

# Through the appraisal process: René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution<sup>1</sup>

Pamella Guerdat

## 'A Masterpiece Recovered'?

'Hence the object can produce meaning, possess a power of representation and act upon cognitive processes. More than meeting material and technical needs, the object signifies complex values, marks the identities of individuals and groups and evokes abstract ideas intended to fuel thought'<sup>2</sup>

In the spring of 1937, a chronicler with the *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* was musing over René Gimpel's (figure 1)\* latest acquisition: 'At the Gimpel Gallery on the Place Vendôme, a portrait of a seventeenth-century man [;] is it a self-portrait by Poussin?'<sup>3</sup> A few months later, in his Parisian gallery, the art dealer opened a monograph exhibition dedicated to just this one painting, to enhance its unique character. This temporary exhibition-event soon dispelled the equivocal echoes reported in the capital's press. Under the explicit title *A masterpiece recovered. Portrait of Nicolas Poussin painted by himself in Rome in 1649 and engraved by Pesne*, the

\* Due to the number and placing of images they may be found in a linked pdf [here](#).

<sup>1</sup> I especially would like to thank René Gimpel and the Gimpel Fils Gallery, who gave me the opportunity to study the *Self-Portrait* copy in London and the related files, as well as Dr. Roberto Contini (Gemäldegalerie) for his advice and for providing me with the archives in Berlin. I am also truly grateful to Valérie Kobi and Nicolas Galley for their valuable comments on my text. Lastly, my thanks go to John Lee for his translation. This contribution derives from my Ph.D. thesis (in progress) and draws on some reflections initiated during the panel *Connoisseurship – or Connoisseurs?* (CAA 104th, Annual Conference, 2016).

The present study is mainly based on René Gimpel archives, the Gemäldegalerie (Pointel *Self-Portrait*, inv. 1488) and Musée du Louvre (Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, inv. RF7302) records.

<sup>2</sup> 'Dès lors, l'objet peut produire du sens, posséder un pouvoir de représentation et agir sur les processus cognitifs. Plus que de répondre à des besoins matériels et techniques, l'objet signifie des valeurs complexes, marque les identités des individus et des groupes et évoque des idées abstraites destinées à nourrir la pensée', Laurier Turgeon, 'La mémoire de la culture matérielle et la culture matérielle de la mémoire', in Octave Debary and Laurier Turgeon, eds., *Objets et mémoires*, Paris: Éd. de la maison des sciences de l'homme, 2007, 19.

<sup>3</sup> 'Place Vendôme, à la Galerie Gimpel, un portrait d'homme du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle [;] est-il un portrait de Poussin par lui-même?', Unknown, 'Informations. Le carnet des Expositions', *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne*, 41:376, April 1937, 296.

occasion gave Paris society an opportunity to admire, now beyond any doubt, a previously unknown work by Nicolas Poussin that had only recently come to light.<sup>4</sup>

At the peak of his career, the painter of *The Shepherds of Arcadia* landed a twofold commission from his faithful patrons in Paris. In the years 1649–1650, the artist painted two self-portraits, one intended for Paul Fréart de Chantelou and the other for Jean Pointel. Less celebrated down history than the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* (figure 2, Musée du Louvre), the Pointel *Self-Portrait* remains more enigmatic owing to its checkered career.<sup>5</sup> After Pointel's death, the painting joined the collection of Jacques Serizier,<sup>6</sup> another fervent admirer of the painter. Around that time, the artist Jean Pesne made an engraving of it (figure 3) which helped to generalise this image, albeit without ever attaining the renown of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*. By the time René Gimpel unveiled the Poussin masterpiece in 1937, it had been eclipsed for decades. At a moment when a numerous research was underway to fix the contours of the artist's output, the singular discovery of a *Self-Portrait* by the master gives rise to a reinterpretation of the sources, as well as historiographic adjustments. Then, at the dawn of the 1950s, the re-appearance in Berlin of a second, identical copy immediately stirred controversy. Today the Berlin copy (figure 4, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) is unanimously held to be the original picture painted by Poussin in 1649. Meanwhile, the copy in the possession of René Gimpel and left to his estate (Gimpel Fils Gallery, London) has been demoted to the status of a 'replica'.<sup>7</sup> (figure 5)

