
Title of Object

The Comtesse d'Egmont Pignatelli in Spanish Costume

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Alexander Roslin

Country: France

Date of Object: 1763

File Created: 9/1/2016

Accession Number: 2006.33

Author of File: Janelle Christensen

Material/Medium: Oil on Canvas

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Paintings

Last Updated/Reviewed: 2/1/2017

Culture: French

Tour Topics

Group 1, Highlight 1600-1850, Trendsetting, Fashion/Style, Animals, Dog, Power/Status, Symbolism, Women, Artist/Patron, Beauty, Music, Rococo,

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

Describe what she is wearing.

What stands out to you?

Based on what you see, what is important to her?

If you had a portrait made of you, what objects or themes would you include to tell about yourself?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

A. This portrait is of Septimanie d'Egmont Pignatelli, daughter of Louis Armand, Duc de Richelieu. Renowned for her beauty, charisma, and intellect. Married at 16 to Don Casimir Pignatelli Count of Egmont, from an ancient noble house and one of the wealthiest men in Louis XV's court, died at 33 from TB, no children/heirs.

-Connection: the Duc de Richelieu was a notorious womanizer and the character of Valmont in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Dangerous Liaisons) is based on his exploits. (Wikipedia)

-Connection: Good friends of the French Enlightenment's literary titans, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Also a close friend of Louis XV's head mistress and patron of the arts, Madame de Pompadour. She also was a close friend of Sweden's King Gustav III, and they corresponded throughout her life.

*Connection: The Comtesse d'Egmont hosted many parties in a salon. Card games, alcohol, chocolate, and coffee until late in the night. In the late 18th century European cities witnessed a profound change in daily life. Parties were private affairs held in grand homes and salons until late at night. Candles illuminated the room and made the Rococo architectural elements dance throughout the evening.

-Connection to Frederick the Great (1712-1786), who is connected to Martin Luther. Her father was in command of a regiment sent to lift Frederick's siege on Prague during the 7 years war. His regiment had to stand down when the Austrian army defeated Frederick at Kolin, forcing him to withdraw from Bohemia. He was also the French Ambassador to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles VI during this time.

B. The Comtesse had close ties to Sweden and perhaps chose the artist, Alexander Roslin, at the suggestion of the ambassador. Roslin is from Sweden but spent a great deal of time in Europe, specifically France.

C. Alexander Roslin was a shining example of Rococo artistry and the use of oil as a primary media. In France he was referred to as "Roslin le Suédois" – Roslin the Swede, and even signed his paintings "Roslin Suédois"

D. Rococo art is characterized by ornate, decorative, and light stylizations with incorporated elements of architecture. Many of Roslin's paintings were distinguished by bright colors and vibrant depictions of fabric and jewels.

E. Rococo was a movement that began in France at the beginning of the 18th century and overlapping some with the late baroque period.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Iconography:

Pignatelli Pearls- wedding gift from her husband, Casimir Pignatelli, Comte d'Egmont

Spanish Costume- In the Spanish style with its raised collar, pearl swags, and slashed sleeves. Silver Spanish lace decorates the pillow under her arm. 18th century Iberian dress. Her husband has Spanish roots- specifically from the Spanish controlled region of Naples. Reference to his family's heritage.

Dog- Symbol of loyalty. The failure of the spaniel to gain her attention suggests her refinement and sensitivity to literature.

Guitar- reinforced the paintings Spanish themes and honored her husband, a grandee of Spain. She was also an accomplished musician and played the guitar. (Grandee: highest ranking members of Spanish nobility.)

Scenery- Landscape signals her allegiance to the philosophy of her friend Rousseau, who championed the natural goodness in people uncorrupted by society or it could be a reference to her retreat in Picardy, Château de Braisne. On the left of the painting, portrait of Madame de Pompadour.

Pose- mimics that of her friend Madame de Pompadour in portraits by François Boucher, as well as other notable women of the time who posed in a similar fashion. However it also suggests that she is comfortable at home and not in a position of entertaining or hosting.

Book- possibly a writing by her good friend, Rousseau?

Frame- hand-carved gilded. Custom designed for the portrait. Symbols of a happy marriage. Floral garlands, Cupid's bow and arrows. Torch and laurel wreath of Hymen. Suggesting that this painting was a matrimonial gift.

Painting is by Alexander Roslin (1718-1793) Swedish painter who traveled to Italy before eventually settling in France. Quickly found himself depicting members of France's elite society, eventually settling in as one of France's premier portrait painters of the time. Because of the patronage of wealthy families in Russia, France, Austria, Sweden, and Poland he was one of the wealthiest artists in Europe.

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

The Comtesse Septimanie d'Egmont Pignatelli (1740-1773) was one of the most intellectually astute and glamorous women of Parisian high society in the 1760s. Her father was the great French statesman, Louis Armand du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu (1696-1788), a trusted advisor to King Louis XV. At age fifteen, she married Casimir Pignatelli, Comte d'Egmont (1727-1801), the scion of two very ancient houses of European nobility, the Egmonts of the Netherlands and the Pignatellis of Naples and Aragon.

The premier hostess of the day, Madame Geoffrin, included Septimanie in her private weekly soirees for the literati and distinguished foreign visitors. The countess, in turn, sponsored many of the leading artistic figures of the Enlightenment, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. She would become a friend and mentor for King Gustav III of Sweden. The two maintained a regular correspondence, although her influence would be short-lived; she died from tuberculosis in 1773.

The countess probably selected Alexandre Roslin in 1763 as her portraitist at the suggestion of Baron Scheffer, the Swedish Ambassador to France. She is depicted in a fashionable Spanish-style gown, a reference to her husband's ancestry. Further emphasizing the Spanish theme is the guitar at her side, of which she was a gifted player. Her languid pose, the open book, and attentive spaniel had their precedents in François Boucher's celebrated portrait of the king's mistress, the Marquise de Pompadour (1721-64), which had exhibited to great acclaim in 1757.

The original hand-carved frame is an exceptional example of early neo-classical French furniture. The emblematic crown includes the torch of Hymen and the bow and quiver of Cupid, both allusions to matrimonial bliss and a confirmation that the picture was commissioned by her husband as a gift.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

PDF of the catalog on the painting, ALEXANDER ROSLIN AND THE COMTESSE D'EGMONT PIGNATELLI:
https://mia-catalogs.s3.amazonaws.com/PAS90094_Roslin_Catalog_2016PDF-smaller.pdf

Eighteenth-Century European Dress, Met Museum, essay at
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/eudr/hd_eudr.htm

The Cover (brief article), by Janet M. Torpy, MD, in JAMA:
<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/184881>

Excerpt from book, Marie-Antoinette, Her Early Youth (1770-1774), By Helen A. Youngusband
(description of Mia's painting), in google books:
<https://books.google.com/books?id=DkVBAAAIAAJ&pg=PA344&lpg=PA344&dq=septimanie+d'egmont+salon&source=bl&ots=ho5tL9mhqy&sig=-H2uSZCAZOnibaIOI8FYE7qObo0&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiutl7D46vPAhXs44MKHdC-DUgQ6AEIQzAF#v=onepage&q=septimanie%20d'egmont%20salon&f=false>

Mia Press Release: ALEXANDER ROSLIN AND THE COMTESSE D'EGMONT PIGNATELLI, August 22, 2008:
<https://new.artsmia.org/press/alexander-roslin-and-the-comtesse-degmont-pignatelli/>

Armand de Vignerot du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, and Comtesse, Wikipedia articles:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armand_de_Vignerot_du_Plessis and
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septimanie_d%27Egmont