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SCHRÖDER, Johann Heinrich

Meiningen 1757–1812

Schröder, also spelt Schrötter, Schröter; his early work shows the influence of Johann Philipp Bach, who may have taught him. However by 1778 he had become a pupil of J. H. Tischbein at Kassel, where he exhibited two works, as a "Junge Maler", in the Akademie show in 1780: one a pastel portrait, the other a Cleopatra, after Titian (medium unspecified). He travelled to Hannover (c.1780–84), Braunschweig (Hofmaler, 1785), Frankfurt, Mannheim, Dresden (1786), Kassel (1787, returning in 1804), Berlin (1789–92 and 1793–1806). His first trip to Berlin was mentioned in a letter of 1.1789 from Charlotte Herzogin von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel to her sister-in-law, Elisabeth Christine Königin von Preußen (q.v.), in which she asks her to let Schröder make her portrait in pastel: this was done, together with a pastel of the late king (Friedrich der Große) as a child, as Charlotte explains in her letter of thanks to Elisabeth Christine, 4.v.1789:

C'est véritablement le chef-d'œuvre de Schröder et je lui sais beaucoup de grâce d'avoir si bien réussi. – L'attention que la jeune Reine marque à Votre majesté, en lui donnant le portrait du Roi défunt comme enfant lui fait vraiment honneur et marque une bonne intention à vouloir obliger ma chère sœur. Il m'a toujours paru que cette Princesse avoit un bon caractère, du moins je n'ai rien entendu de contraire à ce sujet et dans une famille je crois que les qualités du coeur sont à préférer à tout le reste; tous ceux qui ont vu le portrait du Roi défunt comme enfant l'admirent.

Schröder was in London 1792–93, following the marriage of the Prussian princess Friederike with the Duke of York; there he portrayed the royal family and exhibited three portraits of unnamed sitters at the Royal Academy (from 35 George Street, Portman Square, one of these was a portrait of the new Duchess of York). Returning to Germany via The Netherlands, he made a portrait of Königin Luise von Preußen in Berlin which was widely copied. He was in Braunschweig in 1801 before settling in his home town of Meiningen; there were further trips to Bad Pyrmont (1806) and Karlsruhe (1810–11). A series of portraits of the Baden royal family was executed in the 1800s.

In his report on the state of art in Braunschweig in 1804, T. C. Bruun Neergaard discussed Schröder:

Schröder est peintre de portraits de la Cour; il est souvent en voyage; il a connu mon ami Clemens en Angleterre. Il peint au pastel, et fait le contour de la tête avec une espèce de Physionotrace: la ressemblance ne peut donc pas lui manquer. Ses draperies sont légères; ses bras de femmes sont trop forts et les mains sont trop grosses en proportion du reste du corps. Il me montra le portrait de Spalding, qu'il a fait il y a quelques années, ainsi que celui de sa mère; la tête est digne de Gerhard Douw. Le portrait de la reine de Prusse, qui est au château [de Salzthalen], est bien. Il a rapport dernièrement de Berlin un très-beau portrait de Van Dyck à demi-corps. Les mains sont superbes.

In a letter to Charlotte, Frau von Schiller (24.v.1802), her brother-in-law, the librarian Wilhelm Reinwald, describes a visit to Schröder's studio while the artist was in Meiningen. He was working on the portrait of the Herzogin with the Erbprinz in her arms (apparently unrecorded). Praising the excellence of his likenesses and compositions, Reinwald seems to have asked for lessons ("Ich wünschte von ihm etwas ablernen zu können; er ist aber etwas eigen und durch die vielen Lobsprüche, die ihm schon ertheilt wurden, ziemlich verwöhnt, daß es nicht gut mit ihm umzugehen ist."). Schröder instead pointed his visitor to Dresden to see the Rosalbas, and praised also the work of Dora Stock. He claimed to have no interests outside painting and music (he had just bought a flute from Schiedmeyer for 2000 florins), and was even ignorant of art literature.

The Schiller–Reinwald correspondence also informs us that the artist died of dropsy, having suffered from the illness for over a year.

Schröder was the most talented German pastellist since Mengs. His work is typically precise and well drawn, small in scale, and derives much of its effect from the deep colours he used, his female sitters, loose hair and flowing white dresses with numerous light-catching folds constitute his hallmark elegance. Most of his portraits are oval, or in a drawn oval on a rectangular sheet; parchment was his preference to paper for almost all his works, which are rarely signed. On the few occasions where he ventured into larger scale works, the perspective is often faulty and the effect disappointing. His importance was recognised by his contemporaries (though Chodowiecki did not approve of him, perhaps because of his neatness).

Numerous copies of his work were presented in the Berlin Akademie exhibitions, and the proliferation of replicas and versions, occasionally by artists of independent stature (notably Schwartz), makes the cataloguing of his work particularly tricky. A large number of his portraits were engraved.

Monographic exhibitions

Schröder 1994: *Johann Heinrich Schröder, preussische Porträts*, Schloß Paretz, 3.IX.–31.X.1994. Cat. Helmut Börsch-Supan & Marieluise Spangenberg. V.q. *Museums-Journal (Berlin)*, VIII/3, 1994, pp. 86–87; *Weltkunst*, LXIV/19, 1994, p. 2521

Schröder 1995: *Der Meininger Porträtmaler Johann Heinrich Schröder (1757–1812)*, 1995. Ausstellung der Staatlichen Museen Meiningen im Schloß Elisabethenburg, 6.VII.–17.IX.1995. Cat. Marieluise Spangenberg

Bibliography

Bénézit, Börsch-Supan 1988; Brieger 1921; Bruun Neergaard 1806, p. 106; Chodowiecki 1921; Darmstadt 1914; Kircher 1940, pp. 110ff; Kircher 1958, pp. 35f; Leffeldt & Voss 1909, 1, p. 264; Meiningen 1904; Alfred Fieherr von Wolzogen & al., *Schiller's Beziehungen zu Eltern...*, Stuttgart, 1859, p. 281f; *Fürstl. Hessen-Casselische Staats- und Gelehrten-Zeitung*, 11.III.1780, p. 10