René Gimpel is one of the independent art dealers-scholars who, in the early years of the twentieth century, took over the practice of connoisseurship in order not only to respond to market circumstances, but also to develop their own knowledge about art. As an influential figure in transatlantic art dealing, he worked towards building up renowned private and public collections on the soil of Europe and America. However, his career did see some incorrect attributions. While his errors are a challenge to the connoisseur's methodology, they remain indirectly revealing of his connoisseurial praxis and the limits that it comes up against. What can be learnt in this connection from the case of the Nicolas Poussin *Self-Portrait*? After the 1939–45 war, the painting was subjected to new evaluation procedures carried out by various people – gallery owners, art historians, museum professionals, scientists – all competing to categorize it and ultimately settle its status.

This contribution is attached to exploring the significative stages that marked the expert appraisal of the painting, from its rediscovery to its de-

<sup>4</sup> *Un chef d'œuvre retrouvé. Portrait de Nicolas Poussin peint par lui-même à Rome en 1649 et gravé par Pesne*. Invitation to the exhibition, 20 September–30 October 1937, 8 Place Vendôme, Paris. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>5</sup> The two *Self-Portraits* resulted in numerous studies. For a state of literature, see Pierre Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin: les tableaux du Louvre: catalogue raisonné*, Paris: Somogy, 2015, 248–255, no. 28; Pierre Rosenberg and Louis-Antoine Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, 425–427, no. 189 and 428–431, no. 190; Anthony Blunt, *The paintings of Nicolas Poussin: a critical catalogue*, London: Phaidon, 1966, 7–8, no. 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> According to the spelling proposed by Mickaël Szanto, 'Collectionner au Grand Siècle. Poussin et les 'bons amis' Pointel et Serizier', in Isabelle Dubois-Brinkmann and Sylvain Laveissière, dir., *Nicolas Poussin: La Fuite en Égypte, 1657*, Paris: Hazan, 2010, 78, note 13.

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin: les tableaux du Louvre*, 255, no. 28.

attribution.<sup>8</sup> It focusses on the logic and mechanisms at work in the assignation of contrasting statuses to the two paintings. From the perspective of a 'regressive approach', as the phrase is used by the sociologist Bernard Lahire, the idea is to shed light on certain aspects of the multi-layered story of an object that, in the course of the twentieth century, became a medium for multiple views and the locus of successive projections.

### X self-portraits attributed to Poussin: an uncertain state of knowledge

[H]e did himself twice, and in the different poses he adopted, he has always known according to the feelings of the learned that he was the same Poussin (...)<sup>9</sup>

While, at the start of the eighteenth century, the artist and writer Florent le Comte was reporting the existence of two self-portraits painted by Nicolas Poussin, throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, confusion reigned. Indeed, up until the 1950s, the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, which has belonged to the French State collections since 1797, remains the 'sole testimony to the master's activity as a portrait painter'<sup>10</sup> and the only undisputable artwork. Just how many self-portraits did the artist actual paint? The backstory to the two *Self-Portraits*,<sup>11</sup> intended respectively for Pointel and Chantelou, is partially documented in the artist's letters. While Nicolas Poussin was working in 1647 on the second version of the *Seven Sacraments* commissioned by Chantelou, Chantelou decided he would like to have a portrait of the artist. This wish was met with a long silence, as the artist was not familiar with the genre. It was not until the summer of 1648 that he alluded again to the project. This time, the painter expressed reticence at the idea of lending his features to a Roman portraitist which to his way of thinking could only produce unsatisfactory work. There is nothing however to suggest that his patron ever received a self-portrait.<sup>12</sup> On 20 June 1649, a first self-portrait suddenly came to light:

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau: essai sur l'art, la domination, la magie et le sacré*, Paris: La Découverte, 2015. According to Lahire, it consists in '(...) look[ing] back towards the past in order to understand the present' ('remonter dans le passé pour comprendre le présent'), 7. Lahire conducts 'historical regressions' (régressions historiques) in his study on the attribution of *The Flight into Egypt* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. RF 2008-1) by Poussin, 529.

<sup>9</sup> '[I]l s'est fait deux fois lui-même, et dans les différentes attitudes qu'il s'est donné, il a toujours connu selon les sentiments des savants qu'il était le même Poussin (...)', Florent le Comte, *Cabinet des singularitez d'architecture, peinture, sculpture, et gravure: ou introduction à la connoissance des plus beaux arts, figurés sous les tableaux, les statuës, et les estampes*, Bruxelles: L. Marchand, 1702 [1699–1700], vol.3, 31. The spelling and punctuation have been modernized.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Dorival, 'Les Autoportraits de Poussin', *Bulletin de la Société Poussin*, 1, June 1947, 39.

