouchardon to come to his home for an essential matter. Bouchardon arrived and refused; Mademoiselle Basseporte, with a fiery eloquence, pressed, solicited, declared him responsible before God and before man of the loss of a man of genius who was

⁷⁷ Gelbart writes that "the budding geographer...got a boost from her to begin his serious training despite crippling shyness." Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 119.

⁷⁸ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 173-176.

depending on him...”⁷⁹ Eventually of course, Edmé Bouchardon (1698-1762), celebrated sculptor within both Rococo and Neoclassical traditions, and academician frequently patronized by Louis XV, relented, and took on the L’Archevêque as a pupil. The epilogue presents a picture of a student so accomplished in his master’s eyes that when Bouchardon was asked by the Swedish court to recommend an exemplary sculptor, he “indicated L’Archevêque as one of the best artists of the Académie de France.”⁸⁰

The following protégé described is a man of letters, rather than an artist, called M. Rouelle (also apparently known in his time by the informal moniker *Fameux*).⁸¹ Rouelle is presented in much the same way as L’Archevêque, as an innately special youth (in this case he had acquired vast knowledge at an early age rather than artistic skill) from humble origins, without the financial backing to take him very far in the world on his own. As with L’Archevêque, it is unclear how the connection and introduction with Basseporte was made, but when she came to know him she was apparently struck by his musings on advances in the field of chemistry that had yet to be made. Basseporte observed that Rouelle, prohibited by lack of fortune from taking courses and furthering his education, would never be able to enter the world of letters without the aid of a patron. She took him to see a friend, a scholar called M. Avril de Charnacé, who in turn introduced him to others (one M. Crevier and another M. le Beau) that could take him on as pupils in the subjects of rhetoric, Greek, and Latin. Basseporte’s promotion of this young man not only catalyzed his acquisition of a career in chemistry

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Curiously, Bouchardon’s brother, Jacques-Philippe Bouchardon (1711-1753), also served as first sculptor to the king of Sweden (previous to L’Archevêque holding the post).

⁸¹ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 176-179.

and a “prominent name in the world of letters,” but also provided Rouelle’s younger brother with opportunity for success in an academic career.

One of Basseporte’s most famous students, Mademoiselle Marie Marguerite Biheron (1719-1795), serves as the third example.⁸² Biheron, like Basseporte, had lost her father at an early age and was living on a very modest income with her mother. She was well-educated, but without prospects, and it was under Basseporte’s tutelage at the Jardin du Roi that she discovered her eventual calling: anatomy. In the course of Biheron’s artistic training, it is said that Basseporte suggested Biheron take up anatomical wax modeling.⁸³ The “Notice” writers claim that Biheron was at first quite disgusted by the practice, which involved the dissection of cadavers, but this was gradually overcome. It is clear that with many of her students, Basseporte used her circle of connections to find additional instructors when expertise outside of her knowledge of art and botany were wanted. For Biheron’s education in the science of anatomy, she enlisted the help of Jean François-Clément Morand (1726-1784), who taught classes in anatomy and obstetrics, and the physician, botanist, and writer Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg (1709-1779), both of whom were members of the Académie royale des sciences. The popular medium of wax had been used as a scientific approximation of the human body from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, reaching a pinnacle in France and Italy in the eighteenth century.⁸⁴

⁸² Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 179-181.

⁸³ Londa Schiebinger writes that Biheron studied illustration with Basseporte, while Nine Rattner Gelbart has said she studied sculpture. If Basseporte was her only teacher it is likely that she studied both, given her future practice. Though there is no record of Basseporte practicing sculpture herself, her teacher, Robert de Séry, was a sculptor as well as painter, and Basseporte may very well have had some training in the medium. See Londa L. Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27, and Gelbart, “Adjusting the Lens: Locating Early Modern Women of Science,” 125.

⁸⁴ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 27-28.

When, at the end of her training in the late 1740s, Biheron set out to begin her own teaching practice, she was met with widespread acclaim. She established a *cabinet-laboratoire*, a sort of private museum of medicine, in her own home, from which to display her work and engage in formal instruction.⁸⁵ She gave weekly lectures for a fee of three *livres* and offered individual lessons for more than thirty years. Among her body of pupils were to be found the likes of the Madame de Genlis, Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, co-editors of the *Encyclopédie*, and Baron Melchoir von Grimm, editor of the literary newsletter *Correspondance littéraire*.

Biheron received her first invitation to present her work to the academicians at the Académie royale des sciences in 1759, and this was offered by her former tutor Morand. Spectators at these lectures came away astonished by the lifelikeness of Biheron's models, praising her imitation of nature, which extended, beyond accurate positioning and color, to include replication of the "consistency, suppleness, and weight" of every organ and appendage.⁸⁶ Anne Lafont writes that "everyone appreciated and praised the pedagogical qualities of this woman of science, whose merit was equally due to invention as to the fabrication of exceptional didactic tools: of removable sculptures made from a secret material - similar to wax but more malleable - which permitted the realization of anatomical models whose resemblance to the human body was unequalled."⁸⁷ The joint knowledge of botany and anatomy shared by Basseporte and Biheron even extended into holistic medicine.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Lafont, "Basseporte," 57.

⁸⁶ *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences, Année 1759* (Paris, 1765), 94, qtd. in Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 28.

⁸⁷ Lafont, "Basseporte," 57.

⁸⁸ Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 151.

In 1767 Biheron made the acquaintance of Benjamin Franklin, who during a visit to the Parisian capital met a number of prominent scientists and politicians, including Louis XV. Franklin, a friend of Biheron's former instructor, Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg, went on to advertise her work in London.⁸⁹ Biheron gave a public demonstration to the Académie royale des sciences in 1770 of her "elaborate and lifelike" wax model of the pregnant female body.⁹⁰ Alongside noted contemporaries in the sciences as the chemists Antoine Lavoisier (1743-1794) and Pierre-Joseph Macquer (1718-1784), Biheron in 1771 again presented before the Académie royale des sciences, for a particularly special audience which included Gustave III, the crown prince of Sweden, and numerous women of the royal court.⁹¹ No matter how significant her contributions to the fields of medicine and anatomy were, membership within the scientific Académie was ultimately denied to women.

Introducing the passage on Biheron, Castilhon and Sivry write, "The talents and the character of Mademoiselle Basseporte had made her friends of the most eminent merit." Basseporte advocated for her student abroad; she "had long since held the affection and esteem" of Jean-François Ogier (1703-1775, in the "Notice," called by the name of "M. le Président Ogier"), a diplomat, magistrate, and art collector who from 1753-1766 served as the French ambassador to Denmark.⁹² Through this channel of promotion, Biheron's work was made known at the court of Copenhagen, and King Christian VII of Denmark began to acquire some of her models. Upon her death in 1795, Biheron's

⁸⁹ Gelbart, "Adjusting the Lens: Locating Early Modern Women of Science," 125.

⁹⁰ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 28.

⁹¹ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 29.

⁹² Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 179.

collections were purchased by Queen Catherine II of Russia, to enter the Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg.⁹³

Finally, readers are informed of Basseporte's charity towards the daughter of a former colleague. This case and others were truly acts of charity, as the "Notice" makes clear that she took on a number of young ladies as pupils "whose fortunes did not permit them to pay for masters. For more than forty years, she always had two of these students to whom she gave lessons for free. Nearly all of them succeeded and several still make their living as painters. When she found no aptitude in them for that art, she applied them to other objects, and never did they leave her hands without having their minds adorned with the proper knowledge to make a living independently."⁹⁴ The example provided by the writers for this particular type of relationship is the situation of Mademoiselle Thouin, whose father, the chief gardener in the Jardin du Roi, had died and left behind a large family without financial provision. The Comte de Buffon accepted responsibility for the education of Thouin's eldest son, and Basseporte that of the eldest daughter. Basseporte began instructing her in drawing, and, noticing a want of aptitude, taught her instead the fundamentals of orthography, grammar, geography, and history, despite never having made a particular study of these subjects herself. In this way, Basseporte learned as she taught, endeavoring to acquire new competencies in order to more fully provide for pupils with a diverse set of talents. The "Notice" writers explain that, "as for geography, she only knew what she had learned in the work of and conversations with l'abbé Pluche; she consulted M. Mentelle on the path that her student could take, not only to learn, but to place herself

⁹³ Lafont, "Basseporte," 57.

⁹⁴ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 182.

in a position to teach. With this assistance, she put her pupil in a position to benefit from reading the best methods of geography by travelers and historians. Continual use of maps and determined study placed Thouin at the head of those of her sex, who devoted themselves to the teaching of this subject, to which she added that of natural history, which she drew from the works of M. d'Aubenton, the lessons of M. Sage, and from her own reflections on all the pieces in the Cabinet du Roi."⁹⁵ Thouin's aforementioned elder brother, André Thouin (1746-1824), went on to study botany under Bernard de Jussieu, and later became chair of horticulture at Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris (fig. 18).⁹⁶ Mademoiselle Thouin would later teach geography, among other things, to the future Madame de Genlis.⁹⁷ In 1828, Madame de Genlis would reflect:

Nous avons vu jadis au Jardin du Roi, mademoiselle Basseporte, pensionnée par le gouvernement pour peindre à la gouache des plantes et des reptiles, s'amuser de temps en temps (à plus de quatre-vingts ans) à faire de petits tableaux en pastel, et qui étaient charmans de fraîcheur et de vérité; elle nous dit qu'elle avait eu ce talent dès sa première jeunesse; mais que depuis plus de trente ans elle cultivait très-rarement; néanmoins elle l'avait parfaitement conservé.⁹⁸

We once saw at the Jardin du Roi Mademoiselle Basseporte, employed by the government to paint plants and reptiles in gouache, amusing herself from time to time (at more than eighty years of age) by making small paintings in pastel, which were charming in their freshness and their truthfulness; she told us that she had had this talent from her earliest youth; but that for more than thirty years she had cultivated it only very rarely; nevertheless she had retained it perfectly.

⁹⁵ Castillon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 182-184.

⁹⁶ Lafont, "Basseporte," 53.

⁹⁷ Stéphanie-Félicité Comtesse de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de Madame la comtesse de Genlis, sur le dix-huitième siècle et la Révolution française, depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours* vol. 2 (Paris, 1825), 256-257.

⁹⁸ Qtd. in Jeffares, "Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte."

Castilhon and Sivry note that these female students who received instruction from Basseporte pro bono, as it were, came under her care “in addition to the young people from whom Mademoiselle Basseporte expected great success.”⁹⁹ We must assume this differentiation does not signify a sense of apathy or lack of feeling towards certain pupils over others; in fact, it is an indication of how the skills she taught were likely to be applied by her students. She would have taught young women and men of means, for whom drawing and painting was one accomplishment of many to be acquired by young ladies and gentlemen, as well as, and clearly represented by the examples in the “Notice,” young people who were not independently wealthy and sought to learn a trade skill, from which to earn a living. For an example of the former type, Bourin and Ratouis de Limay among others write that Basseporte gave lessons in drawing and flower painting to the daughters of Louis XV, often referred to as Mesdames. While it is essential that we remain cognizant of the motivations underlying this emphasis on Basseporte’s teaching, there is no reason to question the veracity of the above claims and examples, as many of these former students would still have been alive and active in their careers at the time of Basseporte’s death and the publication of the obituary.

The conclusion of the “Notice” speaks of Basseporte’s friendships, and of the final months of her life. She remained close with Benjamin Franklin, having met him at the same time as Biheron, on his trips to Paris in 1767 and 1769. They shared mutual friends in the botanist-physicists Jacques Barbeau Dubourg and Thomas-Francois Dalibard, who were the joint heads of the French electricity group and also Franklin’s translators.¹⁰⁰ They kept in touch in the years following his visits, sending

⁹⁹ Castilhon and Sivry, “Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi,” 181-182.

¹⁰⁰ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 139.

back and forth compliments and well wishes, through both of these two gentlemen and Biheron, and when Franklin returned to Paris for an extended stay in December 1776, they were reunited as old friends. As his residence in Passy was a significant distance from hers at the Jardin, she wrote to him occasionally through Dubourg, who was her neighbor.¹⁰¹ Basseporte and Biheron both expressed support for the revolutionary action in the American colonies.

In a letter from the 26th of May 1780, Basseporte's niece and assistant Madame Aillaud wrote to Benjamin Franklin, appealing to him for support towards an application to Buffon for the transference of Basseporte's pension to herself, thereby augmenting the inheritance Madame Aillaud could expect upon the death of her aunt.¹⁰²

Ce 26 août [1780]

Monsieur,

Le triste etat dans lequel Melle Basseporte se trouve actuellement ne me permettant plus de me flatter que je puisse jouïr encore longtemps du plaisir detre aupres d'elle, je crois devoir me donner des mouvemens pour tacher pendant qu'elle existe, de massurer une pension sur sa charge. Cela depend principalement de Monsieur De Buffond que vous connoissez particulierement, et si vous vouliez bien Monsieur avoir la bonté de lui recommander le petit memoire que jay lhonneur de vous envoyer je serois assurée du succès de ma demande. Joze me flatter que vous voudrez bien maccorder cette grace je me fonde sur l'estime dont vous honorés Melle Basseporte et dont jay été temoin l'orsquelle a eu lhonneur de vous reunir chez elle avec Monsieur De Buffond.

Je suis avec respect Monsieur Votre tres humble et tres obeissante servant

Aillaud

26 August 1780

Monsieur,

¹⁰¹ The thirteen letters that make up this body of correspondence are collected in the digitized papers of Benjamin Franklin, available on the Founders Online website at founders.archives.gov.

¹⁰² Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 149; Jeffares, "Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte."

The sad state in which Mademoiselle Basseporte finds herself at present no longer permits me to flatter myself that I can enjoy the pleasure of being with her for much longer; so I believe I must make a move to try to secure a pension from her charge while she is alive. This depends principally on Monsieur de Buffon, whom you know particularly well, and if you would be so kind as to recommend to him the little memoir that I have the honor of sending you I would be assured of the success of my request. I dare to hope that you will be willing to grant me this favor on the basis of the esteem with which you honor Mademoiselle Basseporte and which I witnessed when she had the honor of welcoming you into her home with Monsieur de Buffon. I am with respect Monsieur your very humble and very obedient servant
Aillaud

The “grasping” request (Gelbart’s characterization) was denied, by both Franklin and the government. The precise details of Basseporte’s death in the autumn of that year, as with so many other particulars, remain unclear.¹⁰³ In the recently published volume *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, which serves as a catalogue of the collection of vellums now housed in the Museum nationale d’histoire naturelle, Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée marks Basseporte’s date of death as 4 September, and Gelbart does likewise.¹⁰⁴ The artist biographer Bénézit claims 6 September, and Ratouis de Limay, as well as the “Notice,” simply states that she died in October. Jal provides more precise detail; he writes that Basseporte occupied lodgings at the Jardin du Roi at the time of her death, and it was there that she passed away.¹⁰⁵ He cites her death certificate, drawn up at the sacristy of Saint-Médard, which states that on 6 September 1780, “Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte, painter in miniature to the King,

¹⁰³ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 149. In an article on Bihéron Georges Boulinier cites Basseporte’s will, housed in the Archives nationales, wherein Basseporte leaves a bequest to her former student. See Georges Boulinier, “Une femme anatomiste au siècle des lumières: Marie Marguerite Bihéron (1719-1795),” *Histoire des sciences médicales* 35, no. 4 (2001): 422.

¹⁰⁴ Brejon de Lavergnée, “The ‘Painters in Miniature to the King’,” 51; Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 149.

¹⁰⁵ Augustin Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d’histoire* (Paris: H. Plon, 1867), 124.

eighty-six years of age or thereabouts, who died the day before, was buried in the cemetery, in the presence of...Clément Louis Marie Anne Belle, painter to the King and inspector of the Gobelins [tapestry manufactory]...” Jal calls for this record to be corrected, as Basseporte was only 79 ½ years of age at the time of her death.¹⁰⁶

What we do know is that an inventory of her possessions was conducted on 5 October, and listed therein were several portraits, including one of her mother, two copies after pastels by Rosalba Carriera, and two original works, as well as a self-portrait, which belonged to Bihéron until her own death fifteen years later in 1795.¹⁰⁷ Given her chronic health concerns and absence of obvious inheritors, it is not surprising that Basseporte drew up multiple wills across a span of about four years. She drafted the first on 7 March 1776, followed by another on 18 May 1777 in which she included Bihéron as another executor, in addition to Monsieur and Madame Dubourg.¹⁰⁸ She wrote her third and final will and testament on 29 June 1780, an elegant description of which is included in Gelbart’s study, and which I will quote at length for its revealing details:

¹⁰⁶ Bultingaire adds the following statements to the discussion: “Nous ne nous expliquons pas pourquoi elle s’était donné un âge un peu plus avancé sur certains vélins, ni surtout pourquoi l’acte de décès, que Jal nous a transmis, porte celui de quatre-vingt-six ans. Il est curieux de noter que Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte avait eu une sœur aînée, Marie-Madeleine, qui, née le 7 octobre 1693, aurait eu véritablement quatre-vingt-six ans à la date qui nous occupe. Faut-il supposer une confusion dans la copie de l’acte de baptême des deux sœurs, ou admettre que l’erreur n’existe pas sur l’acte de décès?” In the first situation, one could reasonably suppose that she was marking the year (1780) or her 80th year. In the second, it does seem logical to conclude that the individual(s) in charge of drawing up the death certificate mistakenly referred to the birth certificate of her sister, Marie-Madeleine, whose name is similar.

¹⁰⁷ Ratouis de Limay, *Le pastel en France au XVIIIème siècle*, 159; Hyde, “« Peinte par elle-même? »,” *Arts et Savoirs* 6 (2016): 6; Jeffares, “Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte.” Ratouis de Limay states that he had access to this inventory via the late Henri Bourin. Neil Jeffares notes that one of the two original works is presumably the Rijksmuseum *Portrait of a Young Girl*. All six of the portraits listed by Ratouis de Limay from the inventory are of female subjects.

¹⁰⁸ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 143, 147.

In her will Basseporte left linens, furniture, and a gold watch to her faithful housekeeper, wife of one of the gardeners, who had stayed loyally with her throughout the decades despite the modesty of her situation and opportunities to earn more money elsewhere; art supplies to her students; some money for the poor of her parish; and a set of silver candlesticks to her most famous female student and special friend Biheron. The inventory of Basseporte's possessions done after her death on 5 October 1780 under Thouin's supervision revealed that she had numerous artworks, including copies of Correggio from [Robert de] Sery's time in Italy that he had given her as thanks for her kindness to him in his final illness. There was also a shrine, and many religious paintings by her and others. Relating to her life in science: works by Sybilla Merian on the plants and insects of Surinam; numerous cartons of natural history drawings and paintings mostly by Basseporte herself, of butterflies, birds, bugs, and studies of a pineapple in pastel; vestiges of the work of some of her protégés - a sketch model by Larcheveque, a wax ear under glass on a pedestal surely by Biheron. There were maps of Paris and of Versailles, where she went regularly. And there were geographic globes, no doubt by Mentelle...¹⁰⁹

The final lines of the "Notice" read as follows:

A son âge et presque hors d'état de remplir les devoirs de sa place, il paraît étonnant qu'on ne lui ait point accordé sa retraite, avec ses appointements en pension, et désigné son successeur; mais par une faiblesse inconcevable, seul tribut qu'elle ait payé à l'humanité, mademoiselle Basseporte frémissait au seul nom de survivancier: l'idée d'en avoir un eût abrégé ses jours. Pour ménager sa délicatesse, M. le Comte de Buffon et M. le Comte d'Angiviller, en s'assurant d'un artiste digne de la remplacer, avaient exigé qu'il garderait sur leur choix un secret inviolable. Affaibli par les années et par le travail, mademoiselle Basseporte a terminé sa carrière dans le mois d'octobre 1780. Sa modestie ne lui a jamais permis de solliciter une place à l'Académie royale de peinture, ce qui ne justifie pas l'Académie de ne lui en avoir point donné.¹¹⁰

At her age and nearly unable to fulfill the duties of her position, it seems astonishing that she was not granted her retirement, with a pension, and a successor designated; but by an inconceivable weakness, the only attribute revelatory of her humanity, Mademoiselle Basseporte shuddered at the very notion of a successor: the very idea of having one would have

¹⁰⁹ Gelbart, *Minerva's French Sisters*, 150-151.

¹¹⁰ Castilhon and Sivry, "Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte, peintre du roi," 185-186.

shortened her days. To spare her delicacy, M. le Comte de Buffon and M. le Comte d'Angiviller, in securing an artist worthy of replacing her, had demanded that he would keep their choice an inviolable secret. Weakened by the years and by work, Mademoiselle Basseporte ended her career in the month of October 1780. Her modesty never permitted her to request a place in the Académie royale de peinture, which does not justify the Académie for not having given her one.

The editors of the “Nouvelles littéraires” section of the 30 June 1781 edition of the *Mercur de France*, which reviewed volume 16 of the *Nécrologe des hommes célèbres de France, par une société de gens de lettres*, pen a fitting salute to the artist, writing that “Mademoiselle Basseporte, at 79 years of age, continued to work; she died, so to say, with brush in hand” (*le pinceau à la main*).¹¹¹ Basseporte was the first and only woman to hold the position of official botanical illustrator to the king at the Jardin du Roi. Though the “Notice” writers persist in their relentless focus on Basseporte’s virtue, a close interrogation of this text reveals that the narrative therein was carefully orchestrated to both purify Basseporte’s image and reflect values dearly held by the Parisian intellectual elite, as well as a clear preoccupation with fixed normative gender roles. Subsequent studies of Basseporte that have relied on this account’s veracity and taken eulogy for definitive biography have fallen into a trap that was carefully laid by the original writers, be they Mentelle, the editors of the compendium of obituaries, or Basseporte herself, and continue to echo a biographical account that is steeped in the rhetoric of its historical moment. It is abundantly apparent that there is more to Basseporte’s story than meets the uncritical eye and just what rises above these layers of nuance is often difficult to pin

¹¹¹ “Mlle Basseporte, âgée de soixante-dix neuf ans, travaillait encore; elle est morte, pour ainsi dire, le pinceau à la main.” “Nouvelles littéraires,” *Mercur de France*, samedi 30 juin 1781 (Paris, 1781), 226.

down. However, it is my contention, as suggested by the evidence to hand, that Basseporte was unquestionably ambitious, and came up against obstacles to further advancement that in no way involved an inherent modesty or delicacy. The “Notice” suggests that she was loath to consider a successor, which is perfectly reasonable. She may have been simply unwilling to consider her own demise, or perhaps she knew that her suggestion of a successor would not be taken into account. It seems additionally probable that she was dissuaded from soliciting further involvement within the academic institutions of the arts and sciences, though her first biographers were uninclined to confront these realities. Despite these barriers put in place by those ultimately in control of her prospects and career, Basseporte gained a place at the forefront of Enlightenment scientific development, which was deeply invested in direct observation of natural phenomena being imported to Europe via the exploration and colonization of distant lands, and from which she would have developed a global worldview.

Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien (1735-1806)

Like Basseporte, our knowledge regarding Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien’s life comes from a small handful of primary sources, and none of those directly from the artist herself, with the exception of a single letter written in 1780. There are some relevant personal anecdotes recounted in the memoirs of her husband, the painter Joseph-Marie Vien (1716-1809), yet due to the lack of surviving archival material, there is even doubt amongst sources as to the year of her birth. In the absence of records, we rely on near-contemporary artist dictionary entries, and find references to Reboul Vien in publications of this nature by Charles Gabet (1793-1860), Augustin Jal (1795-1873), Émile Bellier de La

Chavignerie (1821-1871), and Emmanuel Bénézit (1854-1920), which first appeared in print in 1831, 1867, 1870, and between 1911 and 1923, respectively.¹¹² Joseph-Marie Vien's late-twentieth-century biographers, Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Jacques Lugand, note that Augustin Jal had access to some of the Vien family's personal records (they specify only a document which recorded the date and time of Reboul Vien's death) which were subsequently destroyed in the aforementioned Hôtel de Ville fire in the year 1871, and thus was able to correctly ascertain key biographical milestones.¹¹³ I will therefore piece together, as with Basseporte, the details of Reboul Vien's life, relying heavily on two primary sources, Joseph-Marie Vien's *Memoirs* and Augustin Jal's dictionary entry, wherein her birth year is given as 1735, as well as Vien's biography and period reviews and criticism from Reboul Vien's Salon exhibitions.¹¹⁴ The most recently published scholarship on Reboul Vien is an excellent 2014 article in the *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* by Andrew Hottle, in which he adopts a birthdate of 1738 for Reboul Vien, based on Bénézit's *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs*.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Charles Gabet, *Dictionnaire des artistes de l'école française au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris, 1831), 690; Augustin Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire* (Paris: H. Plon, 1867), 1265-1266; Émile Bellier de la Chavignerie, *Dictionnaire général des artistes de l'école française depuis l'origine des arts du dessin jusqu'à nos jours* vol. II, (France: Librairie Renouard, 1885), 674; Emmanuel Bénézit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des peintres, sculpteurs, dessinateurs et graveurs de tous les temps et de tous les pays par un groupe d'écrivains spécialistes français et étrangers* (Paris: Éditions Gründ, 1999), 14:221.

¹¹³ Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Jacques Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien: Peintre du Roi (1716-1809)* (Paris: ARTHENA, 1988), 26 n. 181 and 48 n. 404. See also Andrew D. Hottle, "Present but Absent: The Art and Life of Madame Vien," *Southeastern College Art Conference Review* 16, no. 4 (2014): 425.

¹¹⁴ Jal's dictionary entry, while it appears to be the best, is not perfect. The problem with using Jal's entry as authoritative is that there is one major date discrepancy which is obviously erroneous. Given the severity of the error, it is probably a misprint (this will be discussed further in a subsequent footnote).

¹¹⁵ Hottle, "Present but Absent," 425. I am very grateful for Dr. Hottle's recent efforts to revive scholarly interest in Reboul Vien, and will draw extensively from his contemporary research in my discussion. For the selection of the 1735 birthdate as the most probable (and the default for the purposes of this study), I am indebted to private correspondence with Dr. Melissa Hyde, who first drew my attention to Jal's archival access.

The short artist biographies of Joseph-Marie Vien and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien are combined under one entry in Jal's *Dictionnaire*. According to the author, Reboul Vien was born to Joseph Reboul, *bourgeois de Paris*, and Anne-Elisabeth Renout, of the rue Feydeau on Saturday, 26 February 1735. Jal locates further information on her father's occupation in the baptismal record for the couple's fourth child (Marie-Thérèse was the third), born on 1 April 1738, which identifies him as "officer of the king, residing on the rue Montmartre."¹¹⁶ The document does not specify exactly what type of official Joseph Reboul was, but it is clear that he was employed by the king at or just after the time of Marie-Thérèse's birth. Jal jumps from birth to marriage, dedicating the bulk of the entry to Joseph-Marie Vien's legacy, and when Reboul Vien is mentioned, it is almost entirely for the purpose of communicating significant events in the life of her spouse. About Reboul Vien's early childhood and adolescence, we know only that she was born and grew up in Paris, within a bourgeois family who had ties to the crown. It is likely that she would have been educated at home, either by her mother or a governess, in basic subjects and feminine accomplishments. Vien's memoirs include a semi-lengthy account of the origin of their relationship, but the story occurs as a digression from his previous narrative, and is presented in the context of the expiration of his bachelorhood.

According to the anecdote, the man who would become a lifelong protector and promoter of the Viens, the Comte de Caylus, seems to have become acquainted with Mademoiselle Reboul's work at the home of M. Charles-Marin de la Haye, *fermier général* (tax farmer) and notable collector of works by François Boucher and others.¹¹⁷ It was on the occasion of a visit here in 1756 that Caylus

¹¹⁶ "Contrôleur [contrôleur] du Roy, demeurant rue Montmartre." Thomas Gaetgens notes that the Reboul residence was more likely on the rue Montorgueil. Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 308.

came upon what he thought was a three-dimensional preserved specimen of a moth, only to find that in fact it was a miniature painted by a young woman called Marie-Thérèse Reboul. I imagine this picture to have been akin to one of Cornelia de Rijk's quite astonishing insect studies in terms of its trompe l'oeil potential to dupe the viewer (fig. 19). The spindly legs, exceedingly lifelike transparent wings, and faint, masterful articulation of shadow underneath the insect's body, which seems to enter the space of the viewer, construct an image and enact a visuality that, as Diderot said of one of Reboul Vien's later pictures, do the same work as a preserved specimen to be scientifically examined in a collector's cabinet. Vien goes on to say that the painting's owner laughed at the Comte's error, remarking that he was "taken in just like the others." The story is apt to remind one of the legendary ancient painting duel between Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which the latter defeats the former in a battle of trompe l'oeil illusion, and lends an insight into the character of her early work.

