Louis-Michel van Loo’s Portrait of the Medal Engraver and Goldsmith Jacques Roettiers – Artistic Dynasties, Professional Pride and Interconnectivity in the Nationalmuseum Collections

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When Louis-Michel van Loo (1707–1771) painted the portrait of Jacques Roettiers (1707–1784) in 1735, they were both 28 years old and had both just started out on very promising artistic careers. They were also both products of artistic families that had been working in their respective fields for several generations. Louis-Michel’s father and teacher was Jean-Baptiste van Loo, his uncle Carle van Loo, his grandfather Louis-Abraham van Loo and his great-grandfather Jacob van Loo, all of them renowned painters. The van Loos were of Dutch origin, while the Roettiers were Flemish, and while artists from the former family were mainly active as portraitists, those from the latter worked primarily as medal engravers. Artists from both families also established themselves in several different European countries apart from France, including England and Spain.

**Louis-Michel van Loo’s portraiture – family tradition and its legacy**

Although van Loo’s work, especially the traditional and yet striking quality of his portraiture, has been recognised by succeeding generations, it was neglected or fell out of favour for quite some time,

Fig. 1 Louis-Michel van Loo (1707–1771), *The Engraver and Goldsmith Jacques Roettiers* (1707–1784), signed 1735. Oil on canvas, 81.5 × 65 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund 2019. Nationalmuseum, NM 7539.
been formed in a kind of interplay between his Dutch heritage, the tutelage of his father and his French academic studies. Louis-Michel’s father, Jean-Baptiste, had studied under Benedetto Luti (1666–1724) in Rome and was active in Italy for several years, during which time he took on his son as student. Later on, Louis-Michel was admitted to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris, where he won a premier prix in 1725. Louis-Michel’s artistic background and combination of influences laid the groundwork for the development of a popular style that was to influence

perhaps partly as a consequence of the prevailing influence of the taste of the Goncourt brothers, who did not include van Loo in their overviews of French 18th-century art. Christine Buckingham Rolland, Louis-Michel van Loo’s only modern biographer to date, also attributes the later lack of interest in his work, or outright downplaying of its specific importance, to the very fact that, just like his sitter, he was part of a commercial workshop family with long-held royal dynastic associations, inadvertently resulting in straightforward misattributions between his work and that of his relatives and therefore in a certain artistic anonymity. According to Buckingham Rolland, the conservative traditionalism represented by the subjects of van Loo’s commissions, moreover, did not lend itself to the modern conception of supposed great artistic output and genius, and therefore failed to excite enough interest to be the subject of serious studies.

However, there is no denying the craftsmanship of van Loo’s work, and in painting Roettiers’s portrait (fig. 1), he brings to bear all the inherited, as well as inherent, influences and stylistic traits which had been formed in a kind of interplay between his Dutch heritage, the tutelage of his father and his French academic studies. Louis-Michel’s father, Jean-Baptiste, had studied under Benedetto Luti (1666–1724) in Rome and was active in Italy for several years, during which time he took on his son as student. Later on, Louis-Michel was admitted to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris, where he won a premier prix in 1725. Louis-Michel’s artistic background and combination of influences laid the groundwork for the development of a popular style that was to influence

Fig. 2 Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), Still Life with Dead Game and a Silver Tureen on a Turkish Carpet, signed 1738. Oil on canvas, 120 × 171 cm. Transferred from Kongl. Museum 1866 (purchase: the Royal Palace, Stockholm 1747). Nationalmuseum, NM 870.
French portraiture for quite some time. The colour scheme of the picture is quite bold, but its application soft, not unlike pastel portraits. The green of the background contrasts nicely with the lilac of Roettiers’s coat. In his hand, he proudly holds some of the tools of the medal engraver’s trade: a graver and a wax study to be used for a portrait medal or medallion. A strong feeling for craftsmanship, as well as professional and ancestral pride, was obviously shared by portraitist and sitter. Roettiers exudes youth and strong self-confidence, perhaps reflecting his pride in the legacy not only of his father, the medal engraver Norbert Roettiers (1665–1727), but also of his mother Winifred Clarke, niece to John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough. That Roettiers was portrayed with the accoutrements of his forebears, an ancient tradition of course in portraiture, must serve to underline his belief in the value of tradition, especially since by 1735 he was well into a new successful career as a goldsmith.