<sup>11</sup> The term 'self-portrait' did not exist in the seventeenth century, see Hannah Williams, 'Autoportrait ou portrait de l'artiste peint par lui-même? Se peindre soi-même à l'époque moderne', *Images Re-vues. Histoire, anthropologie et théorie de l'art*, 7, 2009, 2, paragraph 4, <https://imagesrevues.revues.org/574> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Nicolas Poussin, *Correspondance* [edited by Charles Jouanny], Paris: J. Schemit, 1911, letters from Poussin to Chantelou, 7 April 1647, 355, no. 147; 22 December 1647, 376, no. 157; 2

'I have done one of my portraits and will soon be starting on the other'.<sup>13</sup> Thus a latent, tentative project produced not one portrait, but two self-portraits; for Chantelou's rival Jean Pointel had also prevailed upon Poussin to do his effigy. The first self-portrait, completed in the summer of 1649, went to Pointel. Meanwhile, Chantelou had to wait for over a year to get his coveted picture, to which Poussin put the finishing touches on 29 May 1650.<sup>14</sup> In a letter he sent in 1664 to Abbé Nicaise, who was requesting his portrait, Poussin confirmed the existence of two self-portraits, 'by his own hand', both in Paris, one at Pointel's, the other with Chantelou.<sup>15</sup>

In a spirit of emulation, Poussin delivers to his benefactors a picture of various aspects of his identity. Beyond their theoretical significance, the two paintings carry value in terms of memory and introspection. Depicted half-length and dressed in a black toga, the painter in his fifties turns away to stare at the viewer. For Pointel, Poussin portrays himself three-quarter length, his face bearing the marks of age. He is holding a stylus in his right hand, while his left hand is leaning on a book bearing the Latin inscription *De lumine et colore* on the spine. Behind the painter's smiling countenance, his head tilted back slightly, there is a second inscription in gold letters indicating the painter's age, birthplace and status. Affiliated to the Academy of St. Luke, Poussin was promoted to the rank of 'first painter of the king' in 1641. The background writing is set on a stone plaque, like an epitaph in trompe-l'œil. It is flanked by two *putti* done in low relief and interlinked by a garland or festoon of laurel. Taken together, these elements lend the work the status of a *memento mori* revealing a reflection on the ephemeral dimension of life.<sup>16</sup>

---

August 1648, 386–387, no. 163; 24 May 1649, 399, no. 171. The painter faced difficulties in concluding this enterprise, as he had not executed a portrait for twenty-eight years.

<sup>13</sup> 'J'ai fait l'un de mes portraits et bientôt je commencerai l'autre', Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 20 June 1649, 402, no. 172. He promised Chantelou to reserve for him the one of the two self-portraits 'which would have the most success' ('qui réussira le mieux').

<sup>14</sup> Poussin, *Correspondance*, letters from Poussin to Chantelou, 19 September 1649, 405, no. 174; 22 January 1650, 410–411, no. 178; 13 March 1650, 412–413, no. 179; 29 May 1650, 414–415, no. 181.

<sup>15</sup> Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to the Abbé Claude Nicaise, 18 February 1664, 456–457, no. 207.

<sup>16</sup> The architectural background of the painting has, as model, Ferdinand von den Eynde's cenotaph executed by François Duquesnoy in Roma, Santa Maria dell'Anima Church: Blunt, *The paintings of Nicolas Poussin*, 7, no. 1. On the painting, see in particular Oskar Bätschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: dialectics of painting*, London: Reaktion Books, 1990 [1982], esp. 50–54; Matthias Winner, 'Poussins Selbstbildnis von 1649', in Jean-Pierre Babelon, Pierre Georgel, Jean Guillaume et al., eds., *'Il se rendit en Italie'. Études offertes à André Chastel*, Paris: Flammarion, 1987, 371–401 ('Memorienbild', 387). David Packwood recently discussed the notions of testament and posterity in this respect: 'From *Pictor Philosophus* to *Homo Œconomicus*: Renegotiating Social Space in Poussin's *Self-Portrait* of 1649–1650', in David Warren Sabean, ed., *Space and Self in Early Modern European Cultures*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 61–62. Packwood began in 2012 a project entitled 'Poussin Connoisseurship Project', [http://artintheblood.typepad.com/poussin\\_connoisseurship\\_p/](http://artintheblood.typepad.com/poussin_connoisseurship_p/) (accessed 18 May 2017).