Caylus' astonishment at the illusory power of Reboul's image led him to inquire as to the name of its author. M. de la Haye, who was "strongly attached" to the young woman's father, urged the Comte to take a look at her work and offer her his advice. Caylus paid a visit to the artist's family home, and she presented him with "a bird from the Indies whose purple body was partly covered by wings as white as snow," painted on paper. The eminent *amateur* paid her the highest compliments, and again expressed his utter disbelief at her skill, "but the young lady, enemy of compliments, entreated him" to send some academicians to provide further evaluation and guidance. Marie-Thérèse Reboul's request for an interview with well-connected career professional artists, though cloaked in the guise of modesty, reads like clever networking. The solicitation prompted the Comte to, in Vien's eyes, take on the role of matchmaker, and he persuaded his protégé to call on the Reboul family. Vien's

assessment of the situation is as follows: “M. le Comte de Caylus did not limit himself to obtaining work for me, he also wanted to unite me with a good wife.”¹¹⁸

The first meeting between Joseph-Marie and Marie-Thérèse took place in early winter. Upon his arrival at the artist’s home, he was shown into the study and “saw the bird in question.” He declares in retrospect, “at the appearance of this work, I was truly astonished to recognize so much talent in a young person largely unknown. She had reached a degree of perfection to which so few people arrive that I could not help but express to her my surprise that having as much talent as she did, she was not better known. Her mother informed me that only friends of the family were received at home, and that M. de Caylus sometimes took the trouble to see her daughter’s work.”¹¹⁹ Here ends all account of Marie-Thérèse’s production as an artist. Instead, Vien waxes melodramatically nostalgic: “I left that house determined to return no more. I had seen a pretty painting, but I had also seen the seductive person who had painted it so well, and as I wanted to remain a bachelor, I told myself, ‘If I return to that house for that young woman’s pictures, I fear that the author will please me more than the works’. The resolutions of men are uncertain!”¹²⁰

These protestations were met with strong opposition on the part of Caylus. Vien admits that her work even exceeded the expectations set for him by the Comte. Vien here recounts a lengthy dialogue between the two men, in which Caylus offers the following remarks: “Can you imagine that this young lady is so exacting in all that she does, that even though I tell her not to touch it any further she doesn’t want to believe me? She wanted to give life to her figures. She forgets that Art has limits

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

while Nature has none.”¹²¹ Vien asks that he never be entreated to return and give the young artist further counsel, and when Caylus expresses indignation, he rehearses the following excuse: “Because I don’t want to get married, and the sight of her could very well trouble my heart, and disturb my reason...M. le Comte, I added, you have done so much for me that I submit myself to fulfill your desires, but to tell you the truth, I fear for my peace. Love extinguishes the fires of genius.”¹²² In the end the staunch bachelor relents, and the pair proceed *tout suite* to the Reboul home. The remainder of the anecdote recounts a series of visits and encounters which propel Vien and Reboul towards the inevitable event of marriage. Vien writes that on subsequent visits to see Mademoiselle Reboul, he was continually “astonished by her progress.” He includes in these social calls his close friend, the Swedish painter and academician Alexander Roslin, who, sharing Vien’s dual regard for Marie-Thérèse’s work and character, remarks, “My friend, we are the both of us bachelors, it is necessary that we marry. I already have in view a young lady for myself, and I have just seen one that nature made expressly for you. Never will you find a person who is composed of such qualities as Mlle Reboul. You could maybe marry one more rich, but never one more amiable, nor better raised; she belongs to an honest family, she loves and cultivates the Arts, she will be the friend of your heart and the companion of your glorious work. A bachelor, in growing old, loses his friends, no longer makes new ones, and finds himself abandoned in the winter of life.” As Andrew Hottle has quite correctly noted, in Vien’s anecdotal framework, with each new conversation with a male confidant, and with each renewed reluctance to wed, the “focus is...nuptial, whereas the artistic acumen of the future Madame Vien is

¹²¹ Joseph-Marie Vien, “Mémoires,” in Gaehetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 309.

¹²² *Ibid.*

merely incidental.”¹²³ The motions of courtship progressed quickly, and the couple were married on 10 May 1757.¹²⁴

1757 is a year universally documented in Reboul Vien’s historiography, as it witnessed four major events: Reboul Vien’s first scientific illustrations were published, she married Joseph-Marie Vien, she was named *académicienne* of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, and she participated in her first Salon exhibition. Alexander Roslin painted pendant portraits of the newlywed couple within the year, quite probably as gifts to commemorate their marriage (figs. 20-21). Reboul Vien is positioned in three-quarter profile with a pleasant expression and gaze directed at the viewer. Blue, yellow, and white flowers are artfully placed in her stylish coif and arranged in a miniature bouquet fastened to her bodice. She wears a string of pearls close about the neck, and holds at the ready in her right hand the petite brush of a painter of miniatures. The oval-shaped busts are meant to face each other, and as such Joseph-Marie, also looking outward but turning towards his right to do so, is outfitted in a rust-colored jacket, snug cravat, and powdered wig tied back with a black ribbon. The flowers scattered in a delightfully haphazard arrangement atop Marie-Thérèse’s head parallel the negligent clutter of the large sketchbook held close to Joseph-Marie’s chest, which overflows with loose leaves of paper. These attributes signal, I would argue in equal measure, the creative *génie* of both halves of this artist couple. Andrew Hottle has reasonably concluded that the size of each artist’s tools reflects the relative importance of their work; that “their gendered roles were plainly and quite

¹²³ Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 426.

¹²⁴ Vien records that Reboul Vien’s “uncle, canon dignitary of St. Honoré and vicar general of Lisieux, gave us the nuptial benediction in the church of St. Eustache.” Joseph-Marie Vien, “Mémoires,” in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 309.

conventionally articulated by Roslin, who portrayed Madame Vien as a suitable wife.¹²⁵ However, I would modify this analysis and rather situate the polemic with the societally imposed constraints to women artists, exercised via restrictions in scale, media, and materials, rather than any wish to diminish the worth or skill of the sitter on the part of Roslin.

Some dictionary entries claim that Reboul Vien was taught, at least in part, by her husband.¹²⁶ As he was well-advanced of her in age (Vien was 40 years old at the time of their marriage, while Reboul Vien was 22) and career experience, the conclusion that he would have served as an advisor and potentially provided her with his suggestions or opinions from time to time is plausible. However, it is my contention that the channels of influence ran in both directions. The couple met after Marie-Thérèse had already become an accomplished artist, as Vien relates himself, and he makes no mention of acting in an instructional capacity in his memoirs. It is regrettable, though quite intriguing, that Vien simply claims she was untrained. In fact, Vien alleges that she executed the moth portrait which brought her to the attention of Caylus “without ever having learned to paint.”¹²⁷ At the same time that the initial encounter took place, Reboul Vien would have already been working on her first published and publicly accessible work, a series of strikingly fastidious shell illustrations she produced for Michel Adanson’s 1757 *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal, coquillages* (figs. 22-26).¹²⁸ These engraved illustrations

¹²⁵ Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 427.

¹²⁶ These same sources tend also to say that she was a student at the Académie de Saint Luc. See the artist’s aforementioned entries in the *Dictionnaires* of Emile Bellier de la Chavignerie, Emmanuel Bénézit, and Charles Gabet, as well as Frédéric Villot, *Notice des tableaux exposés dans les galeries du Musée impérial du Louvre*. 3e partie, École française (2e éd.) (Paris: 1855), 404-405.

¹²⁷ Joseph-Marie Vien, “Mémoires,” in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 308.

¹²⁸ Séverine Lepape claims that Marie-Thérèse worked for the natural history dilettante Dezallier d’Argenville in addition to Adanson. Lepape, “The Vellums and the King’s Library,” 59.

served to support Adanson's text by visually organizing and exhibiting the species the author had catalogued on an expedition to Senegal that the leading naturalist, and above all botanist, had undertaken from 1749 to 1754.¹²⁹ In the text's opening pages, Adanson introduces the illustrations as follows:

Il n'est presque personne qui ne convienne de l'utilité des figures, du moins des bonnes figures: ce sont des tableaux fidèles qui nous présentent à chaque instant des objets que souvent l'on ne peut espérer de voir en nature: elles sont d'une nécessité indispensable, surtout lorsqu'il est question de faire connaître des animaux qui ne sont pas encore connus, ou des objets qui ont peu de rapport avec ceux que nous connaissons; c'est pour cela que j'ai accompagné mes descriptions des figures de toutes les espèces de Coquillages que j'ai observés au Sénégal. Il s'en trouve à la vérité beaucoup qui ont été déjà gravées dans quelques ouvrages modernes; mais comme le plan de mon ouvrage diffère de leur en cela qu'il présente les animaux qui habitent chaque coquille, je n'ai pu me dispenser de figurer toutes celles qui appartiennent à chaque animal d'un même genre; d'ailleurs elles sont travaillées avec une exactitude qu'on aura peine à trouver dans les anciennes. Mlle Rebol qui les a dessiné et gravé, mérite bien que je lui rende cette justice; mais ce coup d'essai qui n'est pas indigne d'une main de maître, parle assez en sa faveur: les dix-neuf planches qui accompagnent cet ouvrage mettront les connoisseurs à portée de juger de la perfection que l'on doit attendre d'une main si habile.¹³⁰

There is hardly anyone who does not agree on the usefulness of illustrations, at least of good illustrations: they are faithful pictures which present to us at every moment objects which often one cannot hope to see in nature: they are of an indispensable necessity, especially when it is a question of making known animals that are not yet known, or objects that have little to relate them to those that we know; it is for this reason that I have accompanied my descriptions with figures of all the species of shellfish which I have observed in Senegal. It is true that many of them have already been engraved in some modern works; but as the plan of my work differs from theirs in that it presents the animals which inhabit each shell, I could not dispense with illustrating all those which belong to each animal of the same kind; moreover

¹²⁹ For an expansive study of Adanson's voyage to Senegal, see Xavier Carteret, "Michel Adanson au Sénégal (1749-1754): Un grand voyage naturaliste et anthropologique du siècle des lumières." *Revue d'histoire des Sciences* 65, no. 1 (2012): 5-25.

¹³⁰ Michel Adanson and Philippe Buache. *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal, coquillages: avec la relation abrégée d'un voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris: C.-J.-B. Bauche, 1757), 24-25.

they are worked with an exactitude that one would be at pains to find in older works. Mlle Reboul, who drew and engraved them, deserves this recognition from me, and this endeavor, which is not unworthy of a master's hand, speaks sufficiently in her favor: the nineteen plates which accompany this work will place connoisseurs in a position to judge the perfection that should be expected of a hand so capable.

In observing the level of expertise in these scientific drawings, Vien's claim that his spouse was untrained becomes wholly unsustainable; the skills required to execute these illustrations and the visibility or connections needed to gain the commission of such a distinguished scientist signal the presence of at least one well-positioned artistic mentor. The artist's name is found at the bottom of each of the nineteen plates, written "M. Th. Reboul," indicating that these works were completed and published before her marriage to Vien, and, as stated by Adanson above, she is credited with both drawing and engraving.¹³¹ As noted in these attributions, some of the drawings were executed *d'après nature* (from life) and others were adapted from drawings made in the field.¹³² The variety of species engraved by the artist are rendered often in two or three views, in some cases with the inclusion of their creature inhabitant. On each plate, the specimens are laid out categorically, and even, in general, symmetrically. The composition is clearly ordered, orchestrated, and strategically conceived.

Less than three months after her marriage, Reboul Vien was admitted as an *académicienne* (*agrée* and *reçue*) of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture on 30 July 1757.¹³³ To what

¹³¹ Post-nuptial works by the artist generally include both her maiden name and married surname.

¹³² Hottle additionally notes the following: "When she depicted only one view, Mademoiselle Reboul represented a portion of the other valve, with hatching to create an illusion of shadow, and delineated the division between the two halves of the mollusk. In this way, all of the specimens appear to be complete, three-dimensional exoskeletons. Reboul's sense of accuracy also extends to the orientation of the shells...Since printmaking yields a reversed image, the artist probably executed preliminary drawings in which the orientation was inverted. Reboul's deft execution suggests that she was already a skilled etcher when she began the plates for Adanson in 1756 or 1757." See Hottle, "Present but Absent," pg. 428-430.

¹³³ Anatole de Montaiglon, ed., *Procès-verbaux de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, 1648–1793 (Paris: J. Baur, 1875–92), 6:41.

extent Vien's influence played a role in Reboul Vien's admission we cannot know. However, the alacrity of the acceptance is remarkable when compared with the admission process of other women artists who were related to academicians.¹³⁴ It is true that Vien himself experienced significant obstacles to admission, and this may have motivated him to campaign for her admission all the more fiercely. As Melissa Hyde has written, "this [the Académie] was literally 'an old boys' club. Talent and ambition were only partial requirements to get a foot in the door - no matter who you were; it also took the sponsorship of the right people."¹³⁵ Coincidentally (or perhaps not so), in April of 1757, Rosalba Carriera, at the time the only living female member of the French Académie, had died. Perhaps the rapidity of Reboul Vien's induction was the combined result of her prodigious talent, Carriera's death, and Vien's support. For the review and approval of the assembled body of academicians, "Mademoiselle Marie-Thérèse Reboul, wife of M. Vien, Adjoint à Professeur de l'Académie, born in Paris, presented to the assembly several paintings of various objects of natural history, painted in miniature from life."¹³⁶ As the Académie's records do not specify the subjects or titles of the works submitted, we can only speculate that they were watercolors; we are left to wonder if this selection of works included the exotic bird or trompe l'oeil moth featured in Vien's memoirs.¹³⁷ Following the

¹³⁴ For example, Roslin's spouse, pastellist Marie-Suzanne Giroust Roslin, was admitted to the Académie in 1770, eleven years after her 1759 marriage to Roslin.

¹³⁵ Melissa Hyde, "Women and the Visual Arts in the Age of Marie-Antoinette," in *Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette*, ed. Eik Kahng and Marianne Roland Michel (Dallas, TX; New Haven: Dallas Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2002), 80, 91 n. 33. Vien's biographers recount that it took the combined support of Charles Natoire, Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, the Comte de Caylus, and François Boucher to petition the Académie in favor of Vien's nomination.

¹³⁶ "Mademoiselle Marie-Thérèse Reboul, épouse de M. Vien, Adjoint à Professeur de l'Académie, née à Paris, a présenté à l'assemblée plusieurs tableaux de divers objets de l'histoire naturelle, peints à la miniature d'après le naturel." Montaignon, *Procès-verbaux*, 6:41.

¹³⁷ Hottle, "Present but Absent," 432. Hottle also speculates that these works were executed in watercolor, as no surviving works by Reboul Vien are in oil.

procedures of her nomination and acceptance, Reboul Vien was given leave to choose the piece that she would prepare as a *morceau de réception*.

The Salon of 1757 took place in early autumn, opening, as was customary, on 25 August, the Feast Day of St. Louis and the King's nameday. At this, her first of five Salon exhibitions, Reboul Vien was the only female participant. The Salon, held only rarely in the early decades of the eighteenth century, but for the most part biennially from 1737 onwards, was the premier public event for the members of the Académie.¹³⁸ The duration of the exhibition was approximately three weeks, though from time to time this would be lengthened by a few days so that the most important royal commissions could be brought down to eye-level to be lauded and observed more keenly. For women artists, academic membership enabled them to publicly display their work in the Salon Carré of the Louvre during these state-sponsored periods of exhibition. However, they were not permitted to vote, teach, or hold office within the Académie alongside their male colleagues.¹³⁹ In the mid-century, when Reboul Vien's works were on display, her small-scale watercolor and gouache paintings would have been placed on tables at the center of the room with other cabinet pictures and sculptures. In 1757 Reboul Vien's selection of paintings, because they were miniatures (and perhaps also because she was so recently admitted), were grouped together under the same number in the catalogue ("Différents

¹³⁸ The position of 'curator' (*tapissier* or *decorateur*) responsible for organizing and hanging the selected works was filled by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699-1779) in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. As Philip Conisbee notes, "the efforts of the tapissier were inevitably criticized by some artists and visitors; but he was at times able to make telling juxtapositions of works." Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 21.

¹³⁹ See Hyde, "Women and the Visual Arts in the Age of Marie-Antoinette," 75-93.

morceaux de l'Histoire Naturelle sous le même Numéro”), without separate titles for each piece.¹⁴⁰

Due to the brief period of time between her admission and the exhibition, it is certainly possible that the works she showed were those that she presented to the academic assembly.¹⁴¹

It was perhaps also in the year 1757 that the Comte de Caylus recruited Reboul Vien to complete the illustrations for his *Dissertation sur le Papyrus*, which was published the following year. Caylus was himself an amateur artist (he was made an *honoraire amateur* of the Académie in 1731) who principally practiced engraving. From 1752-1767 he also produced a seven-volume series of engravings titled *Recueil d'antiquités égyptiennes, étrusques, grecques, romaines et gauloises*, which reproduced his vast collection of antiquities. The pair of plates, “*Dessiné d'après nature et gravé par M. Th. Reboul. Vien,*” show two views of the Sicilian papyrus, and two varieties of Madagascan papyrus, respectively (fig. 27). Reboul Vien’s line is expressive and “self-assured, with very little hint of the stopping and starting of the etcher’s needle.”¹⁴² The confidence and sense of playfulness in even these rather straightforward scientific plant diagrams is similarly performed in the swirling curves and protruding heads of snails in her shell engravings for Adanson.

The memoirs of Charles-Nicolas Cochin, academician (from 1751) and son of the aforementioned collaborator with Basseporte, Louise-Magdeleine Horthemels, as well as close personal friend of the Viens, contain a deeply resonant remark about Reboul Vien’s relationship with the Comte de Caylus. Compiled and published after Cochin’s death, the *Mémoires inédits de Charles-*

¹⁴⁰ *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de Messieurs de l'Académie royale* (Paris: J. J. E. Collombat, 1757). Reboul Vien’s works are listed under the number 94, and her name is written “Madame Vien, Académicienne.”

¹⁴¹ Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 434.

¹⁴² Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 430.

Nicolas Cochin sur le Comte de Caylus, Bouchardon, les Slodtz, Publié après le manuscrit autographe

pointedly reveal Caylus's acutely "despotic attitude toward artists."¹⁴³ In a section titled "*Remarques*," which follows the chapter on Caylus, Cochin states that "Madame Vien, who was a talented miniaturist, never dared undertake the practice of portraiture, which could have earned her a lot of money, in fear of irritating M. de Caylus, who absolutely wished that she paint only natural history."¹⁴⁴

Was the possibility of Reboul Vien earning a higher income seen as a threat to her husband's role as the head of the family? Do these comments suggest that she had some measure of early training in portrait painting?¹⁴⁵ Hottle speculates that Caylus, "given his penchant for etching and his familiarity with the Reboul family," may have been the coordinator of Reboul Vien's initial artistic education.¹⁴⁶

However, according to Vien's memoirs, Caylus "discovered" her talent after it had already been cultivated and refined. The problem of reliability in the memoirs is a constant, as Vien was writing them at a half century's remove; whatever the case may be, Reboul Vien's career and practice as a professional artist was clearly delimited by the demands and caprices of the powerful male figures in her life.

¹⁴³ Tamara Griggs, "Ancient Art and the Antiquarian: The Forgery of Giuseppe Guerra, 1755–1765." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (September 2011): 478.

¹⁴⁴ "Madame Vien, qui avait du talent dans la miniature, n'osa jamais entreprendre de s'attacher à peindre des têtes, ce qui lui aurait pu valoir beaucoup d'argent, dans la crainte d'irriter M. de Caylus, qui voulait absolument qu'elle ne fit que de l'histoire naturelle." Charles-Nicolas Cochin, *Mémoires inédits de Charles Nicolas Cochin sur le Comte de Caylus, Bouchardon, Les Slodtz, pub. d'après le manuscrit autographe, avec introduction, notes et appendice, par M. Charles Henry* (Paris: Baur, Librairie de la Société, 1880), 67. Spelling and grammar have been lightly edited to reflect modern conventions.

¹⁴⁵ The Italian auction house Cambi, as of 8 June 2021, lists an ivory miniature portrait of a young gentleman signed and dated "Paris 1804 Reboul" that has been attributed to Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien. I have contacted the auction house to inquire further regarding the attribution, and await their response.

¹⁴⁶ Hottle, "Present but Absent," 430.

In May of 1758, Marie-Thérèse gave birth to her first child, a daughter named Anne-Marie-Charlotte, who was baptised in Paris at the Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois on 8 May.¹⁴⁷ The architect and *Inspecteur des Bâtiments du Roi* Pierre Coustou was named her godfather. As Thomas Gaehtgens has indicated, "It is unfortunately impossible to know if the child lived very long. If she died very young, Jal would have recovered her death certificate in the registers of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois destroyed in 1871. Be that as it may, thereafter the child would never again be mentioned."¹⁴⁸ It seems most likely that the infant died as a newborn.

Reboul Vien's second Salon exhibition, in 1759, was in fact Diderot's first as a writer and critic for the *Correspondance littéraire*.¹⁴⁹ Now aged 24, Reboul Vien was again the sole woman artist represented. As detailed in the Salon *livret*, Reboul Vien exhibited a selection of paintings listed under three numbers: (78) "Two paintings of thirteen inches in length by ten inches in height, one representing a dead partridge, the other a basket of flowers," (79) "A painting of eleven inches by seven and a half inches, representing some flowers in a bottle," and (80) "Two large butterflies, and one small."¹⁵⁰ Diderot dedicates a brief but illustrative commentary on the group, writing that "Les

¹⁴⁷ See the *Généalogie* of Joseph-Marie Vien in Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 350-351.

¹⁴⁸ Translation: "Il n'est malheureusement pas possible de savoir si l'enfant vécut longtemps. Si elle était morte très jeune, Jal aurait relevé son acte de décès sur les registres de Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois détruits en 1871. Toutefois, par la suite, il n'en sera jamais plus question." Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ In circulation from 1753 to 1790, the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* was a cultural newsletter written by Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm. In addition to the writings of Diderot, the newsletter also included contributions from Madame d'Épinay. Produced biweekly until 1773, when Grimm handed down the responsibility for its contents to his successor, Jacques-Henri Meister, the confidential newsletter was copied by hand outside of France to evade French censorship. It is vital to keep in mind when discussing the newsletter that, in its time, it only reached a very limited base of subscribers, made up of a small group of European elites and nobility (one such reader was Catherine the Great of Russia).

¹⁵⁰ *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de Messieurs de l'Académie royale* (Paris: J. J. E. Collombat, 1759), 18. (78) "Deux tableaux de treize pouces de longueur sur dix pouces de hauteur, l'un représente une perdrix morte; l'autre, une corbeille de fleurs," (79) "Un tableau de onze pouces sur sept pouces et demi, représentant des fleurs dans une bouteille," and (80) "Deux grands papillons, et un petit."

morceaux d’histoire naturelle de Mad. Vien ont le mérite qu’il y faut désirer, la patience et l’exactitude. Une portefeuille de sa façon instruirait autant qu’un cabinet, plairoit davantage et de dureroit pas moins” (“The natural history pieces by Madame Vien have the virtue that one would wish, patience and exactitude. A portfolio in her style would instruct as well as a cabinet, would please more and would last no less”).¹⁵¹ His remark about the efficacy of Reboul Vien’s subjects as educational tools that could substitute for the real, three-dimensional objects on which they are based echoes Caylus’ initial error in mistaking her early moth study for a preserved specimen in M. de la Haye’s cabinet. In Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar’s three-volume compilation of Diderot’s *Salons*, the editors note that following the Salon of 1759, “*L’Année littéraire* et la *Feuille* font des éloges de son talent. Le *Journal encyclopédique* admire la ‘grande vérité’ de ses envois, et pense que ceux-ci seront précieux ‘pour compléter la collection d’histoire naturelle du Cabinet des Estampes du Roi’” (“The *Année littéraire* and the *Feuille* praised her talent. The *Journal encyclopédique* admired the ‘great truth’ of her works, and thought that they would be valuable ‘to complete the collection of natural history in the King’s Cabinet of Prints’”).¹⁵²

The year 1760 was rich in artistic collaboration between Marie-Thérèse and Joseph-Marie. The duo produced a series of engravings titled *Suite de Vases Composée dans le Goût de l’Antique* (figs. 28-29). The thirteen designs were drafted by Vien and engraved by Reboul Vien.¹⁵³ The asymmetry,

¹⁵¹ Jean Seznec and Jean Adhémar, ed., *Diderot: Salons, 1759– 1781*, Second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:67.

¹⁵² Seznec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 1:50.

¹⁵³ The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York owns a copy of this publication. Additionally, there are three preparatory drawings that are held in the collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Béziers, France. For more on these, see Gahtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 242-243.

rounded forms, and swooping garlands of the vases gesture towards mid-century rococo aesthetics, but the emphasis on classical architectural motifs and temple ritual practice, all “dans le goût de l’antique,” signals both the new directions taken by Vien in his practice as well as the collective growth in attention given to antiquity following the ongoing archeological excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum. The designs include mythical beings, some of them creatures with half-human and half-animal forms. One vessel, with a short, tapered stem and spherical body, features the head of Medusa as its central motif, her long and winding snake-hair stretching in either direction from the top of her head and coiling into the shape of handles (fig. 30). Another, elevated by three hoof-like feet, with a pair of lamb heads to the left and right and swirling arabesques across the center, emits thick clouds of incense (fig. 31). The series is rife with “floral, foliate, ornamental, avian, and bovid motifs” and strengthened by Reboul Vien’s nuanced and experienced hatching.¹⁵⁴ The *Suite* is fascinating for its reverent and even dark fantasizing upon antique themes.

Concurrently, Reboul Vien served as a model for several of her husband’s paintings, most notably a direct portrait of her, completed in 1760 and now in the collection of the Musée Fabre in Montpellier (fig. 32). She is seen from the waist up, looking out with a tranquil expression towards the artist, who has found her occupied in the act of preparing the materials for a still life. On a table just visible to the viewer, Marie-Thérèse has set out a small selection of shells and is arranging a colorful bouquet of flowers in a cream-colored vessel that would not be wholly out of place in the *Suite des Vases*. Her neck is again encircled by a small string of pearls, and she is wearing another, longer strand,

¹⁵⁴ Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 431.

wrapped multiple times around her right wrist. Her head is crowned with a sumptuous silk turban, accented by electric blue feathers and more pearls, which leaves the chestnut brown hair surrounding her face exposed. The wrapping of fabric, both in the turban and in the shape of the gown, also of silk, in a deep, muted magenta patterned with painterly golden amber flowers, bespeaks a blended influence of the exotic Near East and classical antiquity. Vien kept the portrait for the rest of his life; it was only acquired from the heirs of the family in 1955.¹⁵⁵ Also in the Vien family collection was a drawing, now in the Musée de Béziers, that could be either a preparatory study for the engraving of the portrait, or a copy of the engraving, and in either case is most probably from Reboul Vien's hand, "whose talents in engraving are well known."¹⁵⁶

This portrait marks an early manifestation of a theme that would continue to reappear in Vien's oeuvre. Previous to the final few years of the 1750s, in fact, previous to his meeting Marie-Thérèse, much of Vien's work was of biblical subject matter, with a primary focus on the depiction of the male body, in settings largely denuded and devoid of natural elements (fig. 33). Beginning in the years 1756 and 1757, at the same time that the connection between the two artists was formed and solidified, there is a conspicuous iconographic shift in Vien's work, which suddenly expands to include expressions of femininity and motifs from both the natural world and antiquity. Though scholars largely agree that Vien's fascination with the antique was received from his mentor Caylus, not to mention the general fervor in mid-century France surrounding the recent and ongoing archeological

¹⁵⁵ Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 167.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph-Marie Vien's biographers claim that "A pastel of the same size, similar to the *Portrait of Madame Vien* in the Musée Fabre, was sold at a public auction in Auch on 29 June 1986 under the title 'École italienne XIXe siècle'." Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 167.

discoveries, I believe that Reboul Vien, in addition to acting as model and muse for Vien's depiction of classical female figures, at minimum contributed to the execution of birds and flowers that began to appear in her partner's canvases.

Marie-Thérèse's presence is felt most strongly in a series of compositions by Vien from the years 1756-1788 depicting young women in antique settings and guises, or *à la grecque*. Starting with *Sweet Melancholy* (fig. 34), signed and dated in the year of their meeting, we begin to see an infusion of birds and flowers of species and characteristics that were known specialties for Reboul Vien. The small bird, presumably a dove, perched on the young woman's lap as well as the simple bouquet of flowers and glass carafe, are, to my eyes, treated with the same soft application of paint and both feature marks of highlighting in the form of lively, painterly dabs of white. In Vien's *Young Woman Resting* and *Young Greek Woman Holding a Canary on Her Finger* (fig. 35), both painted around 1760, Reboul Vien is almost certainly the model.¹⁵⁷ On close looking, we notice that familiar attributes and accoutrements continually reappear in these portrait-like paintings that find themselves somewhere between allegorical and genre pictures. Each of the two strands of pearls, one worn as a necklace and the other wrapped around the wrist, the silk turban, exotic wrap dress, and blue hair ribbon show up again and again in these works across almost two decades. These depictions of young classical women, often accompanied by birds and copious flowers, became a fixed type in Vien's practice, so much so that from the mid-1750s to the mid-1760s they make up the vast majority of his studio production. The work that remains to confirm this theory involves close examination of Vien's

¹⁵⁷ Gaegtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 163, catalogue nos. 147a and 148.

oeuvre at a magnifying glass-level in order to discern more accurately any noticeable differences in authorship within individual works.¹⁵⁸

Reboul Vien did not participate in the Salon of 1761, as her second child, a son called Joseph-Marie, was born a mere few weeks before the exhibition opening. He was also baptised in Paris at the Church of St-Germain-l’Auxerrois, on the first of August 1761. The godfather of the child was Joseph Reboul, Marie-Thérèse’s father, and the godmother was Marie-Louise Blasse, the wife of miniaturist portrait painter François-Elie Vincent (1708-1790).¹⁵⁹ Vincent’s son, the academician François-André Vincent (1746-1816), was a student of Vien and would go on to marry fellow *académicienne* Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803). We know from the *Procès-verbaux* that within six months of the birth, Alexander Roslin and Louis-Claude Vassé (1716-1772), *professeur*, were asked to visit Reboul Vien during an illness on behalf of the Académie.¹⁶⁰

Later the same year, on 30 July 1762, Reboul Vien’s reception piece (*morceau de réception*) for the Académie, representing two pigeons, was submitted and accepted with satisfaction (fig. 36).¹⁶¹ Reboul Vien depicts a pair of quite tufty birds, modest in size and muted-cinnamon in color, sharing a moment of interaction while perched atop a small branch, against a hazy blue sky that is interspersed with the wisps of migrating clouds. We notice that liveliness is captured not just in accurate portrayals

¹⁵⁸ Due to travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I have as yet been unable to see the works discussed in this thesis in person.

