Portrait Engraving in 17th Century France

Katherine Golde

Philippus de Champaigne Bruxellensis Pictor Regius, et Regiæ Pictorum Academiæ Rector: Eximiæ hujus artis excellentiâ, et christianâ pietate æque insignis

G. Edelinck sculpsit 1676.

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As art developed in the seventeenth century engravers became an important part of the artistic landscape. Etchings had the ability to be multiplied in a way that paintings did not. In a European social environment where portraits were vital it was advantageous for artists to develop their portrait etching skills. This paper discusses the origin of the relationships of Philippe de Champagne, the subject of this work of art, and his connection to Gerard Edelinck, the artist. I will also examine the reason for creation, usage, and meaning of an etched portrait, specifically. It is likely that the etched portraits were often used to generate an album amicorum. An album amicorum was originally, from Germany, a collection of blank papers meant for a visitors' signature or coat of arms. It later developed into a collection of small, etched portraits that a person would use to be able to prove their friendship with those who were represented in the portraits.

Edelinck's engraving after a self-portrait by Philippe de Champaigne is widely considered his masterpiece. This label is quite an achievement considering art historians' reluctance to agree on a single piece as an artist's greatest work. The etching is a great example of the difference in production between the paintings and engravings. The original self-portrait of Philippe de Champaigne was most likely done in 1668.[VIII] The first of the engraved copies by Edelinck was done in 1676 with 163 known copies to follow.[VIII] It is an understatement to say that it would have taken de Champaigne much longer than the eight years between its original creation and the first print to produce 164 *painted* copies of the piece. It would have been much more economical to have Edelinck engrave and reproduce his portrait as he did.

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[VIII]Unknown Author
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The engraving of Philippe de Champaigne's self-portrait is truly intricate. Edelinck was clearly a master of the craft as exemplified by his ability to create realistic differences between fabrics, natural material, paper, and even the church that is visible in the distant background of the piece. de Champaigne's hands and face are probably the most remarkable features. Edelinck was able to create shadowing and wrinkling that is wonderfully realistic, it even looks like de Champaigne needs to shave. Even more amazing is the look on his face but especially in his eyes. He stares longingly and meaningfully out of the portrait, almost as if he means to tell us the importance of this moment. Edelinck continues to prove his mastery as one investigates the piece even more. Not only is de Champaigne's robe quite believably gathered and heavy but the shadowing of the background is so precise that even the church, approximately one-eighth the height of the entire picture, has appropriate shading on its towers. Truly though, the elements of de Champaigne himself are the most amazing.

As portrait artists gained popularity so did the engravers who worked for them. Etched portraits, "…with the development of the arts portraiture secured an increasingly important place".[VII] Engravers worked mainly from paintings and drawings of their predecessors and contemporary masters. The famous Flemish, Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens is said to be one of the first artists to recognize the usefulness of engravers.[VII] Unlike in paint, a whole series of engravings could be printed which multiplied "both publicity and clientèle for the artists concerned".[VII] During the seventeenth century, even

[VII]Wright pp.1098
[VII]Ibid. pp.1102
[VII]Ibid. pp.1098

an artist with a well-known patron had to rely on himself to promote his works. A patron would have advocated for an artist to his wealthy friends but art was increasingly accessible to the masses therefore developing a client base in the lower social classes was important. Plus, creating multiple copies of an engraving costs less than multiple copies of a painting therefore they could be sold to clientele with lesser wealth.

Paris had grown as a center for engravers in the 17th century. Parisian and foreign engravers living in Paris developed a new technique, probably influenced by the great painters Van Dyck and Rubens. This technique, the staple of "the portrait-engraver proper," was less concerned with minute details and rather focused on the subject's head.[VII] For example, one of the most famous Parisian portrait-engravers of this time is Robert Nanteüil.[VII] His technique used closer, more vigorous line than past techniques plus short "flicks" especially on the forehead and cheeks of his subjects. This added delicacy, greater tone, and precision to his works.[VII] Nanteüil studied under Philippe de Champagne, the subject of my object, and Abraham Bosse. Under these men in particular he learned to study the personality of the sitter and to master engraving technique before giving up painting altogether and devoting to the craft. His first plates in Paris date to 1648.[VII]

Philippe de Champaigne was trained as a landscape painter in Brussels under Jacques Fouquier (Foucquières) before moving to Paris 1621. There he worked with Lallemant, Poussin, and Nicolas Duchesne, succeeding Duchesne as painter of the Queen

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[VII]Wright pp.1099
[VII]Ibid. pp.1108
[VII]Ibid. pp.1100
[VII]Ibid. pp. 1108