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

For Chantelou, the sitter's melancholy gaze makes way for concentration. The artist stages himself in a static pose, with a ringed hand laid on a sketchbook. Poussin immortalizes his identity in the guise of the painter in his studio. The location marks out a world of pictures. On one of the bare canvases there is an inscription in block capitals giving his family name, the town of his birth, and the date of the work's creation. A fragment of a canvas depicts a female figure towards whom two outstretched arms are extended.<sup>17</sup> It represents an allegory of painting asserting the bond of friendship between the painter and his distant patron. In a symbolic language, the artist is manifesting his gratitude to his benefactor by painting for him a work to the glory of artistic effort.<sup>18</sup>

Beside the two self-portraits attested in the seventeenth century, replicas, inaccurate interpretations and rumours were soon being added to the mix. The painter's growing reputation came in the nineteenth century along with both a singularization of his œuvre and the flooding of the art market with copies.<sup>19</sup> The master's image, and the body of his work, scaled up on a variety of media, evolved along with these multifarious manifestations, as a renewed view of the philosopher-painter became crystallized in critical biographies and theoretical studies as well as commemorations.<sup>20</sup> Against this backdrop, interest in his self-portraits rose. Isolated among so many landscapes and history paintings, they individualized the features of the artist and the man for posterity.

'Few painters have ever wielded a comparable influence: and so the crop of copies, pastiches, recensions and forgeries which must be carefully sifted before a *catalogue raisonné* of his output can be compiled (...)', the art historian Thomas Bodkin noted in 1932.<sup>21</sup> Giving an account of Poussin's authenticated output with the help of a checking tool such as the *catalogue raisonné* is a complex undertaking, a

<sup>17</sup> About the allegory, already described by Bellori, see Giovan Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori e architetti moderni* [edited by Evelina Borea], Torino: G. Einaudi, 1976, 455 and note 1; see also: Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: friendship and the love of painting*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996, 177–249.

<sup>18</sup> Bäschmann, *Nicolas Poussin: dialectics of painting*, esp. 45–49 and 61; Louis Marin, 'Variations sur un portrait absent: les autoportraits de Poussin, 1649–1650', *Corps écrit*, 5, 1983, 87–107; see also Marc Fumaroli, ed., *L'inspiration du poète de Poussin: essai sur l'allégorie du Parnasse*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989, 94–96; Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, Paris: Seuil, 1995, 186–208; Todd P. Olson, 'The Fronde, Poussin, and his French Clients', in Todd P. Olson, *Poussin and France. Painting, Humanism, and the Politics of Style*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002, 71–99.

<sup>19</sup> Françoise Benhamou and Victor A. Ginsburgh, 'Copies of artworks: the case of paintings and prints', in Victor A. Ginsburgh and David Throsby, eds., *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006, vol.1, 280–281.

<sup>20</sup> To the Poussin's *Lives*, inaugurated by Gault de Saint-Germain in 1806, were added his letters (first published by Quatremère de Quincy in 1824), and a multitude of catalogues and artistic creations. See in particular Katie Scott, 'Introduction – 'pour la gloire des arts et l'honneur de France': commemorating Poussin, 1784–1995', in Katie Scott and Genevieve Warwick, eds., *Commemorating Poussin. Reception and Interpretation of the Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1–52.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Bodkin, 'Nicolas Poussin in the National Gallery, Dublin I', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 60:349, April 1932, 174.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

veritable challenge that has constantly kept the 'Poussinists' busy.<sup>22</sup> In 1837, the John Smith catalogue sketched the outlines of the Poussin corpus.<sup>23</sup> However, the art dealer listed three purported self-portraits – the first one intended for Chantelou, the second for Pointel, and a third one executed earlier, at the age of forty, with more soon to follow.