¹⁵⁹ Gaegtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 27.

¹⁶⁰ Montaiglon, *Procès-verbaux*, 6:187. The date of the entry is 9 January 1762.

¹⁶¹ Montaiglon, *Procès-verbaux*, 6:198. “M^e Vien donne son tableau de réception.—Madame Marie-Thérèse Reboul, épouse de M. Vien, Professeur, a donné à l’Académie le tableau en miniature qu’elle s’étoit engagée à faire pour son morceau de réception. Il représente deux pigeons. L’Académie l’a accepté avec satisfaction.” Several later sources have incorrectly identified Reboul Vien’s *morceau de réception*. See Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 436, 441 n. 38.

of feathers and anatomical pose, but in the glint of each pigeon's small, dark eyes. The painting, done in watercolor, is a small work on paper, and thus characteristic of her oeuvre. Her delicate brushwork recalls "the incised lines of her etchings," and carries the weight of scientific precision, particularly in her depiction of the creatures' soft, ruffled plumage.¹⁶² The fact that women were disproportionately limited to the use of less durable media makes the issue of materials, in terms of ephemerality, chance of survival, and ease of display, a gendered one. Andrew Hottle has analyzed the situation statistically, reporting that "of the 399 *morceaux de réception* that were accepted by the Académie between 1648 and 1791, 305 have been located. Among the known works, 282 are oil paintings, ten are pastels, five are enamel miniatures, six are gouache or watercolor paintings (including that of Madame Vien), and two are pen drawings. Thus, over ninety-two percent of the known reception pieces are oil paintings; by contrast, fewer than two percent are executed in watercolor or gouache. Madame Vien's medium, like her gender, was unequivocally in the minority."¹⁶³ Nevertheless, though showing signs of its age and possible lack of diligent care, *Two Pigeons* serves as an excellent example of the level of detail Reboul Vien employed to vivify and dynamise her ornithological subjects. The picture, which following the Revolution was transferred from the collection of the Académie to that of the Musée Napoléon, can now be found in the Louvre and was one of the *tableaux* by the artist displayed in the following Salon.

In a similar fashion to the Salon of 1759, Reboul Vien, returning to the public forum after four years away, exhibited a selection of pictures in the Salon of 1763, listed as follows: (105) "A

¹⁶² Hottle, "Present but Absent," 438.

¹⁶³ Hottle, "Present but Absent," 436.

sparrowhawk overcoming a small bird, miniature painting measuring one foot six inches by one foot three inches,” (106) “Two pigeons, miniature painting measuring one foot two inches in width, by one foot three inches in height,” and (107) “Several other paintings in miniature, representing some birds, fruit, and flowers, under the same number.”¹⁶⁴ Her work garnered critical recognition by, in addition to Diderot, the Lyonnais writer and mathematician Charles-Joseph Mathon de La Cour (1738–1793) who, following along with the Salon livret and providing epistolary commentary in his *Lettres à Madame ** sur les Peintures, les Sculptures & les Gravures, exposées dans le Sallon du Louvre en 1763*, wrote of Reboul Vien’s pictures,

Le préjugé méprisable & barbare, qui interdit aux femmes toute espèce de connoissances & de talens, ne s’est pas étendu, Madame, sur l’Académie Royale de Peinture: elle a admis dans son sein plusieurs femmes qui lui font honneur. On a exposé cette année quelques Tableaux en miniature de Madame Vien, qui représentent un émouchet terrassant un petit oiseau, deux pigeons que se caressent, des oiseaux, des fruits & des fleurs. Ces morceaux ont été vus avec plaisir, même par les femmes: on commence à sentir que l’ignorance n’est pas un mérite, ni un devoir. Il y a environ deux cens ans qu’un Gentilhomme auroit été déshonoré, s’il avoit su écrire. La raison dissipe peu à peu ces idées ridicules. Il est impossible qu’on condamne longtemps votre sexe à être frivole malgré lui. Des organes délicats ne sont pas faits pour des travaux pénibles; mais on a aplani le chemin des sciences: les graces peuvent y marcher; laissez aux hommes le privilege de juger des Procès, de tuer leurs semblables, & de disputer sur des questions abstraites & subtiles, qui servent plus à gâter l’esprit, qu’à l’éclairer; etudiez le coeur humain & les merveilles de la nature; suivez votre génie; cultivez les Belles-Lettres & les Arts; vous serez plus heureuses que nous.¹⁶⁵

The contemptible and barbaric prejudice which forbids women any kind of knowledge and talent, has not extended, Madame, to the Académie royale de peinture; it has admitted to its

¹⁶⁴ *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de Messieurs de l’Académie royale* (Paris: J. J. E. Collombat, 1763), 21-22. (105) “Un émouchet terrassant un petit oiseau, tableau en miniature d’un pied 6 pouces, sur 1 pied 3 pouces,” (106) “Deux pigeons, tableau en miniature d’un pied 2 pouces de large, sur 1 pied 3 pouces de haut,” (107) “Plusieurs autres tableaux en miniature, représentans des oiseaux, des fruits & des fleurs, sous le même numéro.”

¹⁶⁵ Charles-Joseph Mathon de La Cour, *Lettres à Madame ** sur les Peintures, les Sculptures & les Gravures, exposées dans le Sallon du Louvre en 1763* (Paris, 1763), 51-52.

bosom several women who do it honor. There are exhibited this year several paintings in miniature by Madame Vien, which depict a sparrowhawk overcoming a small bird, two pigeons caressing each other, some birds, fruits, and flowers. These pieces have been viewed with pleasure, even by women; one is beginning to feel that ignorance is not a merit nor a duty. Two hundred years ago a gentleman would have been dishonored if he had known how to write. Reason is, little by little, dispelling these ridiculous ideas. It is impossible that your sex will be condemned to being frivolous in spite of itself for much longer. Delicate beings are not made for hard work, but the path of science has been paved; the graces can walk on it; leave to men the privilege of judging trials, of killing their fellows, and of disputing on abstract and subtle questions, which serve more to spoil the mind, than to enlighten it; study the human heart and the wonders of nature; follow your genius; cultivate the arts and letters; you will be happier than us.

Diderot, too, seems to pay more attention and spend more time with Reboul Vien's pictures than he had four years previously:

Cette femme peint à merveille les oiseaux, les insectes et les fleurs. Elle est juste dans les formes et vraie dans l'exécution; elle sait même réchauffer des sujets assez froids. Ici, c'est un *Émouchet qui lie un petit oiseau*; là *Deux Pigeons qui se baisent*. Si elle suspend par les pattes un oiseau mort, elle en détachera quelques plumes qui seront tombées à terre et sur lesquelles on serait tenté de souffler pour les écarter. Ses bouquets sont ajustés avec élégance et goût. J'aimerais bien autant un portefeuille d'oiseaux, de chenilles et d'autres insectes de sa main, que ces objets en nature rassemblés sous des verres dans mon cabinet.¹⁶⁶

This woman paints birds, insects, and flowers wonderfully. She is correct in her forms and true in her execution; she even knows how to warm up rather cold subjects. Here, it is a *Sparrowhawk joining a small bird*; there *Two Pigeons kissing*. If she suspends a dead bird by its legs, she will detach a few feathers that will fall to the ground and on which one would be tempted to blow to remove them. Her bouquets are arranged with elegance and taste. I would like a portfolio of birds, caterpillars, and other insects from her hand as much as those objects in nature gathered under glass in my cabinet.

¹⁶⁶ Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 1:231.

The rather curious fourth sentence regarding fallen feathers seems to further suggest Reboul Vien's ability to portray natural elements with a high degree of verisimilitude. Diderot's imagining that one of the birds has been hung upside down, and then feeling tempted to blow the scattered feathers away, acts as a (fittingly) miniature version of the ekphrastic tales he was known to spin in front of Salon paintings, particularly large landscapes.

In addition to these two longer reviews, Sez nec and Adhémar note that "...Fréron [writing for the *Année littéraire*] praised her intelligence. The *Journal encyclopédique* said that the sparrowhawk 'brought much pleasure to true connoisseurs'."¹⁶⁷ Contributing to the *Mercure de France*, the Abbé Philippe Bridard de la Garde (1710–1767) remarked that "the charming works of this *académicienne* continue to justify the rare distinction with which she has been honored by her admission in the Académie; an advantage which would be uniquely her own without the example of the famous lady Rosa-Alba [Carriera]."¹⁶⁸ It is intriguing to note that both Basseporte and Reboul Vien are in their practices compared with Carriera, though one may argue that she was simply the most recent highly regarded and publicly known female artist in Parisian circles.

In Reboul Vien's fourth exhibition, the Salon of 1765, the artist submitted four paintings in miniature (she was the only miniaturist participant), listed under two numbers: (83) "A brooding pigeon," (84) "Three small paintings, under the same number; one a bird that wants to catch a

¹⁶⁷ "...Fréron vante son intelligence. Le Journal encyclopédique dit que l'émouchet 'a fait beaucoup de plaisir aux vrais connoisseurs'." Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 1:177.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Hottle, "Present but Absent," 437.

butterfly; the others of flowers.”¹⁶⁹ In the second of his *Lettres à Monsieur ***, sur les Peintures, les Sculptures & Gravures, exposées au Sallon du Louvre en 1765, Mathon de La Cour dedicated the following passage to Reboul Vien’s contributions:

Si je vous fais l’éloge de Madame Vien, ne croyez pas que ce soit une froide galanterie de ma part. Tout le monde a admiré les ouvrages de cette *Académicienne*. Ce sont des Tableaux en miniature. Le premier représente un Pigeon qui couve; le second un oiseau qui veut attraper un Papillon, & les autres des fleurs. La maniere de Madame Vien n’a rien de cette sécheresse timide & servile des miniatures ordinaires. Son ton de couleur est suave et nourri, ses sujets sont traités dans le grand goût. Il est singulier que se soit une femme qui ait étendu les bornes de ce genre, & qui soit venue donner aux hommes l’exemple d’une maniere plus mâle & plus hardie.¹⁷⁰

If I praise Madame Vien, do not think that it is a cold gallantry on my part. Everyone has admired the works of this *académicienne*. They are miniature paintings. The first represents a brooding pigeon; the second a bird that wants to catch a butterfly, and the other are flowers. Madame Vien’s style has nothing of the timid and servile dryness of ordinary miniatures. Her color tone is smooth and full, her subjects are treated in the grand style. It is remarkable that it is a woman who has extended the limits of this genre, and who has come to give men the example of a more masculine and bold style.

Quite curiously, we know that the painting of the “bird that wants to catch a butterfly” (*l’Oiseau et le papillon*) was not actually shown.¹⁷¹ Bridard de la Garde, again reporting on the exhibition for the *Mercur de France*, quipped that “Madame Vien was obliged to bring a child into

¹⁶⁹ *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de Messieurs de l’Académie royale* (Paris: J. J. E. Collombat, 1765), 17. (83) “Un pigeon qui couve,” and (84) “Trois petits tableaux, sous le même numéro; l’un un oiseau qui veut attraper un papillon; les autres des fleurs.”

¹⁷⁰ Charles-Joseph Mathon de La Cour, *Lettres à Monsieur ***, sur les Peintures, les Sculptures & Gravures, exposées au Sallon du Louvre en 1765 (Paris, 1765), 15.

¹⁷¹ Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 2:7.

the world rather than this painting to the Salon.”¹⁷² Indeed, Marie-Thérèse’s third child, Jean-Marie, would be born immediately after the opening of the Salon (fig. 37). The infant was baptised on 5 September 1765, a day jointly marked by the death of the Comte de Caylus.¹⁷³ However, that Mathon de La Cour relates Reboul Vien’s work to the ‘grand style’ is a compliment of the highest order. In doing so he suggests that Reboul Vien fits within the narrative lineage of the old masters, particularly those of the seventeenth century.

Diderot thus wrote on only one of her pictures, *Un pigeon qui couve*:

Il est posé sur son panier d’osier. On voit des brins de la paille du nid, qui s’échappent irrégulièrement autour de l’oiseau. Il a de la sécurité. Sans voir le nid, un savant pigeonnier comme vous devinerait ce qu’il fait. Il est de profil, et l’on croit le voir en entier. Son plumage brun est de la plus grande vérité: la tête et le cou sont à tromper. La finesse et le précieux de ce morceau arrêtent et font plaisir. Si je ne craignois qu’on m’accusât de m’arrêter à des fétus, je dirois que les brins d’osier du panier sont trop foiblement touchés par-devant, et que c’est le contraire aux brins de paille qui sortent du panier par-derrrière.¹⁷⁴

It is posed on its wicker basket. One can see strands of straw from the nest, which are scattered irregularly around the bird. It has security. It is safe. Without seeing the nest, one with knowledge of pigeons like you would guess what it is doing. It is in profile, and one thinks one sees it in full. Its brown plumage is of the greatest truth: the head and neck are deceiving. The finesse and the preciousity of this piece arrest and please. If I did not believe that I would be

¹⁷² “Madame Vien a été obligée de mettre un enfant au monde au lieu de ce tableau au Salon.” Quoted in Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 2:7.

¹⁷³ For a commentary on Jal’s documented errors surrounding the child’s sex and date of birth, see Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 28 n. 204.

¹⁷⁴ Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 2:129. See an additional note on Reboul Vien’s submissions to the Salon of 1765 by Sez nec and Adhémar on 2:30: “Mathon proteste qu’il ne loue pas ses miniatures par galanterie. Il aime leur ton de couleur suave et nourri, leur ‘grand goût’; et s’étonne de voir ‘une femme donner aux hommes l’exemple d’une manière plus mâle et plus hardie’. Plus brièvement, l’*Année littéraire* parle du ‘pinceau flatteur’, de la ‘mollesse agréable’, et de la vérité; le *Journal encyclopédique* dit un mot aimable. Pour le *Pigeon*, dont le *plumé* atteste, selon le *Mercur*e (p. 194), le beau faire et la patience de l’auteur, ‘le verre qui est placé dessus ne lui est pas avantageux’ (*Critique*). L’*Oiseau*, bien que mentionné par Mathon, n’est pas exposé (cf. *supra*, Note historique, p. 7).”

accused of going on about nothing, I would say that the wicker strands of the basket are too weakly executed in the front, and are inconsistent with the straw strands that come out of the basket from behind.

Here again, Diderot, in an echo of Caylus initial reception of Reboul Vien's work, is impressed by her ability to deceive the eye with her images of natural phenomena.

Among the paintings Reboul Vien displayed in the Salon of 1767 (her fifth and final exhibition) is a lost work that was acquired by Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia.¹⁷⁵ She displayed five pictures listed under three numbers in the Salon *livret*: (54) "A crested hen watching over her chicks," (55) "A Chinese gilded cock-pheasant," and (56) "Three small paintings under the same number, the first representing canaries, one of which leaves its cage to catch a butterfly, and the two other paintings are of flowers (these works are painted in miniature)."¹⁷⁶ The acquisition by the Empress of the gilded pheasant is noted in the *livret*, and thus the purchase must have been made previous to the opening of the Salon.¹⁷⁷ Two of Reboul Vien's works are illustrated in the third volume of Diderot's edited *Salons*, one of which is the "bird that wants to catch a butterfly" that was

¹⁷⁵ Locating this work in Russia amongst the vast collection of objects acquired by the Empress would be an absolute boon. As of April 2021, no traces of work by Reboul Vien have been uncovered by scholar of eighteenth-century Russian art and specialist in the presence of women artists in the collection of Catherine the Great, Dr. Rosalind Polly Blakesley, with whom I have discussed this matter.

¹⁷⁶ *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et gravures de Messieurs de l'Académie royale* (Paris: J. J. E. Collombat, 1767), 15. (54) "Une poule hupée veillant sur ses petits," (55) "Un coq-faisan doré, de la Chine," (56) "Trois petits tableaux sous le même numéro, le premier représente des serins, dont l'un sort de sa cage pour attraper un papillon; & les deux autres tableaux sont des fleurs (ces ouvrages sont peints en miniature)."

¹⁷⁷ The naturalist painter Pierre François de Wailly painted a very similar type of bird (a *Faisan doré Phasianus pictus*) in 1806. Madeleine Pinault Sørensen writes that it, like Reboul Vien's specimen, was "in all likelihood taxidermied" and that "few artists were able to capture the bird's handsome feathers." Madeleine Pinault Sørensen, "The Muséum's Painters: From Van Spaendonck to Redouté," in *The Art of Natural History: Botanical Illustrations, Ornithological Drawings, and Other Masterpieces from the Age of Exploration*, ed. Pascale Heurtel and Michelle Lenoir (New York; Paris: Rizzoli International Publications; Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2018), 80-82.

not displayed in the previous exhibition.¹⁷⁸ These two pictures are now conserved in the collection of the Musée Fabre in Montpellier, and have been given the official titles *Chardonneret cherchant à prendre un papillon* (*Goldfinch trying to catch a butterfly*) and *Fleurs dans un vase de cristal* (*Flowers in a crystal vase*), respectively (figs. 38-39). Diderot's commentaries on her work, perhaps in proportion to his growing confidence (and dare I say vanity) as an art critic, have, in 1767, become both lengthier and more problematic:

54. *Une Poule huppée, veillant sur ses petits*¹⁷⁹

Très-beau petit tableau; bel oiseau, très-bel oiseau; belle huppe, belle cravate bien hérissée, bec entr'ouvert et menaçant, oeil ardent, ouvert et saillant; caractère inquiet, querelleur et fier. J'entends son cri. Elle a son aile pendante, elle est accroupie; ses petits sont sous elle, à l'exception de quelques-uns qui s'échappent ou vont s'échapper; elle est peinte d'une grande vigueur et vérité de couleur; ses petits très-moelleusement; c'est leur duvet, leur innocence, leur étourderie poussinière; tout est bien, jusqu'aux brins de paille dispersés autour de la poule. Il y a des détails de nature à faire illusion. L'artiste n'a pourtant pas remarqué qu'alors une poule, d'une grosseur commune, prend un volume énorme, par l'étendue qu'elle donne à toutes ses plumes ébouriffées. Mme Vien met dans ses animaux de la vie et du mouvement. Je suis surpris de sa poule; je ne croyais pas qu'elle en sût jusque-là.¹⁸⁰

54. *A Crested Hen Watching over Her Chicks*

A very handsome little picture; the bird is beautiful, very beautiful; beautiful crest, beautiful bristled ruff, half-open and menacing beak, with an ardent, open, and prominent eye; a restless, quarrelsome, and proud character. I hear her cry. She has her wing hanging loosely, she

¹⁷⁸ As noted above, Sez nec and Adhémar locate them in the collection of the Musée Fabre, though Hottle reported that as of 27 July 2006, via private correspondence with Michel Hilaire, Directeur du Musée Fabre, “the museum has no work by Madame Vien.” However, as of 12 May 2021, thanks to an email exchange with Isabelle Groux de Mieri at the Musée Fabre, it has been confirmed that the two paintings are indeed still present in the collection. See Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 3:26, and Hottle, “Present but Absent,” 438, 442 n. 56.

¹⁷⁹ In his memoirs, Joseph-Marie Vien misremembers this work as the composition acquired by the Empress of Russia, but states that it was amongst four others in the Empress' collection (“Ce tableau est à la Cour de Russie avec 4 autres dont je ne rappelle pas les sujets”). Joseph-Marie Vien, “Mémoires,” in Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 309 n. 8.

¹⁸⁰ Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 3:173.

is crouching; her little ones are underneath her, with the exception of some who are escaping or are about to escape; she is painted with great vigor and coloristic truth; her little ones very softly; their down, their innocence, the giddiness of the newly hatched are here; everything is as it should be, including the bits of straw scattered around the hen. There are many natural details that create an illusion. The artist has not observed, however, that a hen, though of a common size, can assume an enormous volume by the expansive action of ruffling her feathers. Mme Vien instills her animals with life and movement. I am surprised by her hen; I didn't think she was this accomplished.

55. *Coq-Faisan doré de la Chine*

Il s'en manque bien que ce coq soit de la force de la poule. Assez chaud de couleur, il est froid d'expression, sans vie; c'est presque un oiseau de bois, tant il est raide, lisse et monotone. J'aime mieux que l'oiseau ce petit massif de fleurs, de verdure et d'arbustes, placé sur le fond, quoique ce ne soit pas merveille. Réparation à Mme Vien. J'ai dit que ce coq était sans mouvement et sans vie; et je viens d'apprendre qu'elle l'a peint d'après un coq empaillé.¹⁸¹

55. *Chinese Gilded Cock-Pheasant*

This pheasant lacks the strength of the hen. Rather warm in color, it is cold in expression, without life; it is nearly a wooden bird, it is so stiff, smooth, and monotonous. I like the little bed of flowers, greenery, and shrubs in the background better than the bird, although it is not wonderful. Apologies to Mme Vien. I said that the cock was without movement and without life; and I just learned that she painted it after a stuffed specimen.

56. *Des Serins, dont l'un sort de sa cage pour attraper des papillons*

La *Poule hupée* ne me permet pas de regarder cela. Ces *Serins* sont comme de petits morceaux de buis taillés en canaris, sans légèreté, sans gentillesse, sans variété de tons, sans vie. Madame Vien, vous avez fait ces serins-là toute seule; pour votre *Poule*, votre mari pourrait bien l'avoir un peu coquetée.¹⁸²

56. *Some Canaries, one of which leaves its cage to catch butterflies*

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

The *Crested hen* does not permit me to look at this. These *Canaries* are all like small pieces of boxwood cut into canaries, without lightness, without gentleness, without variety of tone, without life. Madame Vien, you made these canaries all by yourself; as for your Hen, I suspect your husband flirted with her a bit.

Bouquets de fleurs

Celui que représente des fleurs dans une carafe est à merveille; les racines filamenteuses des plantes sont parfaitement imitées, et le tout est bien réfléchi sur la table qui soutient le vase. Les autres fleurs sont moins bien. Les Serins sont ingrats par la monotonie de la couleur. Ah! la belle Poule!¹⁸³

Bouquets of Flowers

That which represents some flowers in a carafe is marvelous; the filamentous roots of the plants are perfectly imitated, and all is well reflected on the table which holds the vase. The other flowers are less well done. The canaries are ungrateful for the monotony of the color. Ah! The beautiful hen!

Diderot, known to be mercurial, indiscriminately disparaging, and partial to his favorites, as well as regularly misogynistic in his melodramatic responses to works of art, still manages to shock us with these comments. The criticism about working from a preserved specimen is well-taken if unnecessary, as Diderot saw himself in asking forgiveness; Reboul Vien, following conventional procedure amongst fellow practitioners of natural history painting, relied on a mix of live and preserved specimens on which to base her studies. It is in his deeply patronizing commentary on *Des Serins* that Diderot, in one fell swoop, questions Marie-Thérèse's authorship, her capability, her integrity, even the fidelity within her marriage, and incontrovertibly moves beyond the boundaries of even the most severe art criticism and into the realm of insult.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Some have been tempted to suspect that Reboul Vien was dissuaded from participating in future public exhibition by these remarks, as has been speculated by Octave Fidière in his *Les femmes artistes à l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (1855) or Germaine Greer in her 1979 study, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work*.¹⁸⁴ However, the *Correspondance littéraire*, to which Diderot was contributing his reviews, had a very limited private readership, and thus Reboul Vien may not have even been aware of Diderot's remarks.¹⁸⁵ In other, more widespread and accessible publications, her work was afforded generous praise, and, moreover, Diderot frequently made equally scathing, if not openly sexist, remarks about the work of the most successful and highly sought-after male artists in the Académie, including Joseph-Marie Vien.¹⁸⁶ The possibility that I offer in contrast is that her duties as a wife and mother of two young sons were expected to take precedence, and that, though she was never formally given credit, she began to take on a more and more active role in her husband's artistic production, as I have suggested above. The systemic sexism inherent in both circumstances was more debilitating (if less piquant and colorful) than Diderot's wit.

The next documented event in Reboul Vien's life took place in 1769, though it was in no way associated with that year's Salon. At this time, the Vien family were offered new lodgings by the Marquis de Marigny. Via an anecdote involving the salonnière Madame Geoffrin, a frequent patron of

¹⁸⁴ Octave Fidière, *Les femmes artistes à l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* (France: Charavay Frères, 1885), 28; Germaine Greer. *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979, 103, 343 n. 23.

¹⁸⁵ Hottle makes this suggestion as well. See Hottle, "Present but Absent," 439.

¹⁸⁶ Sez nec and Adhémar's footnotes regarding other published reviews of Reboul Vien's 1767 submissions are as follows: "Le *Mercur*e assure (octobre, 11, p. 175) qu' 'elle fait passer dans ses mains toutes les grâces de son sexe'; l'*Avant-Coureur* (p. 589) admire chez elle 'l'art et la vérité'; selon l'*Année littéraire*, l'effet est aussi rare que la fermeté dans le *Coq-faisan*. Le Musée Fabre, à Montpellier, possède un *Oiseau poursuivant un papillon*; c'est apparemment celui qui n'avait pas été exposé en 1765 (cf. *Salons*, II, p. 30). Au musée Fabre se trouve aussi une aquarelle représentant des *Fleurs* dans un vase de cristal." Sez nec and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 3:26.

his work, Joseph-Marie Vien recounts in his *Mémoires* that the family's original apartments were on a high floor within the Louvre (one had to climb 147 steps to reach them, according to Vien).¹⁸⁷ It was in this space that Vien also maintained his large school of pupils. Vien later relates that the new lodgings, *aux Galeries du Louvre*, were provided so that he could conserve the old apartments for teaching, and the new apartments for living quarters.¹⁸⁸ However, Gaehtgens and Lugand report that Marigny was in fact thinking of the difficulty for Marie-Thérèse of climbing the stairs, and when she went to thank him in person, he said to her, "Madame, it is in sixty years that you will thank me."¹⁸⁹ The following year Joseph-Marie and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien were listed as witnesses to the proceedings of Anne Vallayer-Coster's presentation to the Académie.¹⁹⁰ This event is significant for two reasons: Vallayer-Coster was the next woman artist admitted to the Académie after Reboul Vien, and Marie-Thérèse's attendance implies her continued involvement in the institution's administration as an *académicienne*, even though she was no longer exhibiting work. In September of the same year, a third female member was granted admission: Suzanne Giroust Roslin, herself a pastel portraitist and a close personal friend to the Viens as well as spouse to Alexander Roslin. She had been made godmother of Marie-Thérèse and Joseph-Marie's third child, Jean-Marie, in 1765.

In 1771 Joseph-Marie Vien was named Directeur de l'École Royale des Élèves protégés par le Roi, the Académie's artistic training program for young students, and with that promotion the Vien family was obliged to move once more. In 1775, Vien's former tutor and mentor Charles-Joseph

¹⁸⁷ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 310.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 311.

¹⁸⁹ Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 29.

¹⁹⁰ Roland Michel, "Vallayer in Her Time," 17.

Natoire, at this time the Directeur de l'Académie de France à Rome, fell dangerously ill, and Vien was nominated to step in as his replacement. A mere few days later, Vien himself was beset with a violent illness that set him "*aux portes du tombeau*."¹⁹¹ In his memoirs, Vien acknowledges the watchful attention of his spouse, writing, "I know not how to express the cares that my wife and her venerable mother took with me; I know from their tender solicitude that the happiness of life is that of being loved!"¹⁹² By the end of May, the artist had begun to make a recovery, and on 2 October, following the Salon of 1775, at which Joseph-Marie Vien had shown three large-scale history paintings, the Viens departed for Rome.¹⁹³

The party was composed of Joseph-Marie and Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, their two sons, Joseph-Marie *fils* and Jean-Marie, aged 14 and 10 by this time, and three of Joseph-Marie's students (*pensionnaires*), one of whom was the twenty-seven year-old Jacques-Louis David.¹⁹⁴ Stopping in Lyon and Turin, the travelers arrived in Rome on 4 November. Right away Vien set about reestablishing order and increasing the number and frequency of public exhibitions for the students. On 14 April 1776 and 3 May 1778, respectively, Monsieur and Madame Vien were honored with appointments as academicians of the Roman Académie de Saint Luc.¹⁹⁵ According to Gaechtens and Lugand, throughout his time in Rome, Joseph-Marie led "a very simple family-centered life in a relaxed atmosphere. Madame Vien looked after the house like a perfect housewife; she managed the accounts

¹⁹¹ The illness was pleurisy. Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaechtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 311.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ The couple visited Madame Geoffrin at her home on the eve of their departure. Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaechtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 311.

¹⁹⁴ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaechtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 312.

¹⁹⁵ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaechtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 313. Gaechtens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 34.

and the linen room, and knew how to economize without being frugal.”¹⁹⁶ Of the two children, the eldest was studying drawing with a private tutor, and the youngest was studying Latin. Vien recounts stories of lavish dinner parties, attended by himself and Marie-Thérèse, in particular those hosted at the Villa Borghese and the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati.

