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Jessica L. Fripp, *Portraiture and Friendship in Enlightenment France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2020. xiv +260. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781644532010; \$99.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781644532027.

Review by Emma Barker, The Open University (UK).

French painting of the eighteenth century is largely devoid of overt celebrations of friendship. The book under review here includes only one incontrovertible example of the type of picture generally known as a friendship portrait, that is, one featuring the likenesses of two or more individuals drawn together by shared interests and affective bonds rather than by any more formal relationship. Nevertheless, as Jessica Fripp demonstrates, the rhetoric of friendship informed the practice of portraiture in France during this period in significant ways. Conversely, by focusing on portraiture, she is able to shed light on the crucial role that friendship played in the professional and personal lives of artists during this period.

The artists with whom Fripp is concerned are the members of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, from its foundation in 1648 until the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789. In this respect, she follows in the footsteps of Hannah Williams, who, in her study of how the Academy functioned as a community, takes portraiture as her principal source for the lived experience of its members.<sup>[1]</sup> As well as considering official uses of portraiture within the institution, Williams discusses unofficial portraits as a means by which academicians negotiated their personal relationships with each other. Fripp extends this type of approach by considering artists' friendships not only with their colleagues but also with people outside the Academy. Moreover, whereas Williams emphasises the difficulty of forging an intimate and equal friendship within the hierarchical structures of the Academy, Fripp argues that friendship played an integral role in the self-understanding of the institution. Her aim is to explore the tensions between the idealized conception of friendship upheld by the Academy and the practice of friendship in the lives of its members.

The book is structured into four well-balanced chapters, each of which explores a distinct aspect of the theme. The first analyses the significance of friendship within the Academy and its relevance to the practice of criticism. Fripp focuses on two lectures delivered during the first half of the century by a father and son, Antoine and Charles Coypel, both history painters who became directors of the Academy. Drawing on classical models of friendship derived from Aristotle and Cicero, the Coypels characterised the relationship as a virtuous one, based on a shared readiness to sacrifice personal interest to the general good. The notion that friendship was conterminous with membership of the Academy served to enhance the institution's social prestige and to

reinforce its cohesiveness and stability. The academic ideal of friendship was challenged, however, by the rise of a new style of art criticism, exemplified by Étienne La Font de St Yenne's *Réflexions sur quelques causes de l'état présent de la peinture en France* (1747). Whereas the Coypels insisted that the only source of advice on which artists could rely was a disinterested friend, such as could be found among fellow academicians, La Font argued the most reliable judges of art were those whose disinterestedness was guaranteed by their distance from the professional practice of art.

This chapter goes on to discuss the way that the notion of friendship was harnessed by Salon critics to justify their own endeavours. A review might, for example, take the form of a letter to a friend. However, the word could also be used to discredit criticism, as does *Le Visionnaire*, an anonymous pamphlet review of the Salon of 1779 by "a friend of the arts" (p. 24). Fripp offers an illuminating analysis of this text, which, as she shows, underlines the incompatibility of friendship and criticism, through the figure of a personified goddess of criticism, who embodies the outsider view that the Academy and its allies so resented. It would have been worth noting that this pamphlet was, unsurprisingly, believed at the time to have been written by an artist. [2]

Chapter two discusses the use of portraiture for the purpose of publicizing friendships by two artists, the pastellist Maurice Quentin de la Tour and the engraver Charles-Nicolas Cochin, at the Salon of 1753. Both enhanced their reputation in that year by exhibiting numerous portraits of those whom they claimed as friends, whether fellow artists, or writers and other well-known figures whom they met in the salons of hostesses such as Mme Geoffrin. Associating portraiture with friendship also enabled artists to counter growing criticism of the genre on the grounds that it was a lucrative practice that catered to female vanity. In this context, friendship was construed with reference to Enlightenment understandings of sociability as a form of commerce distinct from an economic exchange motivated by greed. The public display of friendship at the Salon also served to justify the practice of portraiture by aligning it with the new phenomenon of celebrity, central to which was public interest in the private life of famous individuals. La Tour's bust-length pastels and Cochin's drawn medallion portraits both catered to this interest by offering the illusion of intimacy with their sitters. In each case, the critics responded by characterizing the portraits as the artist's personal tribute to the nation's great men, disregarding the profit motive involved.