Known through the engraving by Jean Pesne, the Pointel *Self-Portrait* was definitely much displayed during the nineteenth century, witness the work of John Corner for example (figure 6). But the Pesne engraving also added to the confusion: in 1899, the art historian Elizabeth H. Denio took the view that there were three self-portraits painted by Poussin, the one for Chantelou, the one for Pointel, and also a replica made for Serizier after one or the other of these two self-portraits. But, she writes, 'This portrait for M. Pointel, was copied by the painter for M. Cerisiers. Both the first painting and the replica have disappeared (...)'.<sup>24</sup> This opinion became widespread and the doubt persisted. At the start of the twentieth century, studies devoted to Nicolas Poussin increased in number. There was a worldwide craze for the artist. From the new edition of his letters to the seminal three-volume work by Otto Grautoff, Émile Magne and Walter Friedländer, our knowledge of both the painter's career and his *œuvre* became organized, with the benefit of gradual revision.<sup>25</sup> By the time René Gimpel acquired the Pointel *Self-Portrait* in 1936, the painting was reputedly lost.

<sup>22</sup> Andresen fundamental catalogue opens with Pesne engraving: Andreas Andresen, *Nicolas Poussin, Verzeichniss der nach seinen Gemälden Gefertigten, Gleichzeitigen und späteren Kupferstiche*, Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1863, 5–7, no. 1. Also see Georges Wildenstein, *Les graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, 19–20, no. 1 and 21–22, no. 2; Martin Davies and Anthony Blunt, 'Some corrections and additions to M. Wildenstein 'Graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle'', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 59:104, July–August 1962, 205–222.

<sup>23</sup> John Smith, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French painters*, London: Smith and son, 1837, ix–lxvi (Life of Nicholas Poussin) and 1–2, no. 1–3 (The works of Nicholas Poussin, 'Portraits of the artist').

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth H. Denio, *Nicolas Poussin, his life and work*, London: S. Low, 1899, 116–117. Walter Friedländer considered the probable existence of a third copy destined for Serizier and did not indicate the location of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*. See Walter Friedländer, *Nicolas Poussin: die Entwicklung seiner Kunst*, Munich: R. Piper, 1914, 92–93 and 120–121.

<sup>25</sup> Grautoff argued that several copies of the *Self-Portraits* were executed in Rome and that the Königsberg gallery kept a copy in one of the Alte Pinakothek's storeroom. See Otto Grautoff, *Nicolas Poussin. Sein Werk und sein Leben*, Munich: Georg Muller, 1914, vol.1, 263–269, notes 456–457. Émile Magne wrote a similar observation regarding the number of self-portraits: *Nicolas Poussin, premier peintre du roi*, Bruxelles: G. Van Oest, 1914, 218, no. 324–326; Émile Magne, 'Appendice: Les portraits peints ou dessinés de Nicolas Poussin', in Émile Magne, *Nicolas Poussin, premier peintre du roi*, Paris: Émile-Paul Frères, 1928 [1914], 277–282. For a state of the presumed copies at the end of the 1939–45 war, see Anthony Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 89:533, 1947, 219–226. In the 1930s, the research mainly focussed on the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*: Mickael Alpatov, 'Das Selbstbildnis Poussins im Louvre', *Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen*, 2, 1933, 113–130; Meyer Schapiro, 'Reviewed Work(s): Kunstwissenschaftlichen Forschungen, II by Otto Pächt', *The Art Bulletin*, 18:2, June 1936, 258–266.

## Reappearance of a vanished *Self-Portrait*: an original in the process of becoming

At the turn of the 1930s, two exhibitions not only drew attention to the Poussin *Self-Portraits* but also awakened the covetousness of professional dealers and amateurs alike for seventeenth-century French artists. In London in 1932, the Royal Academy mounted a retrospective of French art which featured the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* with an exhibit label recalling the existence of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*.<sup>26</sup> In Paris, in 1934, the *Les peintres de la réalité en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* exhibition was held at the Petit Palais, an event co-produced by Paul Jamot, head curator of paintings at the Louvre and a well-informed Poussin specialist, and Charles Sterling, who was involved in an official capacity at the time. On this occasion, the Musée du Louvre again loaned out the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, while the catalogue entry noted that: 'So Poussin painted his portrait twice. One for M. De Chantelou – this is the Louvre portrait – the other for M. Pointel: this painting is thought to have been recently rediscovered in England (...)'.<sup>27</sup> True enough, the latter picture belonged to London's Sackville Gallery, as evidenced by an unpublished letter from the British art dealer Percy Moore Turner, an affiliate of the Sackville Gallery, where Max Rothschild was in charge.<sup>28</sup> The recipient of the letter was Paul Jamot: 'I am in contact with the portrait of Nicolas Poussin by himself, which was painted in 1649 (...). The picture is for sale. I wonder whether you would care to do anything about it for France (...)'.<sup>29</sup> The Pointel *Self-Portrait* reappeared in London in 1934 at the auction of the Sir Richard Leighton collection.<sup>30</sup> At a time when Sterling was prospecting all over France to bring together works not seen before, he registered an interest in the afore-