We gain some insight into this period from the archived correspondence flowing between directors of the French Académie in Rome and the Parisian *surintendants des bâtiments du Roi*. In the autumn of 1780, Vien suffered from a terrible bout of the flu, which was complicated and aggravated by a pulmonary congestion.¹⁹⁷ Though attended by doctors from the Académie and the Pope, it was Reboul Vien who during Vien’s long convalescence “looked after her husband and took over the management of the Académie.” On 20 September, Vien was unable to write, and it was Marie-Thérèse who stepped in to respond to recent letters by the then *surintendant*, Charles Claude Flahaut de la Billarderie, Comte d’Angiviller (1730-1809).¹⁹⁸

Mme Vien à d’Angiviller

Rome, ce 20 septembre 1780

¹⁹⁶ “Vien menait en même temps, au Palais Mancini, une vie toute simple, très familiale, dans une atmosphère détendue. Madame Vien s’occupait de la maison en parfaite ménagère; elle tenait la comptabilité et la lingerie, savait économiser mais sans parcimonie. Les enfants Vien travaillaient chacun de leur côté.” Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 34. No citation is given, but I have assumed that the authors are relying on two different letters for this information, one from D’Angiviller to Joseph-Marie Vien on 3 September 1775, and another from Joseph-Marie Vien to D’Angiviller on 5 March 1777. See Anatole de Montaiglon and Jules Guiffrey, *Correspondance des directeurs de l’Académie de France à Rome avec les surintendants des bâtiments* (Paris: Jean Schemit, Librairie de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français, 1904) Vol. XIII, 124, 279.

¹⁹⁷ Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 37.

¹⁹⁸ The Comte d’Angiviller was a close personal friend of the future Louis XVI, and on the latter’s ascension to the throne in 1774, the Comte was appointed *surintendant des bâtiments*. His predecessor, the Marquis de Marigny, brother of Madame de Pompadour, had served in the position from 1751-1774.

Monsieur, — La maladie épidémique qui désole ce pays depuis quelque tems a frappé M. Vien assés vivement de deux de ce mois. Il a eu un violent point de côté accompagné d'une grosse fièvre et n'a recouvré, en partie, la santé qu'à l'aide de trois saignées et du quinquina; mais il n'est encore que convalescent. Il a fallu employer toute l'autorité des médecins pour l'empêcher d'avoir l'honneur de vous écrire ce courrier. Pour satisfaire à ses désirs et contribuer à sa tranquillité, je lui ai proposé de lui servir de secrétaire, ce qu'il a accepté sans peine. Pardon, M., si ma lettre se ressentira de l'assaut que mon cœur a éprouvé. Je ferai mes efforts pour que le zèle l'emporte sur les chagrins dont mon esprit est à peine remis. Je vais donc, sous sa dictée, M., avoir l'honneur de répondre à vos deux lettres du 28 aoust et 4 septembre.

Les jugemens de l'Académie portés sur les ouvrages de peinture et sculpture des pensionnaires leur ont été communiqués. Ils ont reçu ces sages conseils avec le respect et la soumission qui leur est due. Les élèves sculpteurs ont paru trouver le jugement de l'Académie à leur égard conforme à celui qu'ils en avaient porté eux-mêmes et vont faire de nouveaux efforts pour mériter les encouragemens de l'Académie. Les élèves peintres sont pénétrés de reconnoissance des jugemens favorables des commissaires de l'Académie.

Le sr Peyron, qui étoit sur le point de son départ, accepte l'année de prolongation que vous voulés bien lui accorder, déterminé par les représentations de M. Vien, les encouragemens de l'Académie et les propositions avantageuses que vous avés bien voulu y joindre, dont son cœur sensible est pénétré.

Le sr Bonvoisin, qui étoit également déterminé à partir, vu des offres avantageuses qu'on lui fait, sacrifie ses intérêts pécuniers à son avancement. Comme ce jeune homme n'est sûrement pas sans mérite, mais qu'il est sans fortune, M. Vien lui a fait espérer que, s'il méritoit vos bontés par cette année absolument donnée à l'étude, il obtiendrait les avantages attachés à votre protection.

M. Vien, prévoyant qu'il y auroit des places vacantes, chercha, il y a quelque tems, à sonder le sr Renaud, qui est actuellement à Naples, sur sa résolution concernant son départ, en lui faisant apercevoir qu'une année de plus seroit fort utile à son avancement. Il lui répondit que plusieurs circonstances l'obligeoient, sans balancer, de partir. M. Vien espère que, moyennant sa décision, vous voudrés bien accorder une année de prolongation aux sollicitations du sr de Seine, qui joint au zèle du travail et à l'amour de son état les qualités d'un parfait honnête homme. Je puis vous assurer d'avance, M., de la reconnoissance de ce jeune artiste.

M. Vien ayant imaginé que 400 écus romains pouvoient satisfaire le sr Jean Simon, et en même tems conserver la dignité du Roi, n'a pu obtenir cette satisfaction qu'en lui en donnant 450. Cette affaire est enfin terminée.

Le sr Després, que vous avés pénétrés de satisfaction en lui accordant une année de prolongation, a chargé M. Vien de vous en marquer sa plus vive et respectueuse gratitude.

A l'égard de la mosaïque et des têtes antiques dont M. Aubri vous a parlé, lorsque M. Vien sera en état de faire un voyage à Tivoli, il aura l'honneur de vous faire part de ses réflexions relativement à ces deux objets.

Recevés, M., le profond respect de M. Vien et croyés-moi, avec le même sentiment. M., votre, etc. Reboul-Vien.

P.-S. — M. d'Agincour, qui est tombé malade trois jours après M. Vien, est comme convalescent et n'a plus absolument de fièvre.¹⁹⁹

Mme Vien to d'Angiviller

Rome, 20 September 1780

Sir, — The epidemic illness which has devastated this country for some time struck M. Vien quite severely on the second of this month. He had a violent pain accompanied by a high fever and has recovered his health, in part, thanks to the aid of three blood-lettings and some quinquina; but he is not yet more than convalescent. It was necessary to employ all the authority of the doctors to prevent him from having the honour of writing you this letter. To satisfy his wishes and contribute to his peace of mind, I offered to act as his secretary, which he readily accepted. Forgive me, M., if my letter reveals the assault that my heart has felt. I will do my utmost to ensure that zeal prevails over the sorrows from which my mind has barely recovered. I shall therefore, under his dictation, M., have the honor of replying to your two letters of 28 August and 4 September.

The judgments of the Académie on the works of painting and sculpture of the pensioners have been communicated to them. They received this knowledgeable guidance with due respect and submission. The sculpture students seemed to find that the Académie's judgement in their regard conforms to that which they had made themselves and are going to make new efforts to earn the Académie's encouragement. The painting students are filled with gratitude for the favorable judgements of the Académie's commissioners.

Peyron, who was preparing to depart, accepts the year's extension that you are willing to grant him, determined by M. Vien's representations, the Académie's encouragements, and the advantageous proposals that you have been kind enough to add, by which his sensitive heart is touched.

Bonvoisin, who was also determined to leave, in view of the advantageous offers made to him, sacrificed his pecuniary interests to his advancement. As this young man is certainly not without merit,

¹⁹⁹ Anatole de Montaiglon and Jules Guiffrey, *Correspondance des directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome avec les surintendants des bâtiments* (Paris: Jean Schemit, Librairie de la Société de l'histoire de l'art français, 1905) Vol. XIV, 51-53.

but he is without fortune, M. Vien gave him hope that, if he earned your kindness by this year given absolutely to study, he would obtain the advantages attached to your protection.

M. Vien, foreseeing that there would be vacant places, sought, some time ago, to sound out Renaud, who is at present in Naples, as to his resolution concerning his departure, and make him realize that a year more would be very useful for his advancement. He replied unequivocally that several circumstances obliged him to leave. M. Vien hopes that, with his decision, you will grant a year's extension to de Seine, who combines zeal for work and love of his situation with the qualities of a perfect, honest man. I can assure you in advance, M., of the gratitude of this young artist.

M. Vien, having imagined that 400 Roman *écus* could satisfy Jean Simon, and at the same time preserve the dignity of the King, could only obtain this satisfaction by giving him 450. This affair is finally over.

Després, with whom you have expressed satisfaction in granting him a year's extension, has asked M. Vien to express his deepest and most respectful gratitude.

Regarding the mosaic and the antique heads of which M. Aubri spoke to you, when M. Vien is in a position to make a trip to Tivoli, he will have the honor of sharing his thoughts related to these two objects with you.

Please accept M. Vien's profound respect and from myself, the same sentiment, M., yours, etc. Reboul-Vien.

P.-S. — M. d'Agincour, who fell ill three days after M. Vien, is convalescent and no longer has a fever.

The prolonged illness motivated the Viens to begin preparations for returning to Paris. For the duration of the Rome sojourn, the family's affairs in Paris were managed by Reboul Vien's brother, Charles Reboul.²⁰⁰ When there were preparations to be made to the family's lodgings in anticipation of their return, d'Angiviller delivered the keys to their apartments to Charles, who had taken on the task of attending to them.²⁰¹ Marie-Thérèse herself fell sick in the early months of 1781, but was recovered and able to provide guidance and instruction in housekeeping matters to the wife of Vien's successor,

²⁰⁰ Gahtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 35-37, 195, 198.

²⁰¹ Gahtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 36.

Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée (1725-1805), in the first week of October.²⁰² Vien and Reboul Vien, their two sons in tow, departed Rome on the ninth of October, and arrived in Paris a month later, on the tenth of November. In his memoirs, Vien recounts the heartwarming scene of reunion with friends and family that awaited them in the capital.²⁰³ Following their return, Joseph-Marie Vien painted less prolifically and continued to struggle with his health as a result of the severe bout of sickness in Italy (which was likely malaria). However, he continued to be promoted through the ranks of the Académie, from *Professeur* to *Adjoint à Recteur* to *Recteur* in the years preceding the Revolution.

In December 1788, the family was struck by tragedy when Marie-Thérèse and the couple's youngest son, Jean-Marie (called Rosny) both caught smallpox. Rosny, who had been studying and receiving promising recognition at the Académie royale d'architecture, died at the age of 23. Though Marie-Thérèse survived, the disease ravaged her body, leaving her with severe scarring, not to mention the indescribable anguish of losing a child for the second time.²⁰⁴ The painter Pierre Lacour, a close friend of Joseph-Marie *fils*, later wrote in his *Mémoires* that the soft and sensitive Rosny Vien was his mother's favorite child. In the succeeding years, Reboul Vien tended to avoid society because of the damage caused to her skin, preferring to stay at home or make occasional visits.²⁰⁵

The following May, Joseph-Marie was nominated by the king to fill the highest position for an artist in France, *premier peintre du Roi*, two days after the death of his predecessor, Jean-Baptiste Marie

²⁰² Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 37.

²⁰³ Joseph-Marie Vien, "Mémoires," in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 316.

²⁰⁴ Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 38-39.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 42.

Pierre (1714-1789). He was unanimously appointed Directeur de l'Académie by his colleagues a fortnight later, and lost no time in setting out his administrative agenda, though all was swiftly thrown into chaos with the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. Looking back, Vien writes of his good fortune in being spared from the guillotine, though the family lost the source of their income as the Académie was dissolved.

Vien tells his nineteenth-century readers that he burned a number of letters in this period that would have proven loyalty to the crown and surely cost him his life.²⁰⁶ It is clear that both Monsieur and Madame Vien showed sympathy for the revolutionary movement in its early days. On 7 September 1789, Marie-Thérèse “was part of the delegation of eleven wives and daughters of artists, ‘virtuous citizens’, who, dressed in white and with their hair adorned with the cockade,” went to the National Assembly, convened at Versailles, to offer “the sacrifice of all their jewels for the payment of the public debt’.”²⁰⁷ The Thursday 10 September issue of the *Journal générale de France* gave a detailed report of the event, and Gaetgens and Lugand write that “if the wife of the sculpteur Moitte was the instigator, Madame Vien was named at the top of the list [of participants].”²⁰⁸ The women’s carriages, as they returned to Paris from Versailles, “were escorted from the *barrière des Bonshommes* to the Louvre by some students of the Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture carrying torches and preceded by musicians.”

²⁰⁶ “Depuis mon arrivée à Paris, j’ai reçu de lui vingt lettres du plus grand intérêt. La crainte me les fit brûler dans le temps de la Terreur. On me le pardonnera sans doute, lorsqu’on saura qu’elles auraient suffi pour me faire conduire à la mort, si les Marat ou les Robespierre les avaient découvertes chez moi.” Joseph-Marie Vien, “Mémoires,” in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 316.

²⁰⁷ Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 40.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

In 1791, on 20 August, Joseph-Marie *fils* was married to a young woman named Rose-Céleste Bache. It seems that Joseph-Marie Vien organized the meeting of his son and future daughter-in-law, though Marie-Thérèse was opposed to the union. Whatever the case may be, when the young couple was married and living for a time in the Bache family home, Monsieur and Madame Vien did not visit. Gaehtgens and Lugand suggest that this was due to differences in political opinion, as Rose-Céleste's father and brothers were revolutionary officers, and the Viens did not support the radical and regicidal turn taken by the Legislative Assembly and National Convention.²⁰⁹ It is arguably because many of Vien's fiercely loyal students, particularly David, were leading the revolutionary action within and outside of the Académie that the Viens were protected from harm. However, the succeeding years were ones of austerity and hardship, particularly after the 1793 closure of the Académie, as the family began to suffer the financial consequences of the revolutionary upheavals. Though Joseph-Marie continued to play a part in the shifting landscape of institutional art during the revolutionary years, age, and likely lack of ultra-radical political conviction, both explain his reduced activity in this period.

Pierre Lacour writes, however, that at eighty-one years of age, Vien's "spirit had lost none of the amiability that had characterized him in his youth," and that he remained devoted to his studio practice. The memoirist captured a vivid portrait of the family's daily life in the later years of the 1790s, after Joseph-Marie *fils* had obtained lodgings in the Louvre near his parents:

Les deux ménages ainsi rapprochés se recevaient pour le repas et les réceptions dans la soirée seulement. Les jeunes époux furent obligés d'apporter leur part et de participer à la dépense pour la boisson; la disette qui régnait encore à Paris rendait ces conditions assez

²⁰⁹ Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 42.

naturelles... Tous les dimanches et les jours de grande fête on se réunissait pour déjeuner au café au lait, quelquefois au chocolat. C'était du luxe en ce temps-là car la famille Vien, autrefois fort à son aise, était forcée de se soumettre à la plus grande économie. La réunion avait lieu dans l'atelier même de Mr Vien, c'était le bon père de famille qui recevait et voulait recevoir chez lui.

The two households were thus brought together for meals and receptions in the evening only. The newlyweds were obliged to bring their share and to contribute to the cost of the drink; the scarcity that still prevailed in Paris made these conditions quite natural... Every Sunday and on special holidays we came together for lunch with *café au lait*, sometimes with *chocolat*. It was a luxury in those days because the Vien family, once living very comfortably, was now forced to submit to the greatest economy. The gathering took place in Monsieur Vien's own study; he was a good family man who received, and wanted to receive, guests at his home.

Lacour later sets the scene of the family *en soirée*:

Dans le fond à droite de la cheminée, il y avait une chaise longue sur laquelle [Monsieur Vien] passait la soirée. Madame Vien, la mère, assise à côté de son mari lui faisait la lecture. Tout en écoutant Mr Vien battait de ses doigts sa grande tabatière, l'ouvrait, la fermait, pétrissant le tabac et prisait fort peu. Madame Vien pour se reposer ôtait ses lunettes, et nous faisait part de ses observations critiques ou laudatives. Madame Céleste Vien, son mari et moi, nous nous tenions assis près d'un grand socle blanc, placé en face du St Jérôme et de la cheminée, et à moitié cachés par lui, nous échangeions à voix basse quelques plaisanteries.²¹⁰

In the back, to the right of the fireplace, there was a chaise longue on which [Monsieur Vien] passed the evening. Madame Vien, the mother, sat at the side of her husband and read to him. While listening, M. Vien beat his fingers on his large snuffbox, opening and closing it, kneading the tobacco and taking very little. Madame Vien took off her glasses to rest, and shared with us her observations critical or laudatory. Madame Céleste Vien, her husband, and

²¹⁰ Quoted in Gaetgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 45. Additionally, Gaetgens and Lugand report (p. 45 n. 372) that "Il existe dans les Archives du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Béziers un 'Inventaire des Meubles, Linge, Batterie de Cuisine, Argenterie, Tableaux et effets quelconques, fait au domicile de Monsieur Vien Sénateur, à Paris Place du Muséum'. Il est intéressant de comparer cet Inventaire sensiblement de la même époque à la description qu'en fait Lacour. L'Atelier prend le nom de Cabinet avec une antichambre du Cabinet. L'appartement comprenait également une antichambre, un salon, deux salles à manger, une chambre à coucher, un office, une cuisine et deux chambres pour le domestique et la cuisinière."

myself, we sat near a large white plinth, placed opposite the St. Jerome and the fireplace, and, half hidden by it, we exchanged jokes in low voices.

Lacour lists those who frequented the Vien apartments as the architect Étienne-Louis Boullée, the women of the Duvivier family, the sculptor Félix Lecompte, and Monsieur Charles Reboul, providing an amusing image of Marie-Thérèse's brother, by this point head of the Public Treasury, as an "old man who chews incessantly on a piece of gum for the sake of his lungs."²¹¹

A pair of late still lifes painted by Reboul Vien testify that she too retained an active artistic practice. These small pictures, respectively titled *Partridges, Fruits, and Three Bulbs on a Table* and *Basket of Fruit with Peacock Feathers and Anemones on a Table* were completed in 1798 and are today held in a private collection. The pair were sold at auction in 2000, only to be offered up again but left unsold in 2016. With a subtle and muted color palette, Reboul Vien displays a connoisseurial eye for the selection of objects. As if in continuation of her scientific studies of exotic Senegalese seashells and Egyptian papyrus, the artist placed bulbs, sprouting in beaker-like glass jars, alongside the more traditional still life objects of fruit and birds in the former picture. In the latter, freshly cut anemone flowers are laid in a bunch on the table's surface rather than arranged in a vase, as if for scholarly investigation rather than for decoration. These are accompanied by peacock feathers and fruit piled high in a basket, which may resemble her earlier depiction of a wicker basket in *Un pigeon qui couve* (Salon of 1765). The artist playfully hints at trompe l'oeil by drawing objects, particularly one of the birds, forward into the picture plane, beyond the edge of the wooden table. That capturing the avian

²¹¹ "...vieux garçon qui machonne incessamment quelque morceau de gomme pour le salut de sa poitrine." Quoted in Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 46. See also p. 46 n. 377. Charles-Joseph-Michel Reboul died on 12 March 1810.

form is very much her strong suit is clearly on display here. The pair of partridges, placed front and center, their necks limp, feet in the air, and wings lifelessly spread, are photographic in the detailed textures of feathers, skin, and claw. The humble nature of these still lifes, inclusive of intriguing items but exclusive of any of the conventional signaling towards harvest, feast, or plenty, reminds us of the hardship and privation faced by the Vien family in the revolutionary years. Though they were fortunate to keep their lives, the couple's final years were characterized by austerity and grief.

Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien would live another eight years following the completion of these two works. She died at 71 years of age, at six o'clock on the morning of 4 January 1806, in Paris. Gaehtgens and Lugand write that, "as if [Joseph-Marie] wanted to fight against the thought of this separation and render an homage to the talent of his dear companion, the artist again took up his brushes and painted several *Vases of flowers*."²¹² Two of these works, *Bouquet d'Oeillets et de Giroflées dans une Carafe de Cristal* and *Bouquet de Roses et Giroflées dans un Verre de Cristal* made in Marie-Thérèse's memory form part of the collection of the J. B. Speed Museum in Louisville.²¹³

In the end we too mourn, for Reboul Vien's lost works as well as for her extinguished potential. We must acknowledge the divergent career paths taken by a couple who, at the start of their relationship, were both established professional artists. Marie-Thérèse produced work commercially and in her own name between the ages of 22 to 32, and stopped exhibiting her work publicly shortly after the birth of her third child. Her husband, who was slightly more advanced in his career at the time of their meeting, rose rapidly through the academic ranks, particularly in the fifteen years

²¹² "Comme s'il voulait lutter contre la pensée de cette séparation et rendre un hommage au talent de sa chère compagne, l'artiste reprit ses pinceaux et représenta plusieurs *Vases de fleurs*." Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 48.

²¹³ Gaehtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 208.

preceding the family's departure for Rome. The peak of Vien's career was arguably in his 40s and 50s, and yet Rebol Vien, a restricted though still rising star, was denied the very possibility of such an ascension.

Intertwined Lives

The traces left by Madeleine Françoise Basseporte and Marie-Thérèse Rebol Vien present thought-provoking studies of the possibilities and limitations faced by women artists of the eighteenth century. Fascinating apart, their stories become that much more nuanced and complex when studied together. In recent years, as Basseporte and Rebol Vien have begun to be mentioned more frequently in feminist art historical discourse as examples of women who achieved exceptional artistic status in eighteenth-century France, an assumption has emerged that Basseporte was Rebol Vien's initial tutor. There is, however, no primary source documentation that can explicitly confirm this claim. To the best of my knowledge, the seeds of this assumption are planted in Marianne Roland Michel's 1970 monograph on Anne Vallayer-Coster. As Vallayer-Coster was, like Rebol Vien, brought up in a bourgeois household, with a parent in the employ of the king, she indeed presents an interesting, and potentially enlightening, comparison with Rebol Vien. Vallayer-Coster's father was a goldsmith and a master in the Gobelins Manufactory, the site of royal tapestry and upholstery production from the reign of Louis XIV. Basseporte was named godmother to Anne's older sister Madeleine at the time of her birth in 1743, and thus we do possess a certainty of familial connection between the Vallayers and Basseporte.²¹⁴ In the 1970 monograph, Roland Michel refers to Rebol Vien just twice, cursorily, as

²¹⁴ Roland Michel, "Vallayer in Her Time," 13.

one amongst others in the eighteenth century who was both a woman artist of some renown and a specialist in flower painting.²¹⁵ Of Vallayer-Coster, Roland Michel posits that knowing little as we do of the artist's upbringing, it seems likely that Anne was initially instructed by one or both of her parents (her mother took over her father's studio upon his death in 1770) or by Basseporte. Roland Michel sees connections in the precision and verisimilitude of Vallayer-Coster's work as a still life painter that point to the potential of both her father's influence and that of Basseporte, maintaining that "there is nothing implausible in the fact that Basseporte gave lessons to Anne Vallayer; but it is, still, only a hypothesis."²¹⁶

Several decades after the publication of this initial study, in an essay for the 2002 exhibition catalogue *Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette*, Roland Michel obliquely states, "Tradition has it that Vallayer studied drawing with Madeleine Basseporte - like Marie Thérèse Reboul, who was received by the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture in 1757."²¹⁷ While maintaining the lack of complete certainty regarding Basseporte and Vallayer, Roland Michel treats the Basseporte-Reboul Vieu connection as fact, without providing explanation or evidence.²¹⁸ She also later refers to Vallayer-Coster as "this student of Basseporte," and in her 2012 chapter on Basseporte, Anne Lafont cites Vallayer-Coster as one of her students, again without an explicit reference.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ Marianne Roland Michel, *Anne Vallayer-Coster, 1744-1818* (Paris (5e): C.I.L. (Comptoir International Du Livre, 24, Rue Des Carmes), 1970), 60, 82.

²¹⁶ "Rien d'in vraisemblable à ce que Basseporte ait donné des leçons à Anne Vallayer; mais ce n'est, encore, qu'une hypothèse." Roland Michel, *Anne Vallayer-Coster, 1744-1818*, 15, 83.

²¹⁷ Roland Michel, "Vallayer in Her Time," 14.

²¹⁸ "Although there is no incontrovertible proof of this tutelage, it gains credibility from the stylistic similarity of certain watercolors by Anne Vallayer-Coster to those of Basseporte, who instructed Mesdames, the daughters of Louis XV, in the art of painting." Ibid.

²¹⁹ Roland Michel, "Vallayer in Her Time," 23; Lafont (ed.), *1740, Un abrégé du monde: Savoirs et collections autour de Dezallier d'Argenville*, 58.

2012 additionally saw the opening of *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from the Louvre, Versailles and Other French National Collections* at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. Both Basseporte and Reboul Vien were featured in the exhibition, and in the catalogue, which includes a brief biography of each artist, a vague assumption of the connection appears again. For Basseporte, the contributors write that the artist “may also have given lessons to other women, including the future *académiciennes* Marie Thérèse Vien and Anne Vallayer-Coster,” but for Reboul Vien, the language used is less speculative: “a painter of natural history, Marie Thérèse Vien (known also as Marie Thérèse Reboul and Madame Vien) appears to have been a student of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, whose works accompany hers in the current exhibition.”²²⁰ In his 2014 study of Reboul Vien, Andrew Hottle chose to footnote the hypothesis that “Marie-Thérèse Reboul may have studied painting with a botanical illustrator, such as Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte” and cites the *Royalists to Romantics* entry, while Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari’s 2016 study of Basseporte, admittedly not so focused on Basseporte’s role as a teacher, mentions only Biheron as a prominent example amongst her students.

It is natural that scholars should want to establish this connection. Were we to find irrefutable proof that Basseporte was Reboul Vien’s primary early tutor, the pair would serve as one of only a few known examples of a professional woman artist who taught other women artists that went on to rise above amateur status and also become career professionals. Londa Schiebinger has voiced a similar sentiment regarding Basseporte and Biheron, writing that they provide “a rare example (outside of

²²⁰ *Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from the Louvre, Versailles and Other French National Collections*, 55, 120.

midwifery) of a woman training a young woman who was not her daughter for a career in science.”²²¹

Art history, from its earliest days in the artist biographies of antiquity, has been structured around the formulation of a progressive artistic lineage, in which knowledge and technique are passed from teacher to student, and innovated and improved upon with each successive generation. Historically, the human links of this chain have been male teachers and male students, with women artists existing as displaced anomalies at the periphery. Melissa Hyde begins a discussion in which she briefly explores the theoretical nuances of male instructor as father figure and female instructor as mother figure by pointing out that “one trope that historically recurs in discussions of women artists and their male teachers is that the student is the creation of the master,” again placing the capacity for creative invention in the hands of the male artist.²²² It seems clear that in the last half century, especially in the past two decades, scholars have laudably been more intentional about trying to identify these ties between professional women artists in the historical record. However, it is vital that we do not overextend our authorial reach to imagine connections that did not exist.

Evidence for a relationship between Basseporte and Reboul Vien in an instructor-pupil capacity logically stems from their shared media, subject matter, and social connections. By 1756 Reboul Vien had clearly at minimum been trained in drawing, engraving, and watercolor and pastel painting, all areas of expertise for Basseporte. Though Reboul Vien was too young to have been a pupil of Basseporte in her school for young girls in Robert de Séry’s studio, where we can estimate that she taught from as early as 1724 to as late as 1734, she could have been one of the many young women

²²¹ Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, 27.

²²² Melissa Lee Hyde. “« Peinte par elle-même? ».” *Arts Et Savoirs*, no. 6 (2016), 3.

Basseporte instructed in her capacity at the Jardin du Roi from 1734 onwards. When Reboul Vien was aged ten to twenty, from 1745-1755, and could have taken lessons in painting and drawing, Basseporte was at the height of her career and had been expanding the diversity of her subject matter beyond flowers to include animals and shells. Her chalk depictions of the pectinidae and patella shell species in 1747 correspond to this time period (fig. 40), and are recalled in Reboul Vien's first commissioned project, the 1756-1757 series of shell engravings for Adanson. One factor that makes the connection between Basseporte and both Vallayer-Coster and Reboul Vien compelling is Basseporte's access to the vast royal collection of natural objects, including plants, animals, insects, fossils, and shells, which could be utilized as models and teaching tools. It is worth noting that Basseporte was the first to introduce studies of starfish and sea coral into the royal library vellum collection, and both Vallayer-Coster and Reboul Vien seemed to possess a level of expertise in these types of marine life highly coveted amongst collectors (fig. 41). In addition to the royal gardens and menagerie, to offer just one more example, we know that Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour raised and lavishly cared for pigeons, a frequent subject for Reboul Vien.

We know that, with exceptions, many of Basseporte's students were from families connected to the court, and Reboul Vien belonged to this category. As chief plant painter to the king and a prolific instructor of young students in a genre that would have been seen as acceptable for young ladies, Basseporte would have been a logical choice when the Reboul family sought out an art teacher for their daughter(s). The network of individuals associated with the court, especially artists and scientists largely living and working in Paris rather than Versailles, was tightly interconnected.

Adanson trained with the botanist Bernard de Jussieu, Basseporte's colleague at the Jardin, and Jussieu

was also involved with the Comte de Caylus' *Dissertation sur le papyrus* as a contributor.²²³ We know from the "Notice" that Basseporte and Caylus were close personal friends, as was the case between Caylus and the Viens. Other shared nodes of contact were Cochin, who had been handpicked by Madame de Pompadour to accompany her brother, the future Marquis de Marigny, on the Grand Tour from 1749-1751, as well as Pompadour herself, who worked collaboratively with both Basseporte and Joseph-Marie Vien before her death in 1764. In short, it is certain the two women knew each other as adults, and there is no purely practical reason for arguing that Rebol Vien could not have been taught by Basseporte as a youth.

On the other hand, the theory of their connection might be questioned in the context of Basseporte's succession. In the biographic dossier on Rebol Vien held at the Louvre, there exists a transcribed exchange of correspondence between the Comte de Buffon, the Marquis de Marigny, Joseph-Marie Vien, and an unidentified fourth party about appointing Rebol Vien as Basseporte's successor, a position that she may or may not have been actively lobbying for.²²⁴

The first of the two letters is addressed to Marigny, whom the unidentified correspondent refers to as "nephew," on 22 May 1769.²²⁵ The writer reminds Marigny of a circumstance several years prior, in which Basseporte fell seriously ill, and her place was sought by both a man named Saussay *fils*

²²³ Smollett, Tobias George (ed). "Art. XI. Dissertation sur le Papyrus, par M. le Comte De Caylus." *The Critical Review, Or, Annals of Literature* 7 (1759): 168-69. For the details of Adanson's training, see Xavier Carteret, "Michel Adanson au Sénégal (1749-1754): Un grand voyage naturaliste et anthropologique du siècle des lumières." *Revue d'histoire des Sciences* 65, no. 1 (2012): 5-25.