Jacques Roettiers – from medal engraver to goldsmith

Norbert Roettiers had reached the height of his profession in England, where he was appointed engraver-general to the Royal Mint in 1695. However, Norbert and his family were Jacobites, and later in the 1690s they relocated to Paris, where he now came to hold the position of engraver-general at the French mint. His son Jacques was admitted to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, where he excelled at and was awarded a premier prix for drawing, as well as being made a pensionnaire du Roi at the French Academy in Rome. He never took up that position, however and, at least at first, followed instead in his father’s professional footsteps, even going back to London and for a short time in 1732 working as an engraver at the Royal Mint. Jacques was soon to return to Paris, where he embarked on a different professional career, becoming one of the foremost goldsmiths active there in the middle of the 18th century. Although he lacked a formal apprenticeship, he was made a master in 1733. Again, family certainly came to play a part here, as in January of 1734 Roettiers married Marie Anne Besnier, the daughter of Nicolas Besnier (1686–1754), who for sixteen years had been official goldsmith to the king. However, Roettiers had actually bought Besnier’s studio in the Place du Carrousel as early as November 1732, more than a year before he married his daughter. From 1737 Roettiers himself attained the position of official goldsmith to the king, albeit initially under Besnier’s supervision.

Interdisciplinary interconnectivity in the Nationalmuseum collections – Roettiers, Oudry and the hunt in painting and in silver

Among Roettiers’s most famous creations are silver services made for Louis, Dauphin of France, for Louis Henri, Duke of Bourbon and Prince of Condé, and, in 1735–38, for Lord Berkeley. A spectacular tureen from the last of these services is pictured in a famous still life of the spoils of the hunt by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), bought for the Royal Palace in Stockholm in 1747 and today in the collections of the Nationalmuseum (fig. 2). This painting has been described as Oudry’s celebration of Roettiers’s work, and, in turn, hunting themes from the former’s paintings are typically found in the decoration of Roettiers’s silver services, like his innovative masterpiece made for the Duke of Bourbon, now in the collections of the Louvre. The two were friends and, just like Roettiers, Oudry mainly worked on royal commissions, also directly with decorative arts through his involvement with the royal tapestry manufactory at Beauvais.

As director, Oudry also engaged Roettiers’s father-in-law Besnier at the manufactory. Of the silver service made for the Duke of Bourbon, only the surtout and two candelaabra are known to exist today. The typical surtout would commonly serve a practical purpose, for example incorporating holders for salt and pepper cellars. However, Roettiers forgoes this altogether in his endeavour to capture the feel of Oudry’s work, in this case of one painting in particular, Loup pris au piège, “Wolf Caught in a Trap”, for which there is a preparatory drawing in the Nationalmuseum collections (fig. 3). In this work, Roettiers creates one of the foremost examples of French rococo. Painters like Oudry and, for example, François Desportes (1661–1743), as well as silversmiths such as Roettiers and Thomas Germain (1673–1748), could thus associate themselves with each other’s works in a variety of interesting ways. In the collections of the Nationalmuseum there is also a still life by Desportes which depicts parts of Germain’s famous Penthièvre-Orléans service, also decorated with hunting motifs (fig. 4).

Thus, apart from being an excellent example of his portraiture, Louis-Michel van Loo’s portrait of Jacques Roettiers also holds a special interdisciplinary place in the collections of the Nationalmuseum.
ACQUISITIONS/LOUIS-MICHEL VAN LOO’S PORTRAIT OF JACQUES ROETTIERS

Fig. 4 François Desportes (1661–1743), *Silver Tureen with Peaches*, c. 1740. Oil on canvas, 91 × 117 cm. Transferred from Kongl. Museum 1866 (Tessin–Fredrik I, 1749). Nationalmuseum, NM 800.

Depicting one of the greatest creators of French rococo silverware, whose own work, albeit in painted form, was already indirectly represented in the collections, it further serves to underline the interconnectivity of French artists active in different disciplines around the middle of the 18th century.

Notes:
3. Ibid., pp. 2–7. Especially through the influential positions van Loo was to attain, for example as painter to the kings of both Spain and France. He also succeeded his uncle as director of the Académie Royale’s important École Royale des Élèves Protégés.
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12. Grate 1994, pp. 112–113, cat. no. 120.

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