<sup>26</sup> Royal Academy of Arts, ed., *French Art, 1200–1900*, London, Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1932, 62, no. 119: 'Poussin painted at the same period another portrait of himself for M. Pointel; also a replica of one of these two portraits for a friend, whose name is unknown (...)'.  
<sup>27</sup> 'Poussin peignit donc deux fois son portrait. L'un pour M. De Chantelou – c'est le portrait du Louvre; l'autre pour M. Pointel: ce tableau, on croit l'avoir retrouvé récemment en Angleterre (...)', Paul Jamot and Charles Sterling, eds., *Les peintres de la réalité en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: Éd. Musées nationaux, 1934, 132–134, no. 93. See also Pierre Georgel, ed., *Orangerie, 1934: les 'Peintres de la réalité'*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006, 305, A3 and 243. The painting dimensions (88 x 67 cm) coincide with those of the Gimpel *Self-Portrait*. The catalogue reference, which reproduces the photograph of the painting, indicates: 'location unknown'. Gimpel acquired the *Self-Portrait* in 1936, which remained the property of the Gimpel family until now.

<sup>28</sup> On the Sackville Gallery, see Barbara Pezzini, 'The 1912 Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery, London: an avant-garde show within the old-master trade', *The Burlington Magazine*, 160, July 2013, 471–479.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Moore Turner to Jamot, 20 July 1934. Archives, Réunion des musées nationaux, file X30-1934. Cited by Pierre Georgel and partially reproduced in the catalogue Georgel, ed., *Orangerie, 1934*, 305, A3. Still according to Georgel, on 10 July 1934, Turner notified Paul Jamot about the painting. A list; a loan request was addressed to the direction of the Musée nationaux on 27 September 1934 (notified in a letter dated 1 October 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Christie, Manson & Woods, *Catalogue of pictures by old masters from the collection of the Viscount Grey of Fallodon, [...] the property of Sir Richard Leighton*, London: Christie, Manson & Woods, 1934, 5, no. 144.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

mentioned painting.<sup>31</sup> When the Petit Palais show opened, on account of its late discovery, it was nowhere to be seen, not even in the catalogue, and was only slipped into the exhibition at a later date.<sup>32</sup> In the wake of the Paris show, René Gimpel purchased the Pointel *Self-Portrait* from the Sackville Gallery. The invoice (figure 7), dated 29 December 1936, indicates both the sale amount (£1,200), and the painting's provenance: the work was not only listed in the Smith catalogue but also attested in the seventeenth century by the Pesne engraving and the artist's letters.<sup>33</sup> The master's ratings, which were particularly high on the Italian and French markets both during his lifetime and after his death, fluctuated during the eighteenth century, but remained fairly steady in England. A slight rise occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century, and a steeper rise after 1945.<sup>34</sup> In view of the crucial place of this painting in Poussin's *œuvre* and given the artist's standing during the interwar period, the sum owed by Gimpel seems about right. In addition to the invoice we have a certificate of authenticity signed by Dr. Walter Friedländer. Reputed for his Poussin research and for his book *Nicolas Poussin: Die Entwicklung seiner Kunst* (1914), Friedländer embodies an authority figure. His certificate consisted of a scholarly demonstration. Relying on a factual and stylistic approach to the painting, its ultimate purpose was to prove that it was 'obviously' painted by the hand of Nicolas Poussin, a hand that he recognized specifically in the application of the colours.