In this chapter, Fripp draws productively on the work of historians such as Daniel Gordon, Antoine Lilti and David Bell. [3] There are a number of points that could have done with greater elaboration, however. For one thing, the pastel that she identifies as the portrait of the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne that La Tour exhibited in 1747 has more often been identified as one exhibited in 1763. [4] Indeed, the caption for the illustration of it bears the later date. Moreover, Fripp later describes this pastel as being typical of the looser style that La Tour developed in the 1750s. In other words, the earlier dating causes problems for her argument that are not fully resolved. Likewise, the claim that the distinctive *touche* seen in La Tour's later work offers a stylistic counterpart to the informal *déshabillé* worn by some of the artists whom he portrayed needs fuller development. Fripp suggests that this looser style brought both artist and sitter closer to the viewer, but also quotes a critic who remarked that, with pastels featuring such bold strokes of pigment, "one should not look at them up close" (p. 55). Rather than promoting intimacy, it might be argued, this style aligns the artist—that is, both La Tour himself and his sitters—with the notion of genius, thereby setting them apart from ordinary mortals. Not only

was a loose handling of paint associated with genius, but so too, it seems, was *déshabillé* in (male) portraiture, since it was largely reserved for artists, writers, and the like.[5]

Throughout the book, Fripp draws attention to the role of gender in the rhetoric of friendship and its implications for women's professional and personal lives. Friendship was said to be possible only between men, since they alone were capable of the virtuous, rational behaviour that it required. Nevertheless, women were admitted to membership of the Academy, albeit in small numbers, during the eighteenth century. The third chapter therefore considers two female academicians, Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun and Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, both of whom exhibited portraits that put their friendships on display in the Salons of the 1780s. Building on the work of feminist scholars such as Mary Sheriff, Melissa Hyde and Laura Auricchio, Fripp argues that the supposed rivalry between Vigée-Le Brun and Labille-Guiard was a fiction typical of the delegitimization of female friendship during this period.[6] She acknowledges that the two women's career paths and social networks were very different but suggests that these differences were reinforced by their contrasting critical reception. The first impression created by their submissions to the Salon of 1783, at which both artists made their debut, decisively shaped their respective reputations. Whereas Labille-Guiard was praised for her portraits of a network of male academicians that conformed to contemporary conceptions of true (masculine) friendship, Vigée-Lebrun's portraits of aristocratic women were tarred with stereotypes about the superficiality and insincerity of female friendship.

However, Fripp further argues, a later painting by Labille-Guiard presents female friendship in a highly positive light. *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils*, exhibited in 1785, avoided the strictures directed at Vigée-Lebrun's portraits because, rather than evoking the public world of aristocratic sociability, it assimilated friendship to bourgeois models of domesticity. The physical closeness of the three female figures endows the scene with a familial character that is reinforced by the inclusion of Augustin Pajou's bust of Labille-Guiard's father. Moreover, though the point is not actually made in the book, the composition undoubtedly derives from the tradition of artist's family portraits.[7] The remainder of chapter three considers portraits by both Labille-Guiard and Vigée-Lebrun of their male associates, largely but not exclusively from within the Academy. It is a pity, however, that no mention is made of Vigée-Lebrun's most overt celebration of friendship, her portrait of two aristocratic widows, the marquise de Pezay and the marquise de Rougé, accompanied by the latter's young sons. Not only is it another portrait that validates female friendship by associating it with familial relationships, but, when it was shown at the Salon of 1787, the maternal theme offered a connection to the artist herself since Vigée-Lebrun exhibited a self-portrait with her daughter the same year.[8]

Whereas chapters two and three are both concerned with the public display of portraiture at the Salon, the final chapter considers works of art intended for a more limited audience, in the context not of Paris but of Rome. The pivotal figure is François-André Vincent, who, as a *pensionnaire* at the Academy's Roman outpost during the 1770s, produced inventive portraits of himself and his fellow students. Fripp persuasively argues that the close bonds that these artists forged with each other while in Rome provided the motivation for an experimental approach. Her argument centres on a remarkable series of caricatural portrait drawings by Vincent and other French *pensionnaires*. She proposes that they need to be understood in relation to academic pedagogy, as a playfully exaggerated version of the practices of life drawing inculcated into the artists. She further suggests that the exaggeration of the figures' distinguishing characteristics allowed the drawings to function as souvenirs of the artists' stay in Rome, reflecting as it did the closeness

to each other that they enjoyed at the time. The carefully nuanced discussion might, however, have made more of the fact that so many of the caricatured figures are seen in profile or from behind.

This chapter ends with a consideration of the one incontrovertible example of a friendship portrait as such to feature in the book. Vincent's *Portrait of Three Men*, which he painted in Marseille while on the way back to Paris in 1775, commemorates a reunion between the artist and his travelling companion, the architect Pierre Rousseau, with a Flemish painter, Philippe-Henri Coclers van Wyck, whom they had known in Rome. As Fripp points out, the main precedents for this composition lie in close-cropped triple portraits celebrating bonds between artists forged through travel to or from Italy, typically by Italian or British artists, which, in turn, derive from the tradition of friendship portraits that can be traced to sixteenth-century Italy. Most of these precedents have previously been cited by Jean-Pierre Cuzin and Elizabeth Mansfield, but Fripp makes an interesting new link between the fanciful costumes featured in Vincent's painting and practices of fancy dress in Rome at carnival time, in which the *pensionnaires* participated.[9] Again, some reference to the notion of genius would have been germane to the discussion, since the artists' costumes could be seen not only to testify to their camaraderie but also to define them as a special category, outside ordinary society.

An epilogue extends the discussion into the revolutionary era, which brought new challenges for both friendship and portraiture. Nevertheless, portraiture continued to be used to consolidate and display friendships. As Fripp earlier pointed out, the period after 1789 saw the emergence of new types of group portraiture for this purpose. In this context, she might have mentioned the well-known painting of a gathering in the salon of Mme Geoffrin that the Empress Josephine commissioned in 1814 from Anicet-Charles-Gabriel Lemonnier, who, in his youth, had been a member of Vincent's circle in Rome.[10] This retrospective celebration of the friendship networks of Enlightenment France casts into relief the absence of any equivalent painting dating from the pre-revolutionary era.

Overall, this book displays some of the weaknesses but many more of the strengths of a study tightly organised around a single interpretative angle. It makes a compelling case for the significance of friendship to the practice of portraiture in eighteenth-century France and, in so doing, enriches our understanding of the importance of social networks in artists' lives. It constitutes a valuable addition to the still rather limited literature on French portraiture of this period. One can only hope that it will encourage other scholars to pursue research in this area.

## NOTES

[1] Hannah Williams, *Académie royale: A History in Portraits* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

[2] Christian Michel, "Lettres adressées par Charles-Nicolas Cochin fils à Jean-Baptiste Descamps 1757-1790," *Archives de l'art français, nouvelle période* 28 (1986): 53.

[3] Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Antoine Lilti, *The Invention of Celebrity: 1750-1850*, trans. Lynn Jeffress (Cambridge and Malden, Mass: Polity, 2017); David A. Bell, *The Cult*

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*of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[4] For this dating, see Xavier Salmon, *Pastels du musée du Louvre XVIIe -XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Hazan, 2018), pp. 172-173. For a rebuttal, see Neil Jeffares, “The Louvre pastels catalogue: errata and observations,” *Neil Jeffares*, 12 July 2018,” <https://neiljeffares.wordpress.com/2018/07/12/the-louvre-pastels-catalogue-errata-and-observations/>.

[5] On genius, *touche*, and the aesthetics of the sketch, see Mary Sheriff, *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990): 136-144. On informality and genius, see Desmond Shawe-Taylor, *Genial Company: The Theme of Genius in Eighteenth-Century British Portraiture* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Art Gallery, 1987): 34-36.

[6] Mary Sheriff, *The Exceptional Woman: Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Cultural Politics of Art* (Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Melissa Hyde, “Women and the Visual Arts in the Age of Marie-Antoinette,” in *Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 75-93; Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: An Artist in Revolution* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2009).

[7] Compare such a portrait by Louis-Michel Van Loo; see Williams, *Académie Royale*, p. 186, Plate 4.9.

[8] Paula Rea Radisich, “Que peut définir les femmes?: Vigée-Lebrun's Portraits of an Artist,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25 (1992): 446.

[9] Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *François-André Vincent 1748-1816: Entre Fragonard et David* (Paris: Arthena, 2013), pp. 81-83; Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *The Perfect Foil: François-André Vincent and the Revolution in French painting* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), pp. 69-70.

[10] Antoine Lilti, *Le Monde des salons: sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au xviiiè siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), p. 15.

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