²²⁴ For a full transcription and translation of the correspondence, see Appendix II.

²²⁵ Given the date of the letter, it is not possible that the unidentified correspondent is Charles François Paul Le Normant de Tournehem (1684-1751), *fermier général* and Marigny's predecessor as directeur général of the Bâtiments du Roi, as well as his uncle.

and Madame Vien, “who truly has the talent necessary to replace Mademoiselle Basseporte.” The writer continues, “you had the goodness to speak at that time in favor of Madame Vien to M. de Buffon, who gave you good hope.” Apparently Marigny had sent Monsieur Saussay’s original request for the petition along to Vien, as well as a note which reads as follows: “Monsieur Vien, you will see by the reading of this petition, that we are thinking of Mademoiselle Basseporte’s place. I believe that this affair with Madame Vien is over; I fear that Mademoiselle Basseporte is inciting Monsieur le Comte de Buffon to act in favour of a certain Saussay only with the intention of robbing Madame Vien of the benefits of the promise made to me by Monsieur de Buffon, to whom alone belongs the nomination of this place.” Marigny seems to have suggested, presumably in the middle years of the decade, that Basseporte was prepared to thwart Reboul Vien’s chances of being her successor over a matter of protocol (as Buffon alone was permitted to choose the candidate). This claim immediately raises suspicion. The “Notice” claims that Basseporte “shuddered at the very notion of a successor; the very idea of having one would have shortened her days,” and that, “to spare her delicacy, M. le Comte de Buffon and M. le Comte d’Angiviller, in securing an artist worthy of replacing her, had demanded that he would keep their choice an inviolable secret.” As previously mentioned, unwillingness to confront the notion of a successor is perfectly reasonable, but “inciting” Buffon to choose one candidate over another because he was supposed to be the one to choose is illogical and suggests either that Basseporte held some sort of animosity towards Reboul Vien, or that this claim was fabricated by one of the men involved in the matter.

Following this insertion of Marigny’s earlier note to Vien, the writer continues: “Mademoiselle Basseporte is very unwell and is ten years older. The grace I ask you, my dear nephew, is to write a note

to Monsieur de Buffon to remind him of the promise he made to you in favour of Madame Vien. You know her talent; she has the distinction of being the only woman in the Académie. My dear nephew, what makes the husband and wife want this place is that poor Vien is in very delicate health and that if his wife lost him she would be left without a fortune with her children. Yet this place would be a great resource for her and for her children. I am quite sure, my dear nephew, that one word from you to Monsieur de Buffon will put an end to this matter. You will bring happiness to an honest family to whom you have been kind.” Closing pleasantries from Marigny’s uncle follow, as well as a brief postscript: “Monsieur de Buffon is at his château de Montbard in Bourgogne. I have just learned that Mademoiselle Basseporte is better which gives some time for the request, but another word from Monsieur de Buffon would set us at ease.”

The severe illness suffered by Joseph-Marie Vien, and which he recounted in his memoirs, took place in 1775, just before the family’s departure for Rome; thus, this allusion to Vien’s “delicate health” reveals that his struggle with chronic illness began, at the latest, when he still had four decades left to live.

The second letter is addressed to Buffon from Marigny on 31 May 1769:

I have just learned, Monsieur, that Mlle Basseporte is dangerously ill and that there is little hope of her recovery. I cannot in this circumstance refuse my obligation to Mme Vien to remind you of your promise to me several years ago in support of this artist if the place of Mlle Basseporte became vacant. The talents of Mme Vien are known to you and you are not ignorant that she is of the small number of women who have enjoyed the distinction of being a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture. Thus this choice can only be applauded by the public of connoisseurs. I shall be under a true obligation to you in my own name, and I shall be very honored by what you may do for her on my recommendation.

The original campaign for Reboul Vien's acquisition of the Jardin du Roi position very interestingly coincides with a remark from Diderot in his 1767 Salon, within a section of his discourse titled "L'État actuel de l'École française" in which he nominates Reboul Vien for the place.²²⁶ Separate from the dossier correspondence, Buffon received support in choosing a successor from the Ministre de la Maison du Roi, Saint-Florentin, duc de la Vrillière, in a letter dated 23 July 1769:

M. de Buffon,

I am aware of Mademoiselle Basseporte's services and I think, as you do, that it would be unfair to give her a successor unless it was with her consent. I will not make any commitment on this position except in concert with you and the same is true for the presentation that you will make of a subject capable of replacing her, which you can judge better than anyone. I saw with pleasure the grace that the King granted you and the obliging manner with which His Majesty lent himself to it must compensate you for the costs you incurred by it, being forced by the circumstances. You know the sentiments with which I am very perfectly yours.²²⁷

What must be unequivocally stated at this juncture is that while the men involved in these discussions were allies of the women they represented, neither woman's voice is explicitly heard. We can't know how aware Basseporte was of these conversations, or how truly unwilling she was to name a successor. We also certainly can't ascertain the level of involvement Reboul Vien had in advocating for her own candidacy. In a chapter on Basseporte and fellow female botanist Jeanne Barret (1740-1807) in her very recently published book *Minerva's French Sisters: Women of Science in Enlightenment France*, Nina Rattner Gelbart writes the following regarding these events: "Whenever

²²⁶ Seznez and Adhémar, *Diderot: Salons*, 3:317. "À nommer à la place de Mlle Basse-Porte au Jardin du Roi. Elle a de la couleur et de la vérité. Il y a de bonnes choses d'elle en fleurs et en animaux."

²²⁷ Anna Raitières, "Lettres à Buffon dans les 'Registres de l'Ancien Régime' (1739-1788)," *Histoire et nature: Cahiers de l'Association pour l'histoire des Sciences de la Nature* no. 17-18. Laboratoire d'Ethnobotanique, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 1980-1981, 108.

Basseporte fell sick, others hovered like vultures over her coveted position, including young Mme Vien, the former Marie-Thérèse Reboul, who had earlier been one of her students.”²²⁸ It is just this sort of oversimplified and multilayered presumption that I hope to warn against in the present study.

Clearly serious negotiations faded as Basseporte recovered, though they were undoubtedly carried on in the background. In 1774, six years before her death, Basseporte’s successor was named. The writers of the “Notice” mention Basseporte’s increase of salary in 1774, but avoid any reference to the identity or nomination of her successor, Gerard Van Spaendonck (1746-1822). Paul Lemoine, director of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle from 1932-1936, compiled during his tenure a short history of the institution, which was published in the 1935 edition of the *Archives du Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle*. In Chapter V, on “Le Jardin du Roy sous l’influence de Buffon (1738-1788),” Lemoine writes that “the question of successorship did not arise in the same way in the case of Aubriet-Basseporte as in the case of Basseporte-Van Spaendonck. In 1735, Aubriet ceded his duties to Mademoiselle Basseporte, on the condition that he would retain his emoluments during the rest of his life, which he did until his death in 1742. In 1774, in contrast, Van Spaendonck acquired from the King the right to succeed Madeleine Basseporte upon her death, but he did not take over her work. The pension granted to Madeleine Basseporte in 1774 was not a retirement pension. The decision of the first of July 1774 increased the rate of a pension previously granted, which was independent of the fixed remuneration of 600 *livres* granted for the execution of the vellums.”²²⁹

²²⁸ Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 140.

²²⁹ Paul Lemoine, “Le Muséum National d’Histoire naturelle: Son Histoire, Son État actuel,” *Archives du Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle*, tome XII, sixième série, 1935, 32.

Léon Bultingaire, chief librarian at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in the early twentieth century, provides a more thorough and nuanced account in the 1928 edition of the *Archives du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle*. In an article titled “Les Peintres du Jardin du Roy au XVIIIe siècle,” Bultingaire compiles short biographies of each of the chief plant painters of the royal gardens. For his discussion of Basseporte, he relies heavily on both the “Notice” and Jal, writing, “the very mention of a successor made her shudder, and it was without her knowledge that Gerard Van Spaendonck was appointed by the king to succeed her.”²³⁰ He goes on to say that there was nothing in this circumstance of a bilateral contract. From the “Notice” in 1781 to Bultingaire’s article in 1928, historians have fabricated a causal relationship between Basseporte’s unwillingness to name a successor, and the nomination of a candidate independent of her involvement. The language implies that she might have had the power to hand down the position, if only she had not been so weak as to be paralyzed by the thought of her own mortality. The royal decree dated 1 July 1774, cited by Bultingaire, “only stipulates that ‘His Majesty has retained and retains M. Spaendonck in the aforementioned position’ and on the subject of wages ‘that it will be up to him to make him pay the aforementioned wages after the death of Mademoiselle Basseporte or with her consent during her life to the terms and manner customary.’ There was no consent that would have resembled an abdication on the part of Madeleine Basseporte, and nobody thought of demanding it.”²³¹

It will be recalled that 1774 was also the year of Louis XVI’s ascension to the throne, which officially took place on 10 May, and which adds another layer of explanatory complexity to this

²³⁰ Léon Bultingaire, “Les Peintres du Jardin du Roy au XVIIIe siècle,” *Archives du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle*, tome III, sixième série, 1928, 31.

²³¹ Ibid.

arrangement. Van Spaendonck had immigrated to France from Holland as a young man, and having gained the sponsorship of the independently wealthy artist Claude-Henri Watelet (1718-1786), also “slipped into the good graces” of the Comte d’Angiviller.²³² Given Van Spaendonck’s support from D’Angiviller, who was positioned at the king’s right hand, it is hard to doubt that Van Spaendonck’s placement in the Jardin du Roi was simply a part of the appointments, promotions, and reshuffling associated with the change in regime. Bultingaire makes the following judgement: “This was certainly a choice that would meet with the approval of people of taste and that could not displease Buffon, who had clearly shown by the nominations that he himself proposed to the king, what price he attached to placing in the Jardin only people of real merit.” Whatever suggestions Buffon had made to the late king, they were either proposed at the wrong time or fell upon deaf ears. What is undeniable is that Basseporte had Louis XV’s ardent support, as a personal friend to both himself and Madame de Pompadour and perhaps even the teacher to his daughters. One can assume that had she voiced a request for a successor, be that Reboul Vien or anyone else of relative merit and standing, her wishes would have been taken into account. She clearly did not raise her voice in support of Reboul Vien. Vien had not yet been nominated for the directorship in Rome, and thus the Vien family did not know at the time of Louis XVI’s ascent that they were to leave France the following year. In any case, either ignoring, or in the absence of, any previous nominations for the Jardin position, the new administration swiftly brought in a candidate of their own choosing.

²³² Léon Bultingaire, “Les Peintres du Jardin du Roy au XVIIIe siècle,” 33.

In the early modern period, women's lives involved fluctuating moments of visibility, and these were often the result of certain life choices that they either made on their own, or that were imposed upon them. From the eighteenth century onwards, biographers of both Basseporte and Reboul Vien claim that the prominent men in their lives were their teachers. In Basseporte's case, this was true of Robert and Aubriet, despite our amended knowledge that she was at least twenty-three years of age when she met Robert, and that she entered the employ of the Jardin du Roi as Aubriet's successor at the age of thirty-three. Though we know little of Basseporte's early life, in particular the age at which her father died, it seems clear that she took the audacious step of pursuing an artistic craft, rather than that Robert "took it upon himself" to furnish her with lessons, presumably out of pity and compassion, as the "Notice" would have us believe. Writing of Basseporte and her contemporaries, Anne Lafont astutely concludes that self-starting women who embarked on a notable career made "an a priori immoral choice - in the sense that it opposed gender law, that is to say the conventional division of tasks between men and women in the eighteenth century - but which, in view of its extreme dilution, thereby exonerated the artist from the transgressive nature of this ambition within society. There was thus only one alternative offered for women to gain acceptance of their work and their success in the arts and sciences: *extreme poverty or extreme ugliness*. Both aroused the pity of contemporaries who, in return, granted these women a right to fashionable society...If...these *femmes "dénaturées"* were to see themselves lacking in charm or money...they were by no means found to be threatening to the social order."²³³ Following Lafont's model, Basseporte was "cursed" with a

²³³ Translation and emphasis mine. Lafont, "Basseporte," 55.

handsome appearance (and thus the combination of her prettiness and poverty could easily have led her into a disreputable line of work) but gained social acceptance through maternal mentorship and fiscal humility.²³⁴ Mentelle and the “Notice” editors felt motivated to gloss over, and even occasionally alter the facts pertaining to any choice or arrangement that could have been perceived as unsavory and disrupted Basseporte’s modest, selfless, and penniless fashioned persona. Instead, and in the interest of creating artistic lineages between women artists, we can draw a direct line from Carriera to Basseporte; though the two may never have met, Carriera was unquestionably a mentor and inspiration to Basseporte, via her work, in the formation of Basseporte’s manner and style.²³⁵

Reboul Vien’s early life and training, on the other hand, are obscured by the only account we have of this period in her husband’s memoirs. The story Vien tells is not wholly dissimilar to his own; in the opening paragraphs of the *Mémoires*, Vien writes that his prodigious talent was discovered when he was a young boy, and he was seen to be able to draw much above the capacity of a normal child. It was then that his parents sought out for him a proper tutor. Reboul Vien is presented in a similar way, as a young person of natural genius and no formal instruction, but the story ends there; Vien makes no mention of the presence of any teacher, before or after their meeting, much less that he had any role in her training. He presents her as a fully formed professional artist, albeit still relatively unknown. It is possible that Vien might have regarded “amateur” training, or training outside of the Académie, with a tutor unaffiliated with the academic system, as equivalent to no training at all, though this seems

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Nina Rattner Gelbart suggests that Basseporte may have taken lessons from Carriera during the latter’s Parisian sojourn in 1720. In the absence of evidence, this possibility will remain a tantalizing thought. Gelbart, *Minerva’s French Sisters*, 115.

somewhat unlikely. We tread upon unstable ground in mining Vien's memoirs for historical truth, as we must acknowledge that his advanced age (approximately 90) and distant remove from many of the events in question at the time of writing. However, as Reboul Vien was still alive and well, and available for questions and consultations as he composed, it can be hard not to evaluate his account of herself and their meeting as, at best, thoughtlessly negligent. To return once more to Lafont's two categories, Reboul Vien had neither the poverty nor ugliness that would make a long-term career acceptable, and thus her career was short-lived and swiftly forgotten.

Basseporte and Reboul Vien reached the highest threshold of success permitted to them fairly early in life, and from that point onwards their careers had either to plateau or decline. Basseporte chose never to marry, and though her situation was outside of the norm, she experienced no interruptions to her work, and no obstacle to retaining her position for the rest of her life. She even had the time and space to maintain a small school and produce illustrations for scientific publications, particularly via her affiliation with the Académie royale des sciences. We don't know for sure whether she was simply uninterested in obtaining academic membership, or if she indeed considered seeking it, as her successor Van Spaendonck would in 1781, and was dissuaded from doing so. The consistent glossing over of details regarding the formation of Basseporte's connections with employers, patrons, and institutions on the part of her eulogists covers over any personal ambition that may have been perceived as unseemly, and deprives us of information about how she came to occupy her various professional roles. Reboul Vien, having reached the glass ceiling for women artists at mid-century, academic membership, at the age of 22, similarly could go no further professionally, at least under her own name. Restricted as she was to the genre of natural history painting in miniature, and likely also to

the medium of watercolor and pastel on paper, it is my supposition that she overcame these stifling limitations by taking on an active role in her husband's practice. If I am correct in this hypothesis that she acted in the capacity of collaborator, furnishing the natural history elements of Vien's pictures, as Frans Snyders had done for Peter Paul Rubens in the previous century, she would have found an outlet there for artistic growth, in being granted the freedom to work in oils on large-scale canvases (fig. 42). It seems likely that Reboul Vien may have found the benefits of such an arrangement impossible to refuse, even though it meant sacrificing her own public career. Indeed, it was Vien who was in a position to be promoted through the academic ranks, and effectively add greater financial and social security to the entire family. The mystery of credit for her contributions, however, remains. Reboul Vien is given nearly equal billing for her engraving work in the *Suite des Vases* project, but clearly no formal attribution is made regarding any of Vien's canvases, nor does he make mention of any artistic collaboration between them in his memoirs. She, again, is treated as a fully formed and fully independent professional artist, without any past formation or future development.

Finally, as we have seen across the preceding pages, Basseporte and Reboul Vien received the highest praise during their lifetimes, but almost immediately after their deaths their work was taken less seriously by critics. Basseporte was inevitably compared to her predecessors and successors at the Jardin du Roi, and seen in an unfavorable light. Reboul Vien, probably in part thanks to Diderot's insensitive remarks, has faced open questioning over her place in the Académie by subsequent generations. Despite this lack of serious attention or inquiry, greater interest is being taken in this pair of artists, following on the heels of pioneering work of the women artists in eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Revolutionary France, namely Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, and Anne

Vallayer-Coster. I view Basseporte and Reboul Vien as the next in line for concentrated efforts towards historical reevaluation, the excavation of buried archival documents, and the search for lost works, to all of which I hope to contribute with this study.

In keeping with what Suzanne Cusick termed “thinking from women’s lives,” it is only when we read between the lines of history that we find entry into the everyday lived experience of women of the past, and that we see more clearly the true contribution that intrepid women made in their disciplines.²³⁶ Basseporte and Reboul Vien are, of course, no exception. A spark of their own vitality lives on in the lifelikeness they bestowed upon their subjects, and I will close with an ode written by the Abbé Gabriel Chalres de l’Attaignant in tribute to the genius of Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, his contemporary, and which I believe is an equally suitable tribute to that of Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien.

Verse to Mademoiselle Basseporte²³⁷

L’autre jour j’admirais des fleurs,	The other day I admired some flowers
Qui semblaient fraîchement écloses;	That seemed to be freshly bloomed
Entr’autres, deux superbes roses,	Amongst them, two superb roses
Brillaient des plus vives couleurs.	Shining in the most vivid hues.
Dans l’instant une jeune Abeille,	All of a sudden a young bee
S’abaissant sur la plus vermeille,	Landing upon the most pretty,
Dans son sein voulut se placer,	In its heart wanted to stay,
Et s’apprêtait à la sucer.	And savor the nectar the rest of the day.
A peine l’eut-elle touchée,	Hardly had it chanced to touch,
Que de tout désir détachée,	That all desire was gone in a rush
L’Abeille suit & s’envola.	The bee withdrew and flew away.
Des Petits-Mâîtres le modèle,	A model to Masters satisfy,
Un Papillon passant par-la,	This butterfly along passed by,

²³⁶ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Thinking from Women’s Lives’: Francesca Caccini after 1627,” *The Musical Quarterly* Volume 77, Issue 3, Fall 1993: 484–507.

²³⁷ Translation by the author. I am indebted to Nina Rattner Gelbart for bringing my attention to this poem. Abbé l’Attaignant, *Chansons et autres poésies posthumes* (Paris: Duchesne, 1780), 199-200.

En voltigeant s'approcha d'elle,
Puis comme l'autre s'en alla.
Un Zephyr, à Flore infidèle,
S'arrêta, la voyant si belle,
Et s'empresse à la rafraîchir;
Mais au second battement d'aile,
Tout confus, je le vois partir.
Étonné de cette aventure,
J'approche pour voir de plus près,
Et pour admirer tant d'attraits;
Lors je découvris l'imposture,
Ce n'était que fleurs en peinture.
De Basseporte le pinceau,
Rival heureux de la Nature,
A souvent fait en miniature
Plus d'un aussi parfait tableau.

In fluttering about approached
Then as the other took to the sky.
A Zephyr, to Flora undutiful
Paused, seeing a flower so beautiful
And hastened to refresh her;
But at the second delicate gust,
All confused, I saw it go.
Astonished by this adventure,
I approached to see a bit closer
And to so many attractions admire
When I discovered the imposture
It was only painted flowers.
From Basseporte's brush
Happy rival of Nature,
Often making in miniature
More than one such perfect picture.

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Appendix I: Nécrologe (Source Text and Translation)

Notice sur Mademoiselle BASSEPORTE, peintre du roi

Translator's Note:

This source text is taken from the original rather than the slightly edited and updated reprint in the *Revue universelle des arts*, though spelling and punctuation have been modified to reflect modern conventions.

Source Text:

Magdelaine-Françoise Basseporte, Peintre et Dessinatrice des plantes du Jardin du Roi, née à Paris dans le mois d'Avril 1701, mérite une place distinguée dans le Nécrologe des Artistes et des Gens de Lettres, moins encore par ses rares talents, que par des vertus dignes de servir d'exemple aux uns et aux autres. Fille d'un honnête Commerçant, enlevé par une mort prématurée, après avoir été ruiné par des malheurs imprévus, elle se trouva orpheline, pauvre, et, ce qui devenait plus embarrassant, jeune et jolie; mais sa sagesse, son amour pour sa mère, et son goût pour les Arts, la sauvèrent de ces écueils. A peine instruite des premiers éléments du dessin, M. Robert se chargea de lui donner des leçons. C'était un Peintre habile, à qui M. le Cardinal de Rohan avait permis d'avoir un atelier dans son Palais, d'y travailler, et d'introduire ses élèves dans ses vastes et riches appartements. Âgée de dix à douze ans, elle engagea sa mère à se loger dans le voisinage de l'Hôtel de Soubise, et obtint du Suisse qu'il lui ouvrît la porte au point du jour; elle ne quittait son ouvrage que lorsque la nuit l'y forçait, ne prenant pour son dîner, qu'un peu de pain et quelques fruits qu'elle emportait avec elle. Les travaux domestiques ne souffraient point de cette ambition d'apprendre; de retour auprès de sa mère, elle soupait légèrement, s'occupait jusqu'à minuit des soins du ménage, et dormait jusqu'à ce que le jour la rappelât à ses études. Jusqu'à l'âge de 60 ans elle conserva l'habitude de se lever avec le jour, et de ne quitter son ouvrage qu'à la nuit.

Après avoir épuisé tout ce que l'Hôtel de Soubise renferme de précieux en peinture, mademoiselle Basseporte obtint l'entrée de la galerie et des appartements du Palais-Royal, et s'y rendit avec la même assiduité. Dans l'hiver le plus rigoureux, elle passait les journées entières sans feu (1). Le désir de parvenir, et de pouvoir donner à sa mère, qui approchait de la vieillesse, des secours plus abondants, semblait l'avoir rendue impassible.

(1) Comme dans ce palais tout moyen de se procurer une chaleur artificielle, est interdit aux Artistes, les domestiques, chargés de veiller à la sûreté des appartements, étonnés du courage d'une jeune personne, qui sacrifiait sa santé au désir de s'instruire, lui offrirent, contre l'usage, de faire du feu, de manière à ne rien risquer; elle refusa avec constance leurs offres réitérées.

Mademoiselle Basseporte dut à son opiniâtreté pour l'étude, les succès les plus flatteurs; elle peignait le pastel, et fut bientôt connue par des portraits qu'on met à côté de ceux de la Rosalba: mais la crainte de

manquer d'occupation, l'embarras d'avoir sans cesse de nouvelles connaissances à faire, et d'autres inconvénients encore, l'engagèrent à prendre le parti de dessiner et de peindre les plantes; genre qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec la peinture des fleurs. On appelle ordinairement Peintre de fleurs, l'Artiste qui, sans étudier la fleur en elle-même, sans en détailler toutes les parties constitutives, s'attache uniquement à en rendre l'effet, et à la peindre telle que nous la voyons. Il est un genre qui, sans être moins agréable, est plus utile, plus vrai, et qui ne se contente pas des formes extérieures; dans lequel la plante avec sa fleur, doit plaire comme tableau, et se présenter comme un objet d'étude, de manière que l'illusion faite pour séduire l'Artiste même, ne cache ni ne déguise aux regards perçants du Naturaliste aucun des détails anatomiques les plus secrets de la plante: tel est le genre qu'embrassa Mademoiselle Basseporte, genre hérissé de difficultés et dans lequel elle a si parfaitement réussi, que les nombreux morceaux qu'elle a donnés à la Bibliothèque du Roi, depuis 1732 jusqu'à sa mort (2), se soutiennent à côté de ceux du célèbre Robert, qui peignait les plantes au temps de la Régence, et que personne n'avait encore égalé.

(2) Depuis 1732 inclusivement, elle a fourni douze morceaux chaque année entre les mains de l'Intendant du Jardin du Roi.

M. Obriette occupait la place de Peintre des plantes au Jardin du Roi; les émoluments en étaient de 400 livres indépendamment de 800 livres pour les douze morceaux que le Peintre est obligé de fournir dans le courant de l'année. En 1731, Mademoiselle Basseporte fit un arrangement avec Obriette, qui consentit qu'elle fût pourvue de la place, moyennant un abandon du revenu pendant huit ans. Pendant ce long intervalle, son zèle infructueux n'en fut pas moins actif. M, le Comte de Maurepas était alors Ministre. Mademoiselle Basseporte connaissait son amour pour les Arts, sa justice et sa bienfaisance; il n'eût pas été sourd à la demande qu'elle eût pu lui faire d'une gratification: mais n'ayant plus à partager le fruit de ses talents avec sa mère, qu'elle avait eu le malheur de perdre, elle se trouvait assez riche pour ne pas implorer du Gouvernement, des secours qui pouvaient être plus utiles à d'autres; car elle regardait comme des larcins faits aux infortunés, les bienfaits qu'obtiennent ceux qui peuvent s'en passer.

En 1774, Louis XV avait reçu des oiseaux et des singes de différentes espèces, qui offraient des singularités remarquables. Ce Monarque, qui aimait l'Histoire Naturelle, désira de les faire peindre; et, sur les ordres de M. le Comte de Maurepas, Mademoiselle Basseporte se transporta à Versailles: elle y fit plusieurs voyages, qui continuèrent sous le Ministère de M. le Comte d'Argenson, à Compiègne et à Fontainebleau.

Les personnes que ce Ministre chargeait de ces ordres, n'ignoraient pas que Mademoiselle Basseporte n'était comprise dans les états des appointements et des pensions des Gens de Lettres, que pour 1,200 livres et qu'elle était hors d'état de supporter les frais de voyages d'autant plus dispendieux qu'ils étaient fort multipliés; cependant on n'avait pas l'attention d'en prévenir le Ministre, qui n'eût pas manqué d'en parler au Roi. Mademoiselle Basseporte n'en était pas moins zélée: on la demandait, elle partait et ne murmurait point (3).

(3) M. le Comte d'Argenson lui écrivait souvent de sa propre main. Voici une de ses lettres, écrite de Compiègne, le 20 Juin 1750.

« Le Roi m'ordonne, Mademoiselle, de vous mander de sa part que S. M. désire qu'aussitôt ma lettre reçue, vous vous rendiez à Compiègne avec tout ce qui vous est nécessaire pour peindre un fruit singulier des Indes, qui vient d'être donné à S. M. et qui a encore toute sa fraîcheur: c'est une espèce d'Ananas, qui a une couronne d'une forme extraordinaire, et plusieurs autres accidents qui ne se trouvent pas communément dans ces sortes de fruits. Je compte que vous ne *différez pas un instant* à vous rendre aux ordres de S. M. et que si vous ne partez pas dès ce soir même, vous partirez demain d'assez grand matin pour être ici avant le lever de S. M. Je vous logerai chez moi, où vous trouverez tout ce qui vous est nécessaire, excepté ce qui concerne votre Art, que vous apporterez avec vous. Je suis très-parfaitement Mademoiselle, etc. M. D'ARGENSON. »

Les ordres étaient précis; Mademoiselle Basseporte prit la poste sur-le-champ, se trouva au lever du Roi, qui lui sut gré de sa diligence; mais le voyage fut à ses frais, comme les autres.

Madame la Marquise de Pompadour, qui savait apprécier ses talents, et qui lui rendait justice, contribuait encore à multiplier ces voyages, répétés pendant treize ans. Mademoiselle Basseporte était souvent obligée de travailler à l'ardeur du soleil, dans les Jardins de Bellevue, pour saisir l'instant le plus favorable à certaines fleurs. Enfin, pressée par des Ouvriers, pour des avances considérables en bordures très-riches qu'elle avait commandées pour Madame de Pompadour, épuisée de dettes et de fatigues, elle eut recours à la justice de M. le Comte de Saint-Florentin, alors Ministre, qui lui fit accorder une gratification annuelle de 300 livres mais cette ressource n'était que pour l'avenir: elle exposa la nécessité de secours plus prochains. Le Ministre en parla à Madame de Pompadour, qui porta les représentations de Mademoiselle Basseporte au Roi; et en attendant, elle la fit rembourser des avances qu'elle avait faites pour elle. En 1749, sa pension fut portée à 800 livres somme qui eût suffi à son ambition, sans la retenue des trois vingtièmes. Enfin, en 1774, Mademoiselle Basseporte fut un des premiers objets de la bienfaisance de notre jeune Monarque. Il se fit rendre compte de sa situation; il en fut touché, et en considération de ses services pendant quarante-sept ans, dont huit sans appointements, de ses travaux, de ses talents, et de l'estime que le feu Roi faisait de sa personne (4), Sa Majesté ajouta 400 livres à sa pension, qui se trouva de deux mille, malgré les retenues.

(4) Le feu Roi l'avait dispensée de toute étiquette, lorsqu'elle travaillait sous ses yeux. S. M. exigeait qu'elle répondit à ses questions, comme à celles qu'aurait pu lui faire un simple particulier.

Mademoiselle Basseporte ignorait la célébrité dont elle jouissait; aucun Prince étranger n'est venu à Paris qu'il n'ait voulu voir ses Ouvrages et en connaître l'auteur. Le célèbre Jean-Jacques, juge éclairé dans cette matière, disait que « la nature donnait l'existence aux plantes, mais que Mademoiselle Basseporte la leur conservait. » Ses peintures étaient également admirées du Peintre et du Naturaliste. Les personnes qui se destinaient à peindre les fleurs, recherchaient ses leçons: on lui adressait les

Artistes que le Gouvernement voulait employer (5). Mais tous ces avantages la flattaient encore moins que le plaisir de rendre service et d'être utile au mérite indigent, et de concourir au progrès des Arts. Quelque réputation qu'elle ait obtenue, comme Artiste, elle en mérite encore davantage par ses qualités bienfaisantes et par sa sensibilité. Cette force d'âme, qui lui avait fait surmonter les obstacles que la fortune opposait à ses progrès, se roidissait contre tout ce qui pouvait retarder le bien qu'elle avait projeté de faire. Ce bien ne se bornait pas à soulager l'indigence par des secours momentanés; mais à chercher, dans la classe des indigents, les jeunes gens de l'un et de l'autre sexe, qui paraissaient avoir le plus de dispositions pour les Sciences, les Arts ou les Lettres; et lorsqu'elle en avait trouvé quelqu'un, son coeur n'était plus tranquille; elle quittait ses pinceaux, son atelier, et comme elle ne pouvait rien à cause de la modicité de sa fortune, elle obsédait ceux de ses amis et de ses Protecteurs, qui en avaient une, et ne les laissait que lorsqu'elle les avait intéressés à ses projets, se félicitant de servir en même temps un infortuné et de procurer à l'État un Citoyen utile. Nous pourrions citer un grand nombre d'Artistes, Chirurgiens, Chimistes, Peintres, Gens de Lettres, qu'elle a, pour ainsi dire, créés, et dont le génie et les talents font honneur à la France. Nous nous bornerons à deux ou trois exemples.

(5) Lettre de M. le Duc D***, qui lui recommandait un jeune Artiste, écrite de Saint-Germain, le 5 Juillet 1753:

« Je me flatte, Mademoiselle, que vous ne désapprouverez pas que je recommande à la supériorité de vos talents le jeune homme qui aura l'honneur de vous remettre ma lettre; il doit passer dans peu de temps à la Guadeloupe; il a des dispositions pour dessiner les plantes, et il désirerait puiser dans la source des instructions plus particulières, pour nous communiquer la connaissance des productions de cette partie du Nouveau Monde. Personne ne peut mieux que vous, lui donner les connaissances nécessaires pour nous devenir utile dans un genre que vous possédez aussi éminemment, dont tout l'honneur vous sera dû. Trouvez donc bon, Mademoiselle, que je vous prie de vouloir bien, non seulement lui permettre d'être l'Admirateur de vos Ouvrages, mais même de daigner lui donner quelque instruction, qui fera passer votre réputation dans les pays les plus éloignés, et qui tournera à votre gloire dans celui que nous habitons. Comme ce jeune homme se propose de m'envoyer des dessins des plantes les plus curieuses, j'aurai soin aussi de vous en faire part, comme d'un hommage qui vous sera dû. Je serai d'ailleurs infiniment sensible à ce que vous voudrez bien faire dans cette occasion, dont je profite avec plaisir, pour vous renouveler les sentiments d'estime et de considération, avec lesquels, etc, Le Duc D***. »

Cette lettre fait autant d'honneur aux connaissances de M. le Duc D*** qu'au mérite de Mademoiselle Basseporte.

L'un est M. L'Archevêque, premier Sculpteur du Roi de Suède, et Directeur de son Académie de Peinture, mort depuis quelques années. Cet Artiste, dont les Ouvrages embellissent Stockholm, et sont proposés aux jeunes Suédois, comme ceux des Grecs l'étaient aux Romains, né d'honnêtes et pauvres parents, n'avait que dix ans lorsqu'ils s'aperçurent de son goût et de son talent pour la Sculpture. Il avait fait de génie et sans aucune connaissance du dessin, une figure de cire très-bien proportionnée: une amie de sa mère, qui partageait le chagrin que ces honnêtes gens lui témoignaient, de ne pouvoir

pas seconder les dispositions de cet enfant, hasarda de le présenter, avec son petit chef-d'oeuvre, à Mademoiselle Basseporte; elle examina la figure, fut étonnée de l'ensemble dans les proportions, et ne songea plus qu'à trouver un Sculpteur habile qui voulût se charger du jeune Élève. Le célèbre Bouchardon, son ami, fut le premier qui se présenta à son esprit; mais elle savait que Bouchardon avait refusé aux sollicitations les plus puissantes de recevoir des Élèves.

Elle se souvint que cet Artiste avait des obligations essentielles au Comte de Caylus, leur ami commun; aussitôt elle prend le jeune L'Archevêque, le conduit chez le Comte, le laisse dans l'antichambre, montre la petite figure, qui est trouvée charmante, et présente l'Auteur. Le Comte de Caylus envoie prier Bouchardon de venir chez lui pour une affaire essentielle. Bouchardon arrive et refuse; Mademoiselle Basseporte avec une éloquence enflammée, presse, sollicite, le rend responsable devant Dieu et devant les hommes, de la perte d'un homme de génie, qu'il dépend de lui de donner à l'Etat; le Comte de Caylus l'appuie par des caresses, le jeune enfant par des larmes qu'il répand en abondance; Bouchardon s'attendrit, cède, et L'Archevêque est reçu. Il donna, dans la suite, tant de satisfaction à son Maître, que la Cour de Suède lui ayant demandé un habile Sculpteur, Bouchardon indiqua L'Archevêque, comme un des meilleurs Artistes de l'Académie de France. On sait par quels Ouvrages ce jugement a été justifié. De retour en France, son premier hommage fut pour sa bienfaitrice, qui eut encore l'avantage de lui choisir une épouse, et de faire son bonheur une seconde fois.

Le second exemple, est celui de M. Rouelle, plus célèbre encore dans son genre, et connu depuis longtemps par le surnom de *Fameux*, que l'habitude lui avait fait donner. Il avait acquis, de bonne heure, de vastes connaissances; Mademoiselle Basseporte le vit, et fut frappée des réflexions qu'il faisait souvent sur les découvertes qui restaient à faire en Chimie, et sur le peu de progrès que cette science avait fait. Rouelle parlait avec une espèce d'enthousiasme; mais tout se bornait à des vœux impuissants. La médiocrité de sa fortune ne lui permettait pas d'aller plus loin. Plus Mademoiselle Basseporte l'entendait, et plus elle se disait à elle-même: « Quel bonheur de pouvoir briser les liens qui enchaînent les ailes de ce génie ! » Elle l'entreprit, mit ses amis à contribution; le jeune Rouelle eut des creusets, des fourneaux, et la France un grand homme de plus.

On pourrait citer plusieurs autres personnages devenus célèbres, qui ne lui ont pas de moindres obligations, et ce jeune homme qu'un peu d'étude et une éducation honnête avaient nourri de la lecture de bons Auteurs, mais que son peu de fortune avait empêché de suivre ses classes, et qu'elle livrait à des occupations qui l'éloignaient pour toujours des Lettres. Mademoiselle Basseporte le vit; le jeune homme lui présenta des Vers: elle lui trouva des dispositions, courut chez M. Avril de Charnacé son ami, lui fit lire les Vers, et obtint qu'il se chargeât de l'Auteur. Il était fort retardé, il fallait hâter ses progrès. M. Avril l'adressa à M. Crevier qui entra dans ses vûes, et en moins de dix-huit mois le jeune Élève avait fait des progrès si rapides, qu'il fut reçu en Rhétorique sous M. le Beau; il devint, tant pour le Grec que pour le Latin, un de ses meilleurs Écoliers: il obtint l'amitié de son Maître, et l'a cultivée jusqu'à la mort de cet homme si justement regretté. Il s'est acquis depuis, un nom avantageux dans les Lettres, par des travaux utiles, qui annoncent de plus grands succès. Les bienfaits de Mademoiselle Basseporte, qu'il se fait un plaisir de publier, ont produit encore un effet auquel elle ne s'attendait

point. Ce jeune homme avait un frère, dont l'émulation excitée par cet exemple, lui fit embrasser l'étude des Mathématiques: il s'y livra avec ardeur, entra dans le génie, et s'y distingua par son application, son travail et sa conduite, qui lui ont valu depuis peu le brevet de Capitaine.

Les talents et le caractère de Mademoiselle Basseporte lui avaient fait des amis du mérite le plus éminent; et si ses qualités personnelles n'avaient pas suffi pour se les attacher, elle eût trouvé le moyen de les ménager en faveur des personnes à qui elle voulait du bien. Elle s'était concilié depuis longtemps l'affection et l'estime de M. le Président Ogier: elle l'employa pour faire connaître à la Cour de Copenhague, où il était Ambassadeur, Mademoiselle Biheron, si connue par ses Anatomies artificielles. Cet Anatomiste, unique dans son genre, devait à sa généreuse amie, la perfection à laquelle elle l'a portée. Mademoiselle Biheron avait perdu son père fort jeune; elle n'avait qu'un revenu modique, et vivait auprès de sa mère, qu'elle aimait tendrement. Une bonne éducation était la meilleure partie de son patrimoine; elle dessinait, savait la musique, et lisait les Livres Anglais; mais elle n'était supérieure dans aucune de ces connaissances. Mademoiselle Basseporte lui donna l'idée des *Anatomies artificielles*, genre qui exigeait une longue étude de la structure du corps animal. Mademoiselle Biheron avait la plus grande répugnance pour une Science qui semblait si peu faite pour une jeune Demoiselle. A force de prières, Mademoiselle Basseporte vainquit ses dégoûts. Elle mit à contribution MM. Morand et Dubourg, qui dirigèrent Mademoiselle Biheron avec tant de succès, qu'elle posséda bientôt l'Anatomie. Alors elle entreprit ces compositions, qui imitent jusqu'à la plus étonnante illusion, l'ensemble et les détails de toutes les parties du corps humain, les plus déliées et les plus solides, leur couleur et leur souplesse, leurs rapports, leur jeu, leurs fonctions; invention ingénieuse, qui, en sauvant ce que la dissection des cadavres a de dégoûtant, sert aux démonstrations anatomiques les plus détaillées. Dans le temps que l'Étranger recherchait avec empressement les Ouvrages de Mademoiselle Biheron, encouragée par son amie, elle luttait contre les obstacles qu'on lui suscitait dans sa Patrie.

Outre les jeunes gens dont Mademoiselle Basseporte attendait de grands succès, elle élevait auprès d'elle des jeunes Demoiselles, à qui leur fortune ne permettait pas de payer des Maîtres. Pendant plus de quarante ans, elle a toujours eu deux de ces Élèves à qui elle donnait gratuitement ses leçons. Presque toutes ont réussi, et plusieurs font encore avec succès leur état de la peinture. Lorsqu'elle ne leur trouvait pas de dispositions pour cet Art, elle les appliquait à d'autres objets, et il n'arrivait jamais qu'elles sortissent de ses mains, sans avoir l'esprit orné de connaissances propres à se faire un état indépendant (6).

(6) De ce nombre est Mademoiselle Thouin, dont le père, Jardinier en chef du Jardin du Roi, avait laissé, par sa mort, une famille nombreuse, sans secours, et en bas âge. M. le Comte de Buffon assura la place à son fils aîné, à qui il fit faire de bonnes études. Mademoiselle Basseporte, qui s'était chargée de l'aînée des filles, et qui lui donnait des leçons de dessin, voyant qu'elle n'avancait pas dans cet Art, l'appliqua à la Grammaire, à la Géographie, et à l'Histoire. Ni la Maîtresse, ni l'Élève n'étaient en état de payer des Maîtres. Quoique Mademoiselle Basseporte n'eût jamais fait une étude particulière de ces Sciences, elle entreprit de les enseigner. Elle ouvrit pour la première fois une Grammaire Française; elle la lisait

attentivement avec Mademoiselle Thouin, commentait les principes, y appliquait des exemples, lui faisait copier et apprendre par coeur des morceaux de nos meilleurs Écrivains, les lui faisait ensuite réécrire de mémoire: on confrontait l'original et la copie, et l'on se corrigeait. Avec cette méthode, et de la patience, on vint à bout de bien apprendre l'Orthographe et la Grammaire. Pour la Géographie, elle n'en savait que ce qu'elle en avait appris dans l'Ouvrage et les conversations de l'Abbé Pluche; elle consulta M. Mentelle sur la marche que son Élève pourrait suivre, non seulement pour apprendre, mais pour se mettre en état d'enseigner. Avec ce secours, elle mit son Élève en état de profiter de la lecture des meilleures Méthodes de Géographie, des Voyageurs et des Historiens. L'usage continuel des Cartes, et une étude obstinée ont mis Mademoiselle Thouin à la tête des personnes de son sexe, qui se consacrent à l'enseignement de ces connaissances, auxquelles elle joint celle de l'Histoire Naturelle, qu'elle a puisée dans les Ouvrages de M. d'Aubenton, les leçons de M. Sage et dans ses propres réflexions sur toutes les pièces du Cabinet du Roi.

Mademoiselle Basseporte a eu le bonheur de faire peu d'ingrats; elle en a trouvé cependant; mais elle se consolait aisément de l'ingratitude, parce qu'en faisant du bien, elle ne songeait point à la reconnaissance: il était difficile de connaître son âme généreuse, de ne pas ambitionner son amitié, et de ne pas la conserver quand on l'avait obtenue. Parmi les grands Artistes qui la cultivèrent, Parrocel, Vanloo, Boucher, Massé, Bouchardon, L'Archevêque, Falconet, Morand, Dubourg, furent les plus assidus auprès d'elle. M. le Comte de Buffon, qui n'a cessé de lui donner des marques de l'estime qu'il avait pour ses talents et pour sa personne, lui écrivait de Montbard, le 12 Janvier 1780: « J'ai été enchanté, Mademoiselle, de recevoir une assez longue lettre, toute de votre main, et aussi bien écrite que bien pensée: j'espère que dans dix ans nous nous en écrirons encore de semblables, et que vous me conserverez toujours les mêmes sentiments que vous avez la bonté de m'accorder aujourd'hui, etc. »

Malheureusement, le vœu de ce grand homme n'a point été exaucé. Mademoiselle Basseporte, incommodée depuis quelque temps, ne discontinua point un travail devenu nécessaire à son existence; elle avait déjà fait pour l'année, six morceaux des douze qu'elle devait fournir. A son âge et presque hors d'état de remplir les devoirs de sa place, il paraît étonnant qu'on ne lui ait point accordé sa retraite, avec ses appointements en pension, et désigné son successeur; mais par une faiblesse inconcevable, seul tribut qu'elle ait payé à l'humanité, Mademoiselle Basseporte frémissait au seul nom de survivancier: l'idée d'en avoir un eût abrégé ses jours. Pour ménager sa délicatesse, M. le Comte de Buffon et M. le Comte d'Angiviller, en s'assurant d'un Artiste digne de la remplacer, avaient exigé qu'il garderait sur leur choix un secret inviolable. Affaibli par les années et par le travail, Mademoiselle Basseporte a terminé sa carrière dans le mois d'Octobre 1780. Sa modestie ne lui a jamais permis de solliciter une place à l'Académie Royale de Peinture, ce qui ne justifie pas l'Académie de ne lui en avoir point donné.

M. *Mentelle*, Historiographe de Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, Pensionnaire du Roi, Professeur émérite d'Histoire et de Géographie de l'École Royale Militaire, des Académies des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Rouen, etc., Auteur de la Géographie comparée, et de plusieurs autres Ouvrages utiles, nous

a fourni les renseignements qui composent cet article, comme un témoignage de sa reconnaissance envers Mademoiselle Basseporte.

Fin de la Notice sur Mademoiselle Basseporte.

Translation:

Magdelaine-Françoise Basseporte, painter and draughtswoman of plants of the King's garden, born in Paris in the month of April 1701, deserves a distinguished place in the obituaries of artists and people of letters, less for her extraordinary talents than for virtues worthy of serving as an example to others. Daughter of an honest merchant whose death came prematurely, after having been ruined by unforeseen misfortunes, she found herself an orphan, poor, and, what was becoming more awkward, young and pretty; but her wisdom, her love for her mother, and her penchant for the arts, saved her from these pitfalls. No sooner had she learned the first elements of drawing than Mr. Robert took it upon himself to give her lessons. He was a skillful painter whom M. le Cardinal de Rohan had permitted to have a studio in his palace, in which to work, and to introduce his students into his vast and rich apartments. From the age of ten to twelve, she and her mother lived in the neighboring building to the Hôtel de Soubise and obtained from the Swiss artist an open door at the start of each day; she didn't leave her work until the night forced her to do so, taking for her dinner nothing but a bit of bread and some fruit that she brought with her. The domestic work did not suffer from this ambition to learn; upon returning home to her mother, she supped lightly, occupied herself until midnight with the chores of housekeeping, and slept until the new day recalled her to her studies. Until the age of 60 she maintained the habit of rising with the day, and not leaving her work until nightfall.

After having exhausted all that the Hôtel de Soubise contained of value in painting, Mademoiselle Basseporte obtained entry to the gallery and the apartments of the Palais-Royal and progressed with the same assiduity. In the harshest winter, she passed each day in its entirety without a fire (1). The desire to achieve and to be able to give her mother, who was approaching old age, more abundant assistance, seemed to have rendered her stoical.

(1) As, in this palace, all means of procuring artificial heat was forbidden to artists, the servants charged with keeping the apartments safe, astonished by the courage of a young person who sacrificed her health to the desire to learn, offered, against custom, to make her a fire in such a way as not to risk anything; she steadfastly refused their repeated offers.

Mademoiselle Basseporte owes many flattering successes to her obstinate dedication to study. She painted pastels and was soon known for her portraits that were placed alongside those of Rosalba; but the fear of being without work, the embarrassment of constantly having to make new acquaintances, and still other inconveniences made her resolve to take on the role of draughtswoman and to paint plants, a genre that must not be confused with flower painting. One ordinarily gives the title of flower

painter to the artist who, without studying the flower in itself, without detailing all of its constituent parts, is concerned only with rendering its effect, and with painting it as we see it. It is a genre which, without being less pleasing, is more useful, more true, and which is not satisfied with exterior forms; in which the plant with its flower must please as a painting and be presented as an object of study, so that the illusion, made in order to seduce the artist himself, neither hides nor disguises to the piercing gaze of the naturalist the most secret anatomical details of the plant: such is the genre which embraced Mademoiselle Basseporte, a genre bristling with difficulties and in which she succeeded so perfectly, that the numerous pieces she donated to the royal library, from 1732 until her death (2), stand alongside those of the famous Robert, who painted plants in the time of the Regency and whom no one had yet equaled.

(2) From 1732 onward, she delivered twelve pieces each year into the hands of the steward of the king's garden.

M. Aubriet occupied the position of plant painter in the King's Garden; the annual salary was 400 *livres*, not including the 800 *livres* for the twelve pieces that the painter was obliged to produce in the course of the year. In 1731, Mademoiselle Bassporte made an arrangement with Aubriet, who agreed that she would take his place, in exchange for a waiver of income for eight years. During this long interval, her fruitless zeal was no less active. M. le Comte de Maurepas was then Minister of the Royal Household. Mademoiselle Basseporte knew of his love for the arts, his justice and his charity; he would not have been deaf to the request she could have made for monetary compensation; but no longer having to share the fruit of her talents with her mother, whom she had had the misfortune to lose, she found herself sufficiently wealthy not to implore the government for assistance which could be more useful to others; she regarded the obtaining of rewards by those who could do without as petty theft from those less fortunate.

In 1744, Louis XV had received several birds and monkeys of different species, which offered remarkable singularities. This monarch, who loved natural history, desired to have them painted, and on the orders of M. le Comte de Maurepas, Mademoiselle Basseporte ventured to Versailles: she made several trips there, which continued under the ministry of M. le Comte d'Argenson, to Compiègne and Fontainebleau.

The persons whom this minister charged with these orders were not unaware that Mademoiselle Basseporte was only included in the statements of allowances and pensions of the people of letters for 1,200 *livres*, and that she was unable to bear the travel fees, which were all the more expensive as they were greatly multiplied; however, it was not thought necessary to warn the minister, who would not have failed to mention it to the king. Mademoiselle Basseporte was no less zealous: they asked for her, she went, and never said a word (3).

(3) M. le Comte d'Argenson himself wrote to her often. Here is one of his letters, written from Compiègne, 20 June 1750:

“The king ordered me, Mademoiselle, to inform you on his behalf that His Majesty desires that as soon as you receive my letter you would go to Compiègne with all that is necessary for you to paint a singular fruit from the Indies that was just given to His Majesty and retains all of its freshness: it is a type of pineapple that has a crown of an extraordinary shape, and several other characteristics that are not commonly found in these sorts of fruits. I trust that you will not delay an instant to submit yourself to the orders of His Majesty and that if you do not leave tonight, you will leave tomorrow first thing in the morning in order to be here before His Majesty rises. I will host you at my home, where you will find everything that is necessary for you, excepting that which concerns your art, which you will bring with you. Very sincerely yours, Mademoiselle, etc. M. d’Argenson.”

The orders were precise; Mademoiselle Basseporte took the poste-chaise at once, and found herself at the rising of the king, who thanked her for her diligence, but the trip was made at her expense, as were the others.

Madame la Marquise de Pompadour, who knew how to appreciate her talents, and who did them justice, helped to multiply these trips over the course of thirteen years. Mademoiselle Basseporte was often obliged to work in the heat of the sun, in the gardens at Bellevue, in order to capture the most favorable moment for certain flowers. At one point, pressed by workmen for considerable advances for some very expensive borders that she had ordered for Madame de Pompadour, exhausted from debts and fatigue, she had recourse to the justice of M. le Comte de Saint-Florentin, then Minister of the Royal Household, who gave her an annual bonus, but this resource was only for the future; she displayed the need for more immediate relief. The minister spoke about it with Madame de Pompadour, who took Mademoiselle Basseporte’s representations to the king, and in the meantime she reimbursed her for the advances she had made for her. In 1749, her pension was increased to 800 *livres*, a sum which would have been sufficient for her ambition, without the deduction of the three vingtièmes. Finally, in 1774, Mademoiselle Basseporte was one of the first objects of the benevolence of our young monarch. He was made aware of her situation; he was touched by it, and in consideration of her services for forty-seven years, eight of which were without pay, her work, her talents, and the esteem in which the late King held her (4), His Majesty added 400 *livres* to her pension, which, including the tax deductions, amounted to two thousand *livres*.

(4) The late king had exempted her from all etiquette when she worked before his eyes. His Majesty asked that she respond to his questions as she would to those posed by a commoner.

Mademoiselle Basseporte was unaware of the fame she enjoyed; no foreign prince came to Paris who did not want to see her works and know their author. The famous Jean-Jacques [Rousseau], an enlightened judge in this matter, said that “nature gave plants their existence, but Mademoiselle Basseporte preserves it for them.” Her paintings were equally admired by painters and by naturalists. People who set out to paint flowers sought her lessons: she was approached by the artists the government wanted to employ (5). But all these advantages gratified her still less than the pleasure of rendering service and being useful to the talented destitute, and contributing to the progress of the

arts. Whatever reputation she had obtained as an artist, she deserves even more for her benevolent qualities and her sensibility. This fortitude, by which she had surmounted the obstacles that fortune posed against her progress, rooted her against all that which could delay the good that she had planned to do. This goodness did not confine itself to relieving destitution by momentary relief; but to seeking in the class of the destitute, the young people of both sexes who seemed to have the greatest aptitude for the sciences, arts, or letters, and when she had found someone, her heart was no longer tranquil; she put down her brushes, left her studio, and as she could do nothing, because of her modest fortune, she pressed on those of her friends and protectors who did have wealth to spare, and left them only when she had interested them in her projects, being pleased to serve at the same time an unfortunate individual and to provide the State with a useful citizen. We could cite a large number of artists, surgeons, chemists, painters, people of letters, whom she has, so to speak, created, and whose genius and talents bring honor to France. We shall confine ourselves to two or three examples.

(5) Lettre de M. le duc D***, who recommended a young artist to her, written from Saint-Germain, le 5 juillet 1753:

I flatter myself, Mademoiselle, that you will not disapprove that I commend to the superiority of your talents the young man who will have the honour of delivering my letter to you. He is to spend a short time in Guadeloupe; he has the ability to draw plants, and he would like to draw from the source of more particular instructions, in order to communicate to us some knowledge of the plant life of this part of the new world. There is no one better than you to give him the necessary knowledge to become useful to us in a genre that you possess eminently, for which all the honour will be due to you. I beg you, Mademoiselle, to be so kind as to permit him not only to be an admirer of your work, but even to deign to give him some instruction, which will carry your reputation to faraway countries, and turn to your glory in our own. As this young man proposes to send me drawings of the most curious plants, I shall also take care to send you some of them, as an homage that is due to you. I shall, moreover, be infinitely sensitive to what you may wish to do on this occasion, which I shall gladly take advantage of, to renew to you the feelings of esteem and consideration in which you are held, etc. Le duc D***.

This letter does as much honor to the knowledge of M. le duc D*** as it does to the merit of Mademoiselle Basseporte.

One is M. L'Archevêque, premier sculpteur to the king of Sweden, and director of his Académie de peinture, who died a few years ago. This artist, whose works decorate Stockholm, and are propounded to young Swedes, as those of the Greeks were to the Romans, born of honest and poor parents, was only ten years old when they noticed his taste and talent for sculpture. He had ingeniously made, without any knowledge of drawing, a very well-proportioned wax figure: a friend of his mother's, who shared the sorrow that these honest people showed her for not being able to support the abilities of this child, ventured to present him, with his little masterpiece, to Mademoiselle Basseporte; she examined the figure, was astonished by the composition in the proportions, and thought only of finding an able sculptor who wanted to take charge of the young student. The famous Bouchardon,

her friend, was the first to come to her mind, but she knew that Bouchardon had refused the most powerful solicitations to receive students.

She recalled that this artist had essential obligations to the Comte de Caylus, their mutual friend; immediately she took the young L'Archevêque, conducted him to the Comte's residence, left him in the antichamber, displayed the little figure, who was found to be charming, and presented the author. The Comte de Caylus sent out a plea for Bouchardon to come to his home for an essential matter. Bouchardon arrived and refused; Mademoiselle Basseporte, with a fiery eloquence, pressed, solicited, declared him responsible before God and before man for the loss of a man of genius, who was depending on him to give him to the State; the Comte de Caylus supported him with caresses, the young child by tears that he shed in abundance; Bouchardon softened, gave in, and L'Archevêque was received. He gave, as time passed, such satisfaction to his master, that when the court of Sweden asked him for an able sculptor, Bouchardon indicated L'Archevêque as one of the best artists of the Académie de France. One knows by which works this judgement was justified. Upon returning to France, his first homage was for his benefactress, who had the pleasure of choosing a wife for him and making him happy a second time.

The second example is that of M. Rouelle, yet more famous in his genre, and known for a long time by the nickname of *Fameux*, which he was accustomed to be called. He had acquired, early on, vast knowledge; Mademoiselle Basseporte saw him and was struck by the reflections that he often voiced regarding the discoveries that had yet to be made in chemistry, and on the little progress that this science had made. Rouelle spoke with a kind of enthusiasm; but all was limited to hopeless wishes. The mediocrity of his fortune did not allow him to go any further. The more Mademoiselle Basseporte heard him, the more she said to herself: "What a joy to be able to break the chains that bind the wings of this genius!" She undertook the task, and set her friends to work; the young Rouelle had all the scientific equipment he needed, and France had another great man.

One could cite several other personages who became famous, who had no lesser obligations to her, and this honest young man who, with a little study and little education had been nourished by reading the scholarship of good authors, but whose little fortune had prevented him from taking classes, would have otherwise been engaged in pursuits that were forever removed from letters. Mademoiselle Basseporte saw him; the young man presented her with some verses; she made some arrangements for him, ran to the home of her friend M. Avril de Charnacé, made him read the verses, and negotiated that he would take charge of the author. He was much delayed, and it was necessary to hasten his progress. M. Avril introduced him to M. Crevier, who also played a role in his educational development, and in less than eighteen months the young student had made such rapid progress that he was received in rhetoric under M. le Beau; he became, in both Greek and Latin, one of his best pupils. He obtained the friendship of his master, and cultivated that friendship up until the death of that man so justly regretted. He has since acquired a prominent name in the world of letters through useful works which herald even greater success. The good deeds of Mademoiselle Basseporte, which are a pleasure to publish, have continued to produce effects which she did not expect. This young man

had a brother, whose excited emulation of this example led him to embrace the study of mathematics; he devoted himself ardently to it, entered into engineering and distinguished himself by his application, his work, and his conduct, which has recently earned him the master's certificate.