The Pointel picture is therefore more natural, looser, fresher and pictorially very attractive. The colouring of the picture, displays the masterly hand of Nicolas Poussin; the value and gradations of the blacks in the coat are beautifully rendered, the flesh-tints of the face are very typical; and specially [*sic*] beautiful as an example of pictorial handicraft is the 'chiaroscuro' of the winged *genii*. We have obviously here, therefore, a highly important example of the work of Nicolas Poussin.<sup>35</sup>

The gallery directors, Max and Lionel J. Rothschild, made sure to provide René Gimpel with all the required certifications. Gimpel dealt chiefly with Max

<sup>31</sup> Georgel, ed., *Orangerie, 1934*, 17 and 38.

<sup>32</sup> In February 1935 and was visible until the end of the exhibition on 24 March 1935. Georgel, ed., *Orangerie, 1934*, 22 and 243. Gimpel probably became aware of the Poussin's *Self-Portrait* at the exhibition. His daily notebook (1933-1935) suggests, however, that he visited it (entry from 8 October 1934, 117. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished). Gimpel was close to the art historian's Charles Terrasse's circle and he frequented Paul Jamot and Charles Sterling (for example, see Letter from Charles Sterling to Jean Gimpel about René Gimpel, 29 June 1963. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished) from whom he sought advice in order to expertise French or Italian Primitive artworks.

<sup>33</sup> Invoice, Sackville Gallery, Max Rothschild, 29 December 1936; letter from the Sackville Gallery to René Gimpel, 23 June 1938. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>34</sup> Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste: the rise and fall of picture prices, 1760–1960*, London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961, 414–415.

<sup>35</sup> Certificate from Walter Friedländer, 10 July 1936. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. René Gimpel translated the certificate with the probable aim of transmitting it to his French-speaking clients.



Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

Rothschild, who was an acquaintance of his in any case, and yet of whom he had a mixed opinion. With a letter he sent to John D. Rockefeller in 1931 he enclosed a list of those experts he recommended to his client or advised against. In his view, Max Rothschild enjoyed a contrasted reputation. 'Max Rothschild, 28 Sackville Street, Piccadilly. Have sometimes one good picture amongst many of second rate'.<sup>36</sup> Despite the unreliable quality of the works that he tried to sell him, Gimpel nonetheless allowed himself to be convinced by the *Self-Portrait*. Rothschild had come to notice on several occasions by the acquisition of key Poussin works, as noted in the *Burlington Magazine*.<sup>37</sup>

If we consider the *Diary of an Art Dealer* or the stockbooks that René Gimpel kept, the work of Nicolas Poussin did not capture his attention very much up until the 1930s. His stock of seventeenth-century French painting amounted to just a few pictures by Claude Lorrain and Gaspard Dughet.<sup>38</sup> The art dealer was learning the mysteries of his trade with the firm of E. Gimpel & Wildenstein, founded in 1898 by his father Ernest Gimpel and his partner Nathan Wildenstein. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Paris firm took its business across the ocean, where an address on Fifth Avenue was chosen to open a new branch.<sup>39</sup> When his father died in 1907, René took over the running of the firm's business until 1919, at which time he terminated his partnership with Nathan Wildenstein. Specializing in the Old Masters, the company originally operated to promote eighteenth-century French art in the United States, later moving into medieval and Renaissance art. Thus René Gimpel preferred the Dutch golden age and seventeenth-century Spanish art to the seventeenth-century French school. It was rather through the gaze of contemporary artists that he looked at seventeenth-century French art. During a session in 1923 sitting in the studio of the painter Henry Caro-Delvaile, who was doing his portrait, the conversation came round to Poussin and Lorrain: 'Le Lorrain, Le Poussin, they are a lesson in wisdom and uprightness!' the painter exclaimed, before raising a question: 'So tell me, René, what is their market value, how are they selling?'<sup>40</sup> And

<sup>36</sup> Letter from René Gimpel to John D. Rockefeller, 8 July 1931. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>37</sup> Esp. *Pyramus and Thisbe* (Städelmuseum, Frankfurt, inv. 1849) and *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* (Art Institute of Chicago, inv. 1930.500). See Pezzini, 'The 1912 Futurist exhibition at the Sackville Gallery, London', 473.

<sup>38</sup> Stockbooks and lists of good on storage, correspondences with Hudson Forwarding & Shipping, Duveen Walker, Robinot and Chenue, c. 1937–1940. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>39</sup> The firm competed with circulation of artworks in provenance from dispersed collections in Europe. On the transatlantic art market, see esp. Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscape with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Flaminia Gennari Santori, *The Melancholy of Masterpieces: Old master paintings in America, 1900–1914*, Milan: 5 Continents, 2003, 71–122 and 123–149; Manfred J. Holler and Barbara Klose-Ullmann, 'Art Goes America', *Journal of Economic Issues*, 44:1, March 2010, 89–112.

<sup>40</sup> 'Le Lorrain, Le Poussin, c'est une leçon de sagesse et de droiture ! (...) Et dis-moi René, quelle est leur cote sur le marché, comment se vendent-ils?', René Gimpel, *Journal d'un collectionneur: marchand de tableaux*, Paris: Hermann, 2011, 354 (4 September 1923). On René Gimpel's *Diary*, see Diana J. Kostyrko, 'René Gimpel's "Diary of an Art Dealer"', *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2015, 157:1350, 615–619. The twenty-two manuscript

the art dealer replied: 'They aren't. Their only client in the world is the Louvre'.<sup>41</sup> 'Too serious' and 'not understood', these masters generated hardly any interest on the art market. Gimpel attributed museum and heritage value to Poussin's *œuvre*, and not so much speculative value.

Once on a visit to the Louvre, he returned to Poussin: 'It is [Abraham] Mintchine who brings me before a Poussin', he wrote in his *Diary* in 1929.<sup>42</sup> On that occasion, he gave the young painter his view of art history, a retrospective, genealogical view that saw the master's work through the prism of modern artists. The inclination of Cézanne, Maurice Denis or Picasso for Poussin at the time was a contributory factor in the revived taste for 'new classicism' in France.<sup>43</sup> The dialectic linking old art and modern art affected the theories of art, the history of collections and the art market as well.<sup>44</sup>

---

notebooks that composed Gimpel's *Diary* are preserved at the Gimpel Fils Gallery, London. Here, we refer to the expanded edition, which appeared in 2011.

<sup>41</sup> 'Ils ne se vendent pas. Leur seul client au monde est le musée du Louvre (...) Trop graves (...) incompris', Gimpel, *Journal*, 355 (4 September 1923) and 359 (14 September 1923), on Lorrain.

<sup>42</sup> 'C'est [Abraham] Mintchine qui me conduit devant un Poussin', Gimpel, *Journal*, 590–593 (18 December 1929). With the painter Angel Zarraga, Gimpel discussed the French artistic tradition of the seventeenth century: Gimpel, *Journal*, 543 (7 February 1929).

<sup>43</sup> Poussin incarnated a model – he was 'one of Cézanne's ancestors', to quote Julius Meier-Graefe's beautiful book *Cézanne et ses ancêtres: reproductions en facsimilé d'après des dessins par Le Tintoret, Le Greco, Le Poussin, Corot, Delacroix, Cézanne*, Berlin: Société Marées, 1921. As also attested by Robert Rey's text *La renaissance du sentiment classique dans la peinture française à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle: Degas, Renoir, Gauguin, Cézanne, Seurat*, Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, [1931]. See also Anne Baldassari, ed., *Picasso et les maîtres*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> On this dialectic, see Pascal Griener, 'La jouissance du Même: les maîtres anciens comme fétiches modernes', *Kunst und Architektur/Art et Architecture*, 52:4, 2001, 35–41; Pascal Griener, 'Old masters/modern painting: a dialectic construction of art history for the American market during the 30s', in Peter J. Schneemann and Thomas Schmutz, eds., *Masterplan: Konstruktion und Dokumentation amerikanischer Kunstgeschichten*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2003, 173–190.

## Securing the attribution: strategies and dynamics of the connoisseur appraisal

Before going ahead with purchasing the picture, René Gimpel examined very closely the Jean Pesne engraving, a copy of which was in his possession. In the course of this operation, he produced various drawings to give him a better grasp of its structure and composition (figure 8). From the painter's face to the inscriptions, he went over the picture and its engraved counterpart in minute detail. He annotated his drawings with his observations. He also became interested in two other nineteenth-century engravings inspired by the Pointel *Self-Portrait*, the one by John Corner and another anonymous engraving he discovered at the British Museum.<sup>45</sup> In addition to his notes and drawings came a photo-engraving of a painting by Poussin, *The Holy Family*, which the art dealer recalled having admired and commented upon in 1924 at the time of its purchase by his former partner Nathan Wildenstein. For all this canvas's 'pictorial qualities', