

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Anne-Marie-Joseph Archinard, comtesse de Gouvion
(Crest, Drôme 1777 – Paris 1811)

Self-portrait with a portfolio

Signed and dated lower left: *Nancy Archinard / Peint...L'an 3 de la R.F.*

Inscription on verso: *Portrait de fantaisie fait par Madame de gouvion Archinard*

Pastel

57 x 46.2 cm (22 ½ x 18 ¼ in.)

Literature:

N. Jeffares, *Web Dictionary of Pastellists*, no. J.1094.101

Provenance:

Private Collection, Belgium;

Nazareth, Belgium, Coronari Auctions, 27th March 2024, lot 264.



Wearing a straw hat crowned by a huge red ribbon, and holding her portfolio, Anne-Marie-Joseph Archinard, known as Nancy, looks confidently out at the viewer, sure in her status and abilities as an artist. The inscription seems to read *'l'an 3 de la R.L.'*, a reminder that the pastel was completed during the tumultuous years of the French Revolution. The pastel, drawn by Archinard at the tender age of eighteen, is the artist's only known extant work.

Born in 1777, Archinard was the daughter of a négociant from Crest, a small town in the Drôme department, in the Auvergne. In 1791, her father, Jean-Pierre, initially a supporter of the Revolution, was sent to the Assemblée Legislative in Paris as député de la Drôme. By this point Archinard was in Lyon, being educated along with her sister, and it was there that she first met Mlle de Saussure, with whom she would go on to conduct a remarkable correspondence regarding her experiences during the Revolution. Archinard's passionate letters, written during her early adolescence, reveal her to be an ardent revolutionary. In them she describes herself as *'une ennemie irreconciliable des aristocrates'*.¹

In 1806, in Crest, Archinard married Louis-Jean-Baptiste Gouvion (1752-1823), twenty-five years her senior. Gouvion was a relatively distinguished Revolutionary and Napoleonic general, named a senator and elevated to *comte* during the Empire period. The couple were held in esteem, making appearances at the imperial court. Gouvion later also found favour under the returning Bourbons and was named to the Chamber of Peers in the French Parliament. Archinard was sadly to pass away in 1811, only five years after her marriage.

After her death, protracted litigation arose between Gouvion and Archinard's brother Pierre-Lucrétius, concerning the considerable debt of 50,000 francs owed by the latter to the former. This eventually led to the conviction of Pierre-Lucrétius for having forged documents that purported to forgive his debt. The case was widely reported in France.

It seems that Archinard practiced her art as an amateur, for herself and for her family, rather than for any professional purposes, given that there are no Salon entries for her, or indeed any other exhibition. Whatever the case, the present work demonstrates her to be a deft draughtswoman, confident with both line and colour. She presumably learned to draw, along with Mlle de Saussure, at her school in Lyon.

This is taken as a given, since instruction in drawing was a quite common occurrence in the schooling of well-off girls at the time, though is also revealed in a letter of 1792, written just after Archinard had visited Versailles. Displaying her usual royalist scorn, Archinard recounts that she had seen a head in red chalk in the Queens' Chamber of the Trianon, done by the princess Marie-Thérèse, and claims that it is *'not worthy of even the earliest sketches done by the friends from Lyon'*, though it was *'not bad for the daughter of a queen'*!²

Compositionally, Archinard's self-portrait is very much in keeping with other near contemporary examples in pastel, in particular the work of Vigée-Lebrun, Capet (fig. 1) or Labille-Guiard (fig. 2). Above all, as per Neil Jeffares, Capet's 1784 self-portrait in oils (fig. 3)

¹ J. Chavennes, *'Impressions d'une jeune patriote sous la Révolution'*, *Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse*, Lausanne 1873, XLVI, pp. 199.

² *Ibid*, p. 200, *'elle ne valait pas les premières ébauches faites par les amis de Lyon'* and *'ce n'était pas mal pour la fille d'un roi'*.

should be mentioned in relation to the present work, with its numerous visual parallels. How Archinard may have seen Capet's work is not known.



Fig. 1, Marie-Gabrielle Capet, *Self-portrait*, pastel, 72 x 58 cm, musée Antoine-Lecuyer, Saint Quentin



Fig. 2, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Self-portrait (?)*, c. 1783, pastel, 72 x 58 cm, Private Collection

The decision to depict herself in a straw bonnet, with its strong connection to Marie-Antoinette and Vigée-Lebrun, seems a little strange for such a zealous revolutionary. It seems unlikely that Archinard was unaware of the connection and though she goes on to rail against the chaos engendered by the Revolution in her letters of 1793, her anti-royalist tendencies remain intact, so the choice of hat is perhaps simply a reflection of her desire to associate herself with Capet's work.³



Fig. 3, Gabrielle Capet, *Self-portrait*, 1784, oil on canvas, Private Collection

³ Her father however did later regret the Revolution. See J. Brun-Durand, *Dictionnaire biographique et bibliographique de la Drôme*, Grenoble 1900, vol. I, p.30.