The talents and the character of Mademoiselle Basseporte had made her friends of the most eminent merit; and if her personal qualities had not been enough to attach them to herself, she would have found the means of conserving them in favor of the people to whom she wanted to do good. She had long since held the affection and esteem of M. le Président Ogier: she used him to make known at the court in Copenhagen, where he was ambassador, Mademoiselle Biheron, so well known for her artificial anatomies. This anatomist, unique in her genre, owed to her generous friend the perfection to which she brought her. Mademoiselle Biheron had lost her father at a very young age; she had only a modest income, and lived with her mother, whom she loved dearly. A good education was the best part of her inheritance; she drew, knew music, and read English books; but she was not superior in any of these accomplishments. Mademoiselle Basseporte gave her the idea of artificial anatomies, a genre that required an extensive study of the structure of the animal body. Mademoiselle Biheron had the greatest repugnance for a science that seemed so little suited for a young lady. After many pleas, Mademoiselle Basseporte vanquished her disgust. She enlisted the help of MM. Morand and Dubourg who would direct Mademoiselle Biheron with so much success that she soon mastered anatomy. So this young lady undertook these compositions, which imitate to the most astonishing illusion, the composition and the details of all the parts of the human body, the most loose and the most tight, their color and their flexibility, their relationships, their play, their functions; an ingenious invention, which, save the disgusting nature of the dissection of corpses, served for the most detailed anatomical demonstrations. At a time when foreigners were eagerly seeking out the works of Mademoiselle Biheron, she, encouraged by her friend, fought against the obstacles that were being created for her in her homeland.

In addition to the young people from whom Mademoiselle Basseporte expected great success, she brought up alongside her some young ladies whose fortunes did not permit them to pay for masters. For more than forty years, she always had two of these students to whom she gave lessons for free. Nearly all of them succeeded and several still make their living as painters. When she found no aptitude in them for that art, she applied them to other objects, and never did they leave her hands without having their minds adorned with the proper knowledge to make a living independently (6).

(6) Of this number is Mademoiselle Thouin, whose father, the chief gardener at the Jardin du Roi, had left behind, when he died, a large family without assistance, and at a young age. M. le Comte de Buffon assured the place of his eldest son, to whom he gave a good education. Mademoiselle Basseporte, who took charge of the eldest of the daughters and gave her drawing lessons, seeing that she wasn't advancing in that art, applied her to grammar, geography, and history. Neither master nor student were in a position to pay for instructors. Although Mademoiselle Basseporte had never made a particular study of these sciences, she undertook to teach them. She opened for the first time a French grammar book; she read it attentively with

Mademoiselle Thouin, commented on the principles, applied examples, then had her copy and learn by heart pieces of our best writers, then had her rewrite them from memory; they examined the original and the copy, and made corrections. With this method, and patience, they managed to learn spelling and grammar well. As for geography, she only knew what she had learned in the work of and conversations with l'abbé Pluche; she consulted M. Mentelle on the path that her student could take, not only to learn, but to place herself in a position to teach. With this assistance, she put her pupil in a position to benefit from reading the best methods of geography by travelers and historians. Continual use of maps and determined study placed Thouin at the head of those of her sex who devoted themselves to the teaching of this subject, to which she added that of natural history, which she drew from the works of M. d'Aubenton, the lessons of M. Sage, and from her own reflections on all the pieces in the *cabinet du roi*.

Mademoiselle Basseporte had the good fortune of seldom encountering ungratefulness, though she did find some; but she easily consoled herself against ingratitude, because in doing good, she no longer thought about recognition. It was difficult, knowing her generous soul, to not aspire to her friendship, and to not keep it when it was earned. Among the great artists who cultivated her friendship, Parrocel, Vanloo, Boucher, Massé, Bouchardon, L'Archevêque, Falconet, Morand, Dubourg were the most devoted to her. M. le Comte de Buffon, who did not cease to show her the esteem that he had for her talents and for her character, wrote to her from Montbard, on 12 January 1780: "I was enchanted, Mademoiselle, to receive a rather long letter, all in your hand, and as well written as well thought out. I hope that in ten years time we will still write in the same way, and that you will always keep the same sentiments that you have the goodness to grant me today, etc."

Unfortunately, the wish of this great man was not to be granted. Mademoiselle Basseporte, ill for some time, did not discontinue the work that had become necessary to her existence; she had already made six of the twelve pieces she had to produce for the year. At her age and almost out of condition to fulfill the duties of her position, it seems astonishing that she was not granted her retirement, with her pension allowances, and that her successor was not designated; but by an inconceivable weakness, the only tribute she paid to humanity, Mademoiselle Basseporte shuddered at the very name of a successor; the idea of having one would have shortened her days. To spare her delicacy, M. le Comte de Buffon and M. le Comte d'Angivilliers, in securing an artist worthy of replacing her, had demanded that he would keep an inviolable secret of their choice. Weakened by the years and by work, Mademoiselle Basseporte ended her career in the month of October 1780. Her modesty never permitted her to apply for a place in the Académie royale de peinture, which does not justify the Académie for not having given her one.

M. Mentelle, historiographer of Monseigneur le Comte d'Artois, employee of the King, Professor Emeritus of History and Geography at the l'École Royale Militaire, the Académies of science and letters in Rouen, etc., author of comparative geography, and of several other useful works, provided us

with the information which composes this article, as a testimony of his gratitude towards Mademoiselle Basseporte.

End of the Notice on Mademoiselle Basseporte.

Appendix II: Transcription and Translation of Basseporte / Reboul Vien Correspondence

Source Text:

Correspondance g'le des bâtiments

Mon cher neveu me voilà à votre débotté,

Je vous fais mon compliment sur le plaisir que vous avez de vous trouver dans votre beau château, et j'espère que ce plaisir vous disposera favorable à m'accorder une grâce que je vous demande de tout mon cœur. Il y a plusieurs années que Mlle Basseporte étant fort malade sa place vous fut demandée par un nommé Saussay fils. Comme on vous l'avoit demandé pour Mme Vien qui a véritablement le talent nécessaire pour remplacer Mlle Basseporte vous ut la bonté de parler dans ce tems là à M. de Buffon en faveur de Mme Vien qui vous donna de bonnes espérances. Vous ut même la bonté de renvoyer à M. Vien le placet du Sr. Saussay avec une note de votre main que j'ai vu et que voici:

Propres parolles de mon neveu

M. Vien, vous verrez par la lecture de ce placet, que l'on pense à la place de Mlle Basseporte, je crois cette affaire terminée avec Mme Vien je crains que Mlle Basseporte ne fasse agire M. le duc de Buffon en faveur du nommé Saussay que dans l'intention de frustrer Mme Vien de l'effet de la promesse affirmation qui m'a été faite par M. de Buffon à qui seul appartient la nomination de cette place -

Mlle Basseporte est fort mal et a dix ans de plus - La grâce que je vous demande mon cher neveu est de vouloir bien écrire un mot à M. de Buffon pour lui rappeler la promesse qu'il vous a faitte en faveur de Mme Vien. Vous conoissé son talent, elle a la distinction d'être la seulle femme de l'Académie.

Mon cher neveu ce qui fait desirer cette place au mari et à la femme c'est que le pauvre Vien a une santé tres delicate et que si sa femme le perdoit elle resteroit sans fortune avec ces enfans. Or cette place luy seroit une grande ressource pour elle et pour ces enfans.

Je suis bien sûr mon cher neveu, qu'un mot de vous à M. de Buffon finira cette affaire. Vous comblerai de bonheur une honnête famille pour qui vous avés des bontés.

Et vous ferai un plaisir très sensible à votre bonne tante qui vous est attachée bien véritablement. Je vous embrasse et la belle des belles, de tout mon coeur.

J'espère que vous me donnerés bientôt des vos nouvelles et que vous n'oublierai pas l'hôtel -

A Paris ce lundi 22 mai

M. de Buffon est à son château de Montbard en Bourgogne.

Je viens d'apprendre que Mlle Basseporte est mieux cela donne du tems pour la sollicitation, mais une parolle renouvelée de M. de Buffon nous laissera dans la tranquillité.

[Non signé]

Correspondance generale des Batiments

M. de Marigny

Menars le 31 mai 1769

A M. de Buffon de l'Acad. R. des (Sciences), Intendant du Jardin du Roi à Montbard

Je viens d'apprendre, Monsieur, que Mlle Basseporte est dangereusement malade et qu'il y a peu d'espérance à son rétablissement. Je ne puis dans cette circonstance refuser à Mme Vien de vous rappeler la promesse que vous m'avez faite, il y a quelques années en faveur de cette artiste si la place de Mlle Basseporte venoit à vacquer. Les talens de Mme Vien vous sont connus et vous n'ignorez pas qu'elle est du petit nombre des femmes qui ont joui de la distinction d'être de l'Académie Royale de Peinture. Ainsi ce choix ne peut manquer d'avoir l'applaudissement du public connoisseur. Je vous en aurai en mon particulier une véritable obligation, et je serai très flaté de ce que vous voudrez bien faire pour elle à ma recommandation.

Translation:

My dear nephew, I present myself to you,

I compliment you on the pleasure that you have of being in your beautiful château, and I hope that this pleasure will favorably dispose you to grant me a favor which I ask of you with all my heart. Several years ago Mademoiselle Basseporte was very ill and her place was requested by a man named Saussey fils. As it had been asked of you for Madame Vien who truly has the talent necessary to replace Mademoiselle Basseporte you had the goodness to speak at that time in favor of Madame Vien to M.

de Buffon, who gave you good hope. You even had the goodness to send back to Mr Vien the petition of Sr. Saussay with a note in your hand which I have seen and which is as follows:

My nephew's own words

M. Vien, you will see by the reading of this petition, that we are thinking of Mlle Basseporte's place, I believe that this affair with Mme Vien is over, I fear that Mlle Basseporte is inciting M. le Duc de Buffon to act in favour of a certain Saussay only with the intention of robbing Mme Vien of the benefits of the promise made to me by M. de Buffon, to whom alone belongs the nomination of this place -

Mademoiselle Basseporte is very unwell and is ten years older - The grace I ask you, my dear nephew, is to write a note to M. de Buffon to remind him of the promise he made to you in favour of Mme Vien. You know her talent, she has the distinction of being the only woman in the Academy.

My dear nephew, what makes the husband and wife want this place is that poor Vien is in very delicate health and that if his wife lost him she would be left without a fortune with her children. Yet this place would be a great resource for her and for her children.

I am quite sure my dear nephew, that one word from you to M. de Buffon will put an end to this matter. You will bring happiness to an honest family to whom you have been kind.

And you will deeply please your dear aunt who is truly attached to you. Warmest wishes to you and the beauty of beauties, with all my heart.

I hope that you will soon give me your news and that you will not forget our home -

Paris, Monday 22 May

M. de Buffon is at his château de Montbard in Bourgogne.

I have just learned that Mademoiselle Basseporte is better, which gives some time for the request, but another word from M. de Buffon would set us at ease.

[Not signed]

Correspondance générale des Bâtiments

M. de Marigny
Menars, 31 May 1769

To M. de Buffon of the Académie Royal des Sciences, Intendant of the Jardin du Roi at Montbard

I have just learned, Monsieur, that Mlle Basseporte is dangerously ill and that there is little hope of her recovery. I cannot in this circumstance refuse my obligation to Mme Vien to remind you of your promise to me several years ago in support of this artist if the place of Mlle Basseporte became vacant. The talents of Mme Vien are known to you and you are not ignorant that she is of the small number of women who have enjoyed the distinction of being a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture. Thus this choice can only be applauded by the public of connoisseurs. I shall be under a true obligation to you in my own name, and I shall be very honored by what you may do for her on my recommendation.

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Figure 36: Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Two Pigeons on a Tree Branch*, 1762. Watercolor brush and pen and ink heightened with white, 0.31 x 0.375 m. Département des Arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre.

Figure 37: Joseph-Marie Vien, *Portrait of Jean-Marie Vien, Son of the artist*, ca. 1783. Oil on canvas, 46 x 37.5 cm. Private collection.

Figure 38: Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Chardonneret cherchant à prendre un papillon*, 1765. Watercolor and pastel. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

Figure 39: Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Fleurs dans un vase de cristal*. Watercolor and pastel. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

Figure 40: Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Pectinidae, Patella*, 1747. Red chalk on paper. Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

Figure 41: Anne Vallayer-Coster, *Panaches de mer, lithophytes et coquilles*, 1769. Oil on canvas, 1.3 x 0.97 m. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Figure 42: Joseph-Marie Vien, *Mars and Venus*, 1768. Oil on canvas, 225.5 x 151 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

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Figure 1. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Portrait of a Young Girl*, 1727.
Pastel on paper, 44.5 x 37 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 2. Rosalba Carriera, *Nymph from Apollo's Retinue*, 1720-1721.
Pastel on paper, 61.5 × 54.5 cm. Musée du Louvre.



Figure 3. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, after Sebastiano Conca and engraved by Nicolas Le Sueur, *Diane et Endimion*, c. 1729-1742 (published 1763).

Chiaroscuro woodcut printed from three blocks: black line block and gray-blue and light blue tone blocks on heavy laid paper, 53.2 x 34.4 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Figure 4. After Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, engraved by Marie Jeanne Renard Dubos, *Young Girl Caressing a Rabbit*, c. 1715-1757. Ink on paper, 210 mm x 154 mm. British Museum, London.

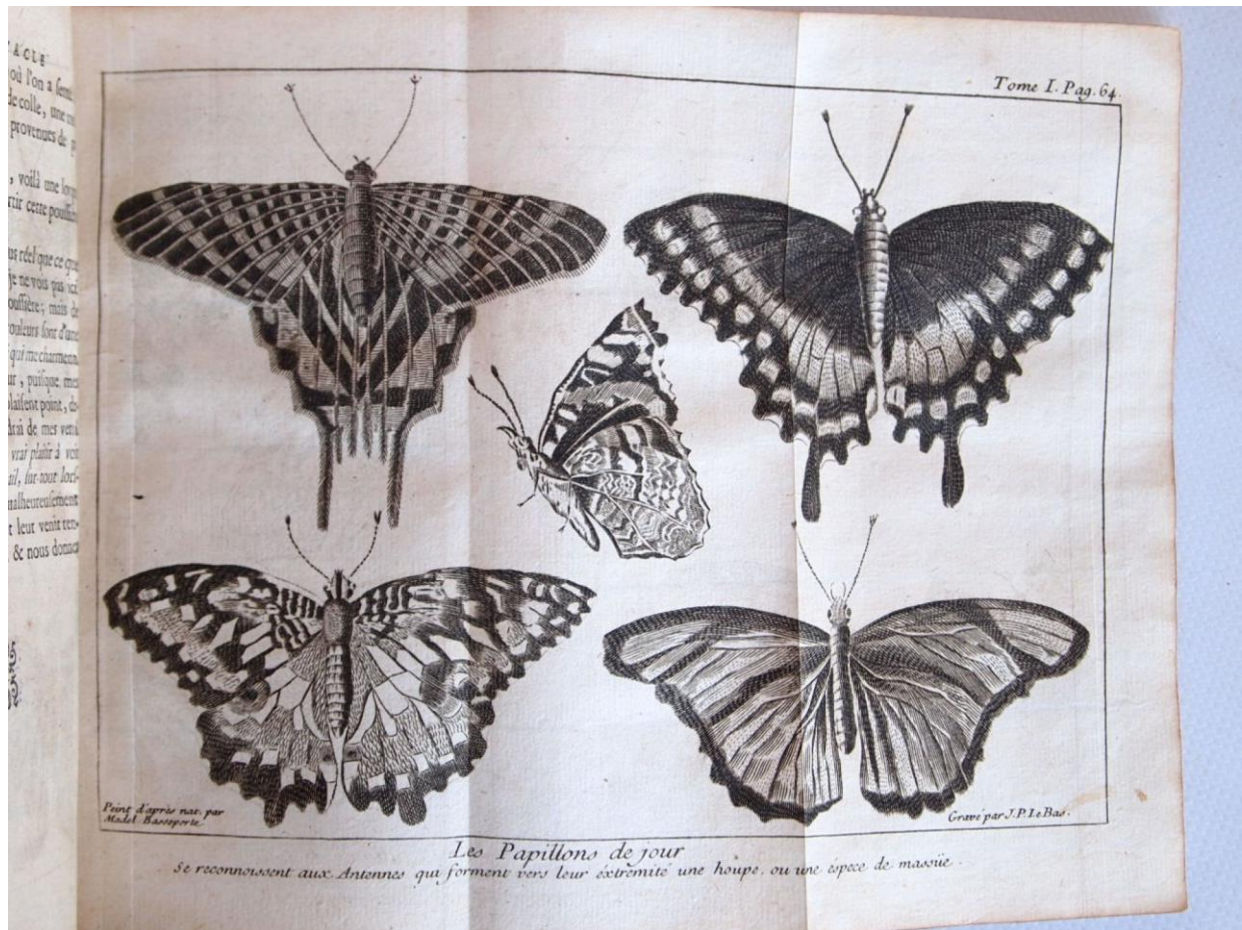


Figure 5. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Les Papillons de jour*, in l'abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Spectacle de la nature* (1732-1750).

Peint d'après nature par Madeleine Basseporte / Gravé par Jacques-Philippe Le Bas



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 6. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *La Luzerne et La Trefle*, in l'abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Spectacle de la nature* (1732-1750).

Peint d'après nature par Madeleine Basseporte / Gravé par Jacques-Philippe Le Bas



A. Le Sainfoin commun. B. Le Sainfoin d'Espagne. C. Le Feuillage du pié de la plante.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 7. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Le Sainfoin commun, Le Sainfoin d'Espagne, et Le Feuillage du pié de la plante*, in l'abbé Noël-Antoine Pluche's *Spectacle de la nature* (1732-1750).
Peint d'après nature par Madeleine Basseporte / Gravé par Jacques-Philippe Le Bas

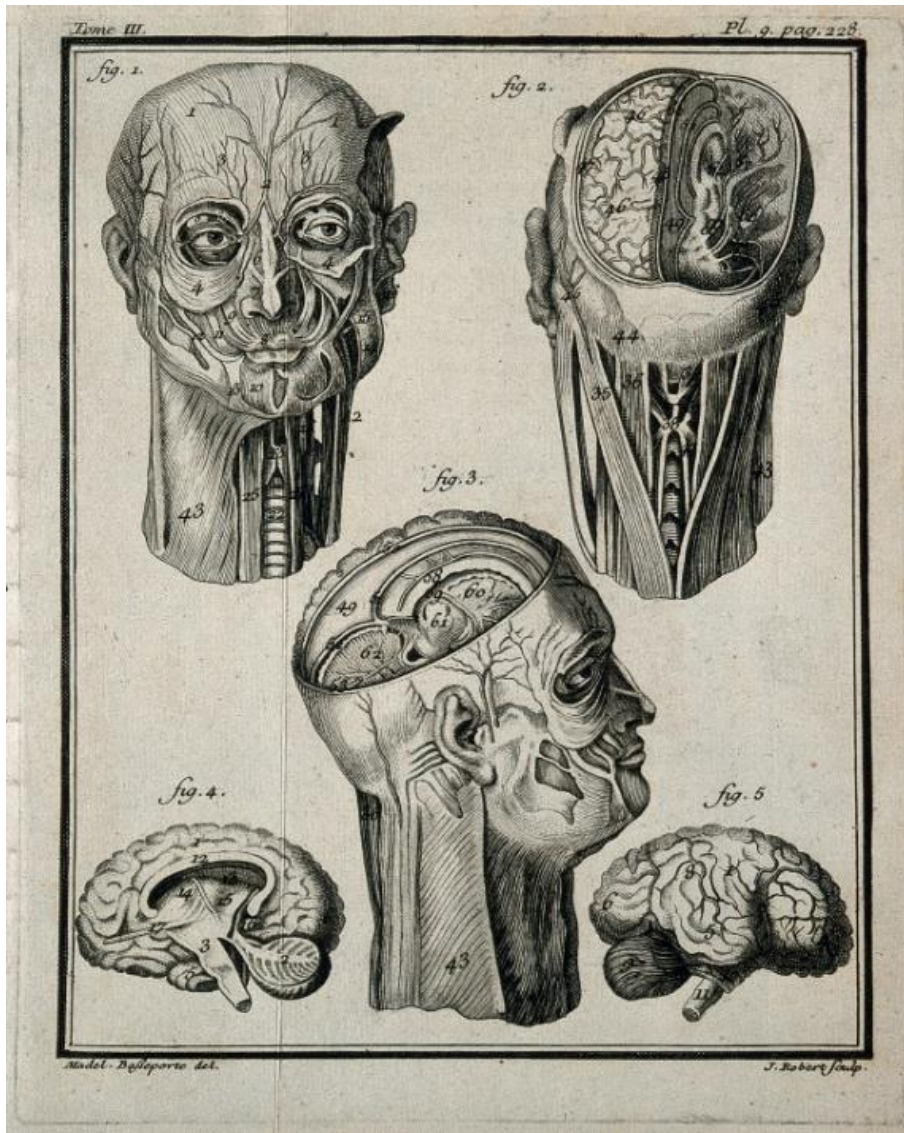


Figure 8. After Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, engraved by J. Robert, *Cranial anatomy*, in Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* (1749), Tome III, Page 228. Wax models of the head and neck (figs 1-3), and of the right hemisphere of the brain (figs 4-5), made by G. G. Zumbo.

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Figure 9. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Canard du nord*. Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Figure 10. Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte, *Papaver*. Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Figure 11. Madeleine-Françoise Basseporte, *Agave virginica*. Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



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Figure 12. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Espèce de héron pris dans les étangs de Versailles en 1760.*

Gouache on vellum. Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Figure 13. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Musa paradisiaca* (fruit). Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Madeleine Françoise Basseporte pinxit.

Musa paradisiaca. (Linn.)

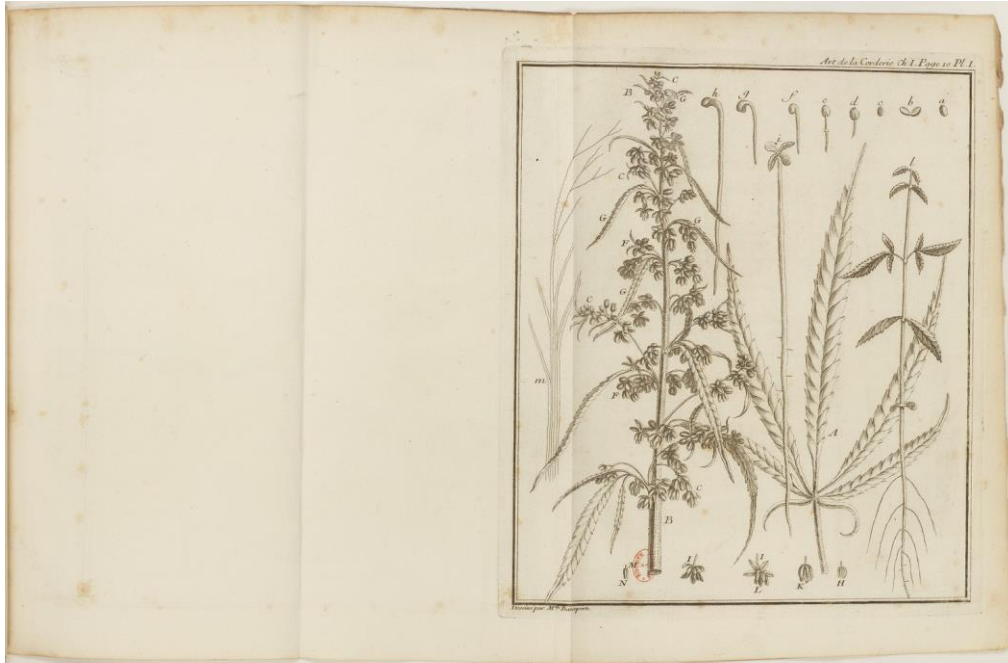
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Figure 14. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Musa paradisiaca* (flower). Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

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Figure 15. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Langermania gigantea*. Gouache on vellum.
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 16. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, Plate I from Henri-Louis DuHamel du Monceau's *Traité de la fabrique des manœuvres pour les vaisseaux, ou l'Art de la corderie perfectionné*, 1747. Chapter 1.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 17. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, Plate II from Henri-Louis DuHamel du Monceau's *Traité de la fabrique des manœuvres pour les vaisseaux, ou l'Art de la corderie perfectionné*, 1747. Chapter 1.



Figure 18. After Madeleine Françoise Basseporte, *Bernard de Jussieu*, *D'après le portrait au pastel peint d'après nature par Mlle Basseporte*, from *Galerie française: ou Collection de portraits des hommes et des femmes qui ont illustré la France, dans les XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library.

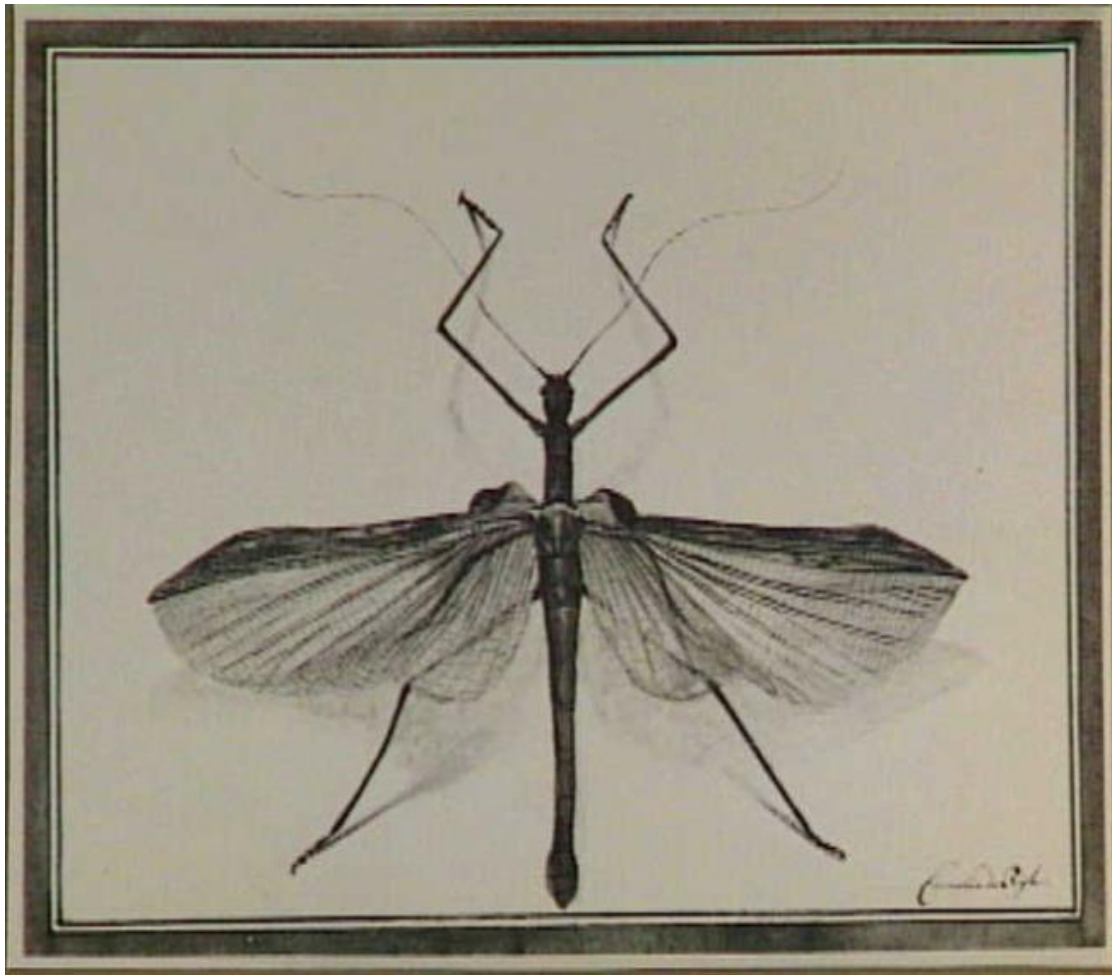


Figure 19. Cornelia de Rijk (active 1671-1727), *Insect*.
Gouache over graphite on paper, 170 x 210 mm. Kungliga Vetenskapsakademien, Stockholm.



Figure 20. Alexander Roslin, *Madame Joseph-Marie Vien, née Reboul*, 1757.
Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 38.5 cm. Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

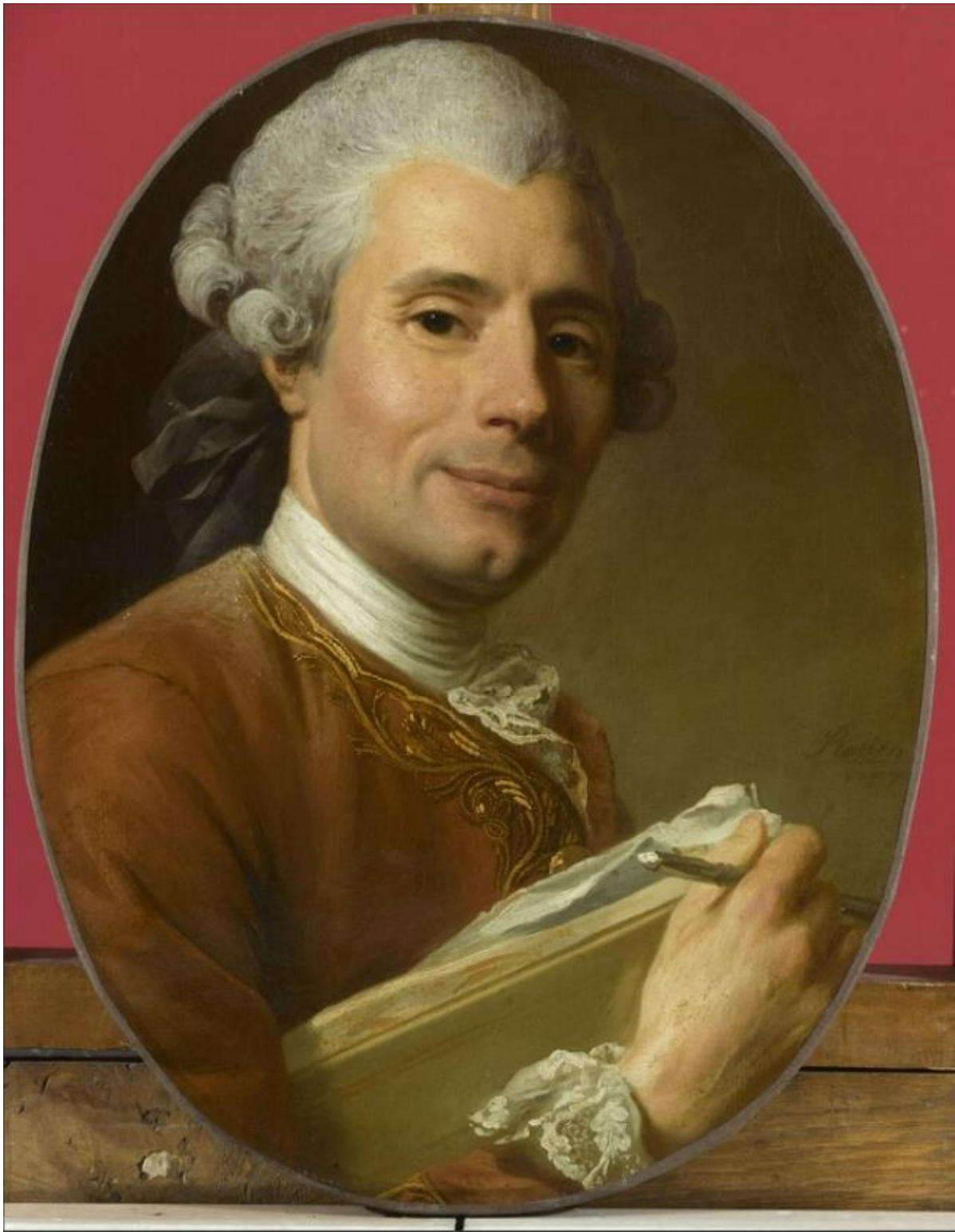


Figure 21. Alexander Roslin, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, 1757.
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 38.5 cm. Musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon.

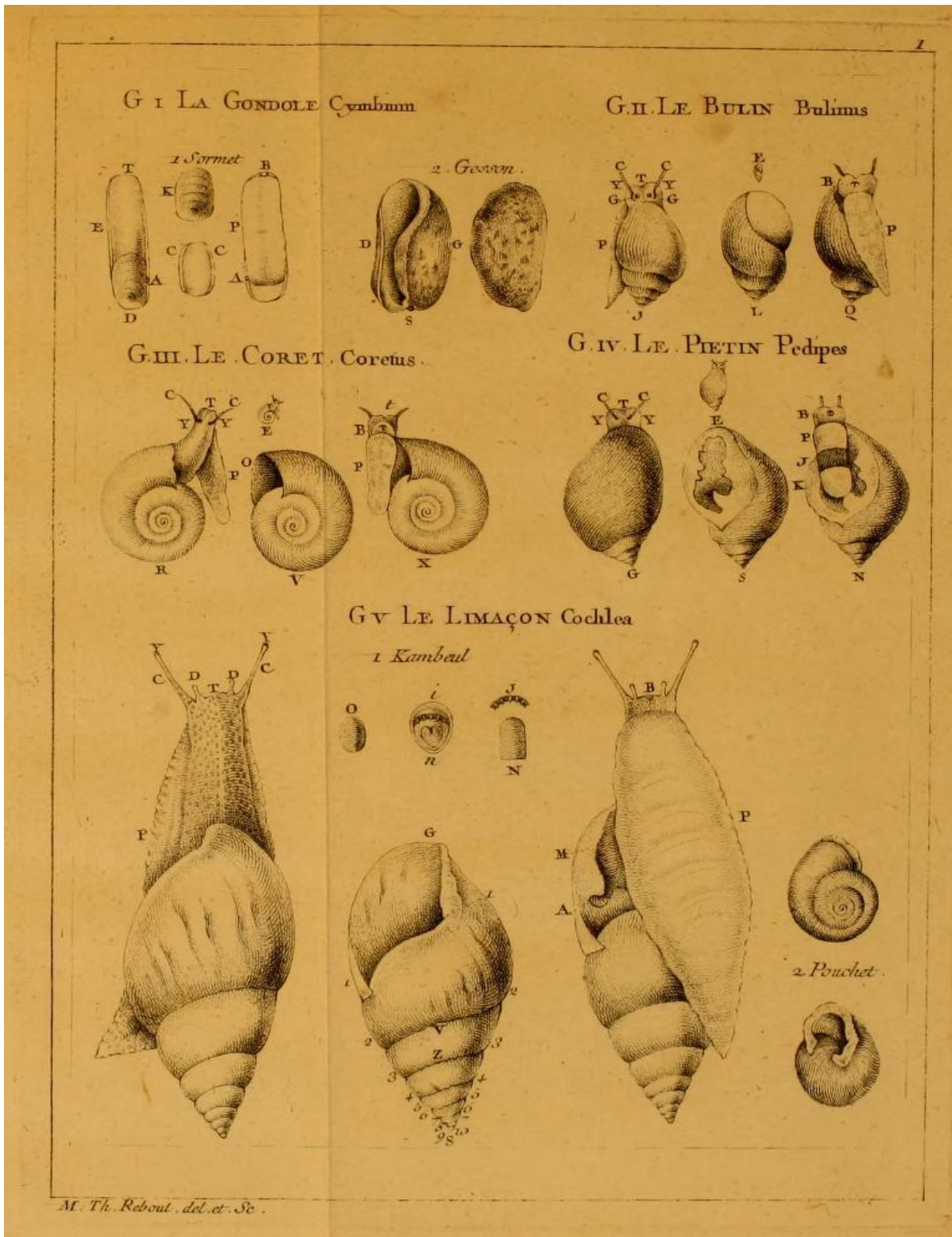


Figure 22. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate I from Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal: Coquillages, Avec la Relation abrégée d'un Voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris, 1757).

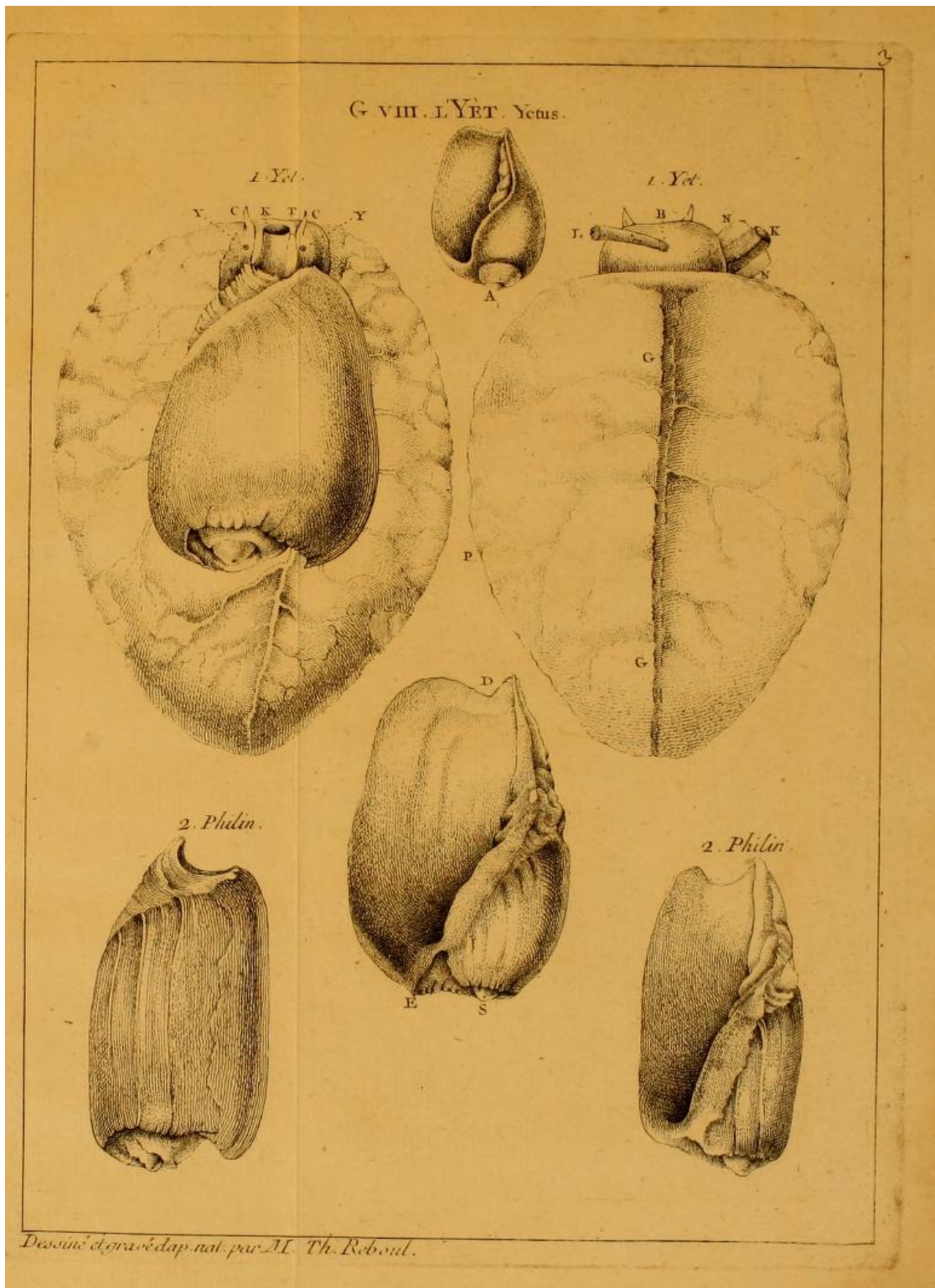


Figure 23. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate III from Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal: Coquillages, Avec la Relation abrégée d'un Voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris, 1757).

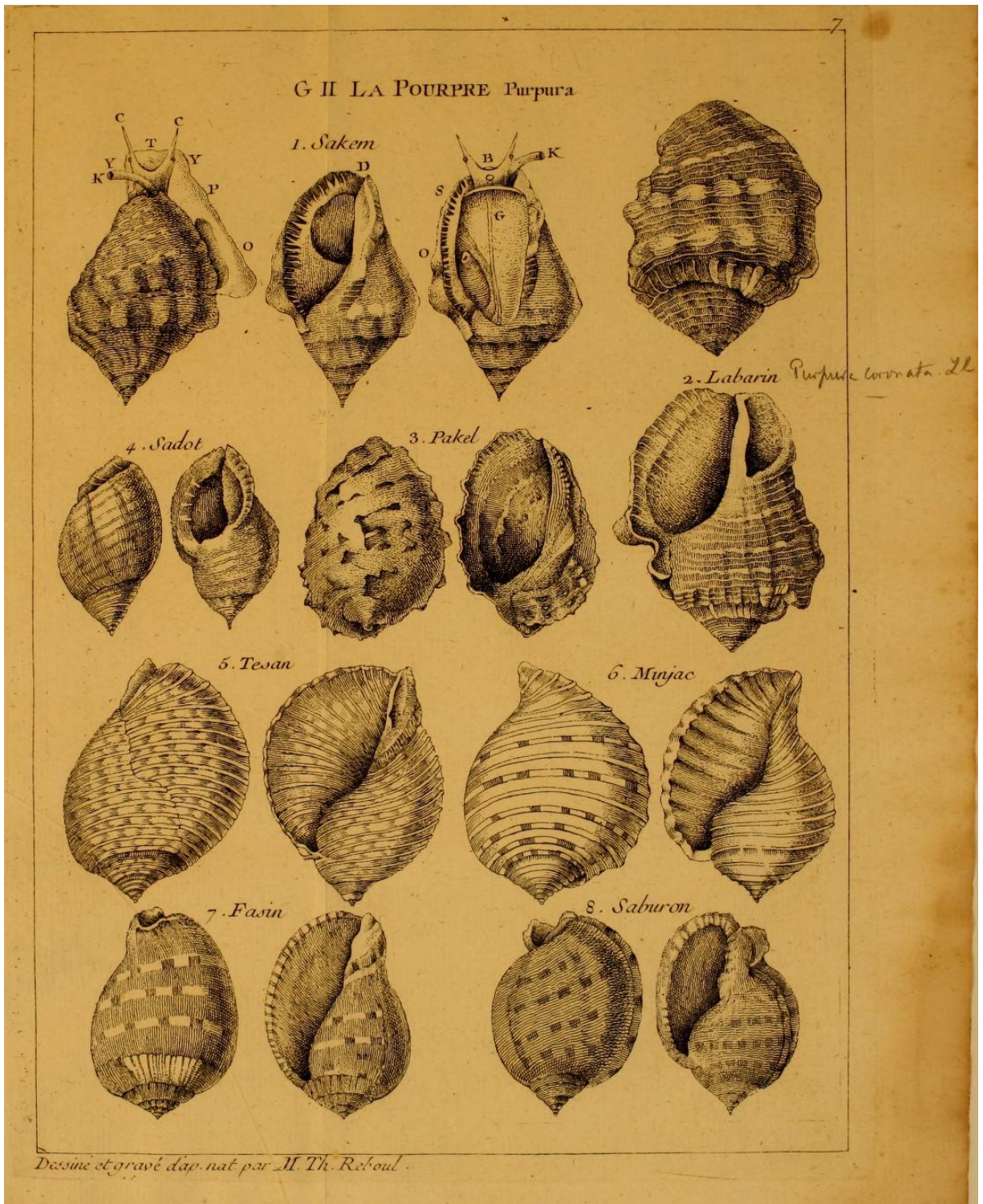


Figure 24. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate VII from Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal: Coquillages, Avec la Relation abrégée d'un Voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris, 1757).

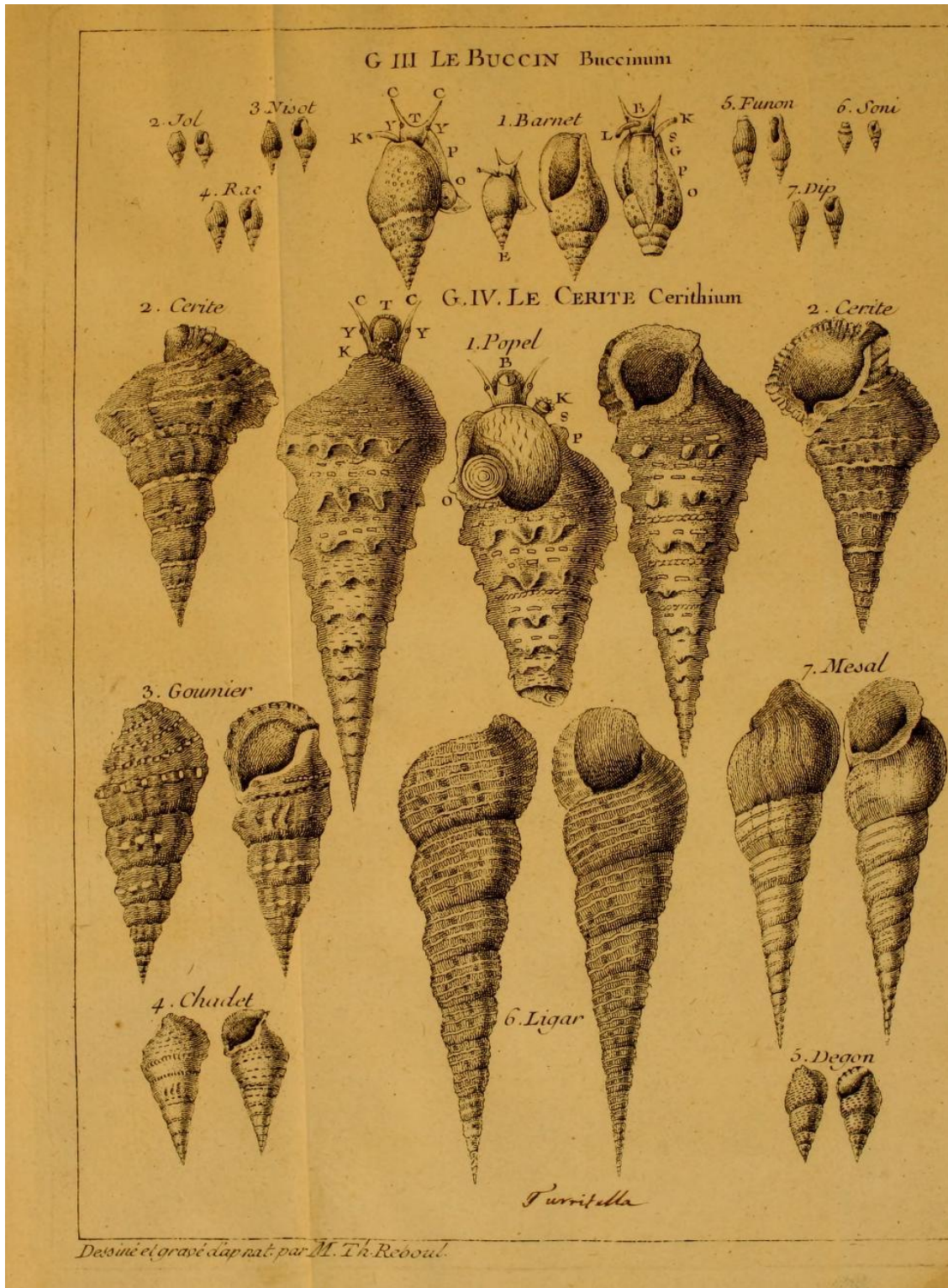


Figure 25. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate X from Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal: Coquillages, Avec la Relation abrégée d'un Voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris, 1757).

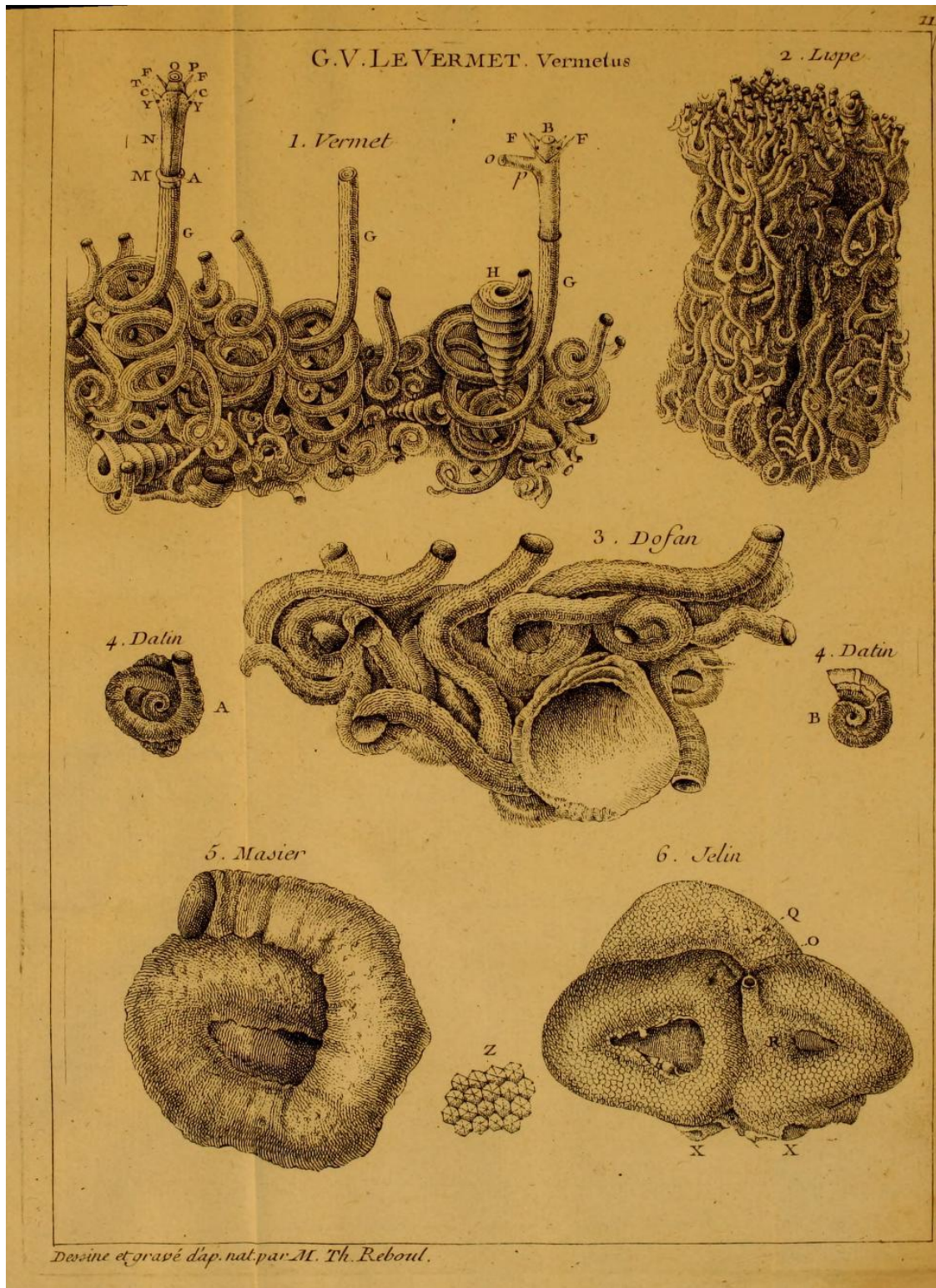


Figure 26. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate XI from Michel Adanson's *Histoire naturelle du Sénégal: Coquillages, Avec la Relation abrégée d'un Voyage fait en ce pays, pendant les années 1749, 50, 51, 52 & 53* (Paris, 1757).

Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

*Ces plantes sont réduites à moitié de leur proportion naturelle.
Dessiné d'après nat et gravé par M^{lle} Th. Reboul. Vien.*

Figure 27. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, Plate II for Anne-Claude-Philippe de Tubières, Comte de Caylus, *Dissertation sur le papyrus* (1758), Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

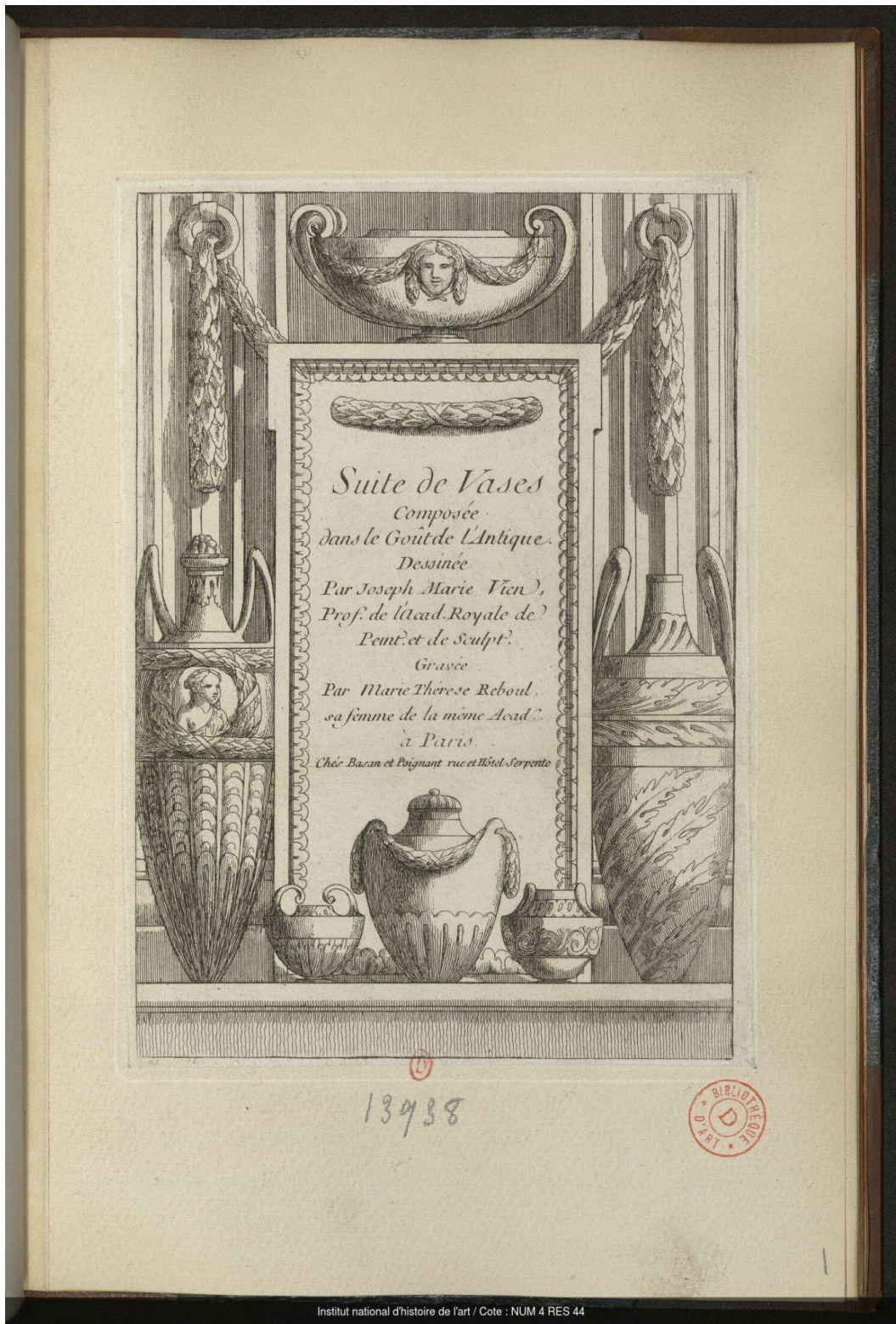


Figure 28. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, after Joseph-Marie Vien, Frontispiece from *Suite des Vases Composées dans le Goût de l'Antique*, 1760. Institut national d'histoire de l'art.



Figure 29. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, after Joseph-Marie Vien, Plate VI from *Suite des Vases Composées dans le Goût de l'Antique*, 1760. Institut national d'histoire de l'art.



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Figure 30. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, after Joseph-Marie Vien, Plate IV from *Suite des Vases Composées dans le Goût de l'Antique*, 1760. Institut national d'histoire de l'art.



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Figure 31. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, after Joseph-Marie Vien, Plate IX from *Suite des Vases Composées dans le Goût de l'Antique*, 1760. Institut national d'histoire de l'art.



Figure 32. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Portrait de Madame Vien*, ca. 1760.
Oil on canvas. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.



Figure 33. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Saint Jérôme*, 1751.
Oil on canvas, 98.7 x 135.8 cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims.



Figure 34. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Sweet Melancholy*, 1756.
Oil on canvas, 68 x 55 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art.



Figure 35. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Young Greek Woman Holding a Canary on Her Finger*, ca. 1760.
Oil on canvas. Private collection.



Figure 36. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Two Pigeons on a Tree Branch*, 1762.
Watercolor brush and pen and ink heightened with white, 0.31 x 0.375 m.
Département des Arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre.



Figure 37. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Portrait of Jean-Marie Vien, Son of the artist*, ca. 1783.
Oil on canvas, 46 x 37.5 cm. Private collection.



Figure 38. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Chardonneret cherchant à prendre un papillon*, 1765.
Watercolor and pastel. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.



Figure 39. Marie-Thérèse Reboul Vien, *Fleurs dans un vase de cristal*.
Watercolor and pastel. Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

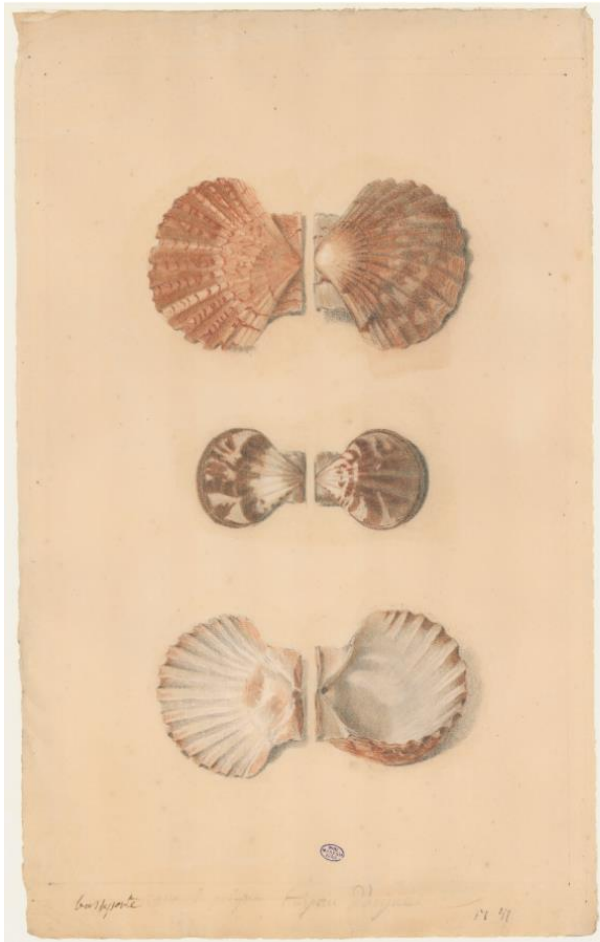


Figure 40. Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (1701-1780), *Pectenidae, Patella*, 1747.
Red chalk on paper. Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris.



Figure 41. Anne Vallayer-Coster, *Panaches de mer, lithophytes et coquilles*, 1769.
Oil on canvas, 1.3 x 0.97 m. Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Figure 42. Joseph-Marie Vien, *Mars and Venus*, 1768.
Oil on canvas, 225.5 x 151 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.