Mother. His own style was unique although Rubens and Van Dyck influenced him. Evidence suggests that de Champaigne was studying Roman statues, simultaneously with yet independently of Poussin. In his early works he maintained the Baroque style but later, when he became a follower of Jansenism (the most severe form of Catholicism in the 17th century) while at Port Royal, a Jansenist convent, he rejected the Baroque style. The art historian Anthony Blunt has stated that de Champaigne "abandons his near-Baroque energy, but never quite attains the classicism of Poussin, at which he seems to be aiming".[1]

Despite abandoning a technique in which he was proficient, he remained innovative. He invented a kind of "half-length" formula for portraiture. The subject is seen from the waist up, with his hand on a ledge of some sort. The style very closely resembles Flemish 15th century and Venetian 16th century models. de Champaigne's modification had sitters in a window with their hand on the sill. His following of Jansenism is reflected in his restraint of depiction. His subjects mostly wear black, appear with their head and body mostly to the front, have no suggestion of contrapposto, and are backed in grey. Any portraits in Jansenism were surprising because the movement aggressively disapproved of "outward show" as portraits were posthumous and regarded as images of 'saints'.[1] Evidence that de Champaigne never truly rid himself of Baroque ideas.

By the end of the 17th century, an Academy of portrait-engravers was formed in France. Nanteüil's technique and renown at the Academy made the French School

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[1]Blunt pp.254
[1]Ibid. pp.256

recognized as the first in Europe. Interestingly enough, the creation of an established

academy caused engraving original portraits to become all but extinct and the design

became "uninspired and mechanical as time went on".[VII] The first academies of art of any

kind were created with the desire of artists to identify themselves in the pursuit of

scholastic art making rather than along side their "craft-based cousins".[III] For the entirety

of history artists have worked to be seen in a more prestigious light by the wealthy and

powerful as well as the general public. While craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths,

and bronze casters remained in lower statuses, artists rose in the ranks of society. But

there was never a time when artists did not actively make sure not to fall, once again, to

the level of the laborer.

     Nanteüil's significance continues owing to the fact that Edelinck studied under

him in Paris. Gerard Edelinck, the artist who created this engraved portrait of Philippe de

Champaigne, originally from the Netherlands, settled in Paris in the mid to late

seventeenth century, as did many young Dutch artists. He was a very successful pupil of

Nanteüil's but went a step further to marry Nanteüil's niece in 1695.[VII] His career was

laden with recognition. He was engraver in ordinary to the King in 1672, naturalized in

1675, became member of the Academy in 1677, and a "chevalier Romain" by decree of

the Pope in 1695.[VII]

     It is likely that so many copies of the engraved portrait of Philippe de

Champaigne were made for distribution in album amicorum. Originating in Germany, the

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[VII]Wright pp.1113
[III]Duro pp.89
[VII]Wright pp.1111
[VII]Ibid. pp.1111

German name for an album amicorum is Schädtbücher, meaning "book causing mischief".[V] The Schädtbücher became a fad because of the growing number of young men attending university during the 14th and 15th centuries in which it was popular to befriend as many foreigners as possible. [VI, V] The books were originally clad with inscriptions and signatures of the people whom the owner befriended. In Italy they were entrusted with quotes of classic authors on friendship.[VI] The bookseller and printer Sigmund Freyerabend of Frankfurt am Main developed a book compiled of pictures rather than inscriptions. The combination of relatively cheap engravings and the popularity of proving friendship made the album amicorum a priority for many. It seems as though a person could have their portrait engraved and then have the picture printed several times over. These prints would then be distributed to one's friends, adding to their albums.

Pierre Crozat, a great financier and collector in Paris in the early 1700s, was becoming well versed in recueils.[II] Recueils were anthologies of reproductive engravings comparable to album amicorum. In 1721, Crozat together with P.J. Mariette, and influential connoisseur of the time, took it upon themselves to produce "bound volumes of prints after paintings and drawings".[II] Whether an album amicorum or a recueils, it would have been a stamp of elevated rank to have Philippe de Champaigne's portrait engraved into one's own book.

[V] O'Dell pp.31
[VI] Rosenthal pp. 619
[V] O'Dell pp.31
[VI] Rosenthal pp.624
[II] Crow pp.40
[II] Ibid. pp.40

As the artistic landscape of the seventeenth century expanded to include

engravers, Philippe de Champaigne saw a change to broaden his recognition through the

use of engraved copies of his work such as this by Gerard Edelinck. de Champaigne was

an artist of high esteem, carrying titles given to him from the King of France, the

Academy of Artists, and the Pope himself. To have Philippe de Champaigne's portrait

amongst those of one's friends would be to prove, not only that one was making friends

all over the world but also, that one was making important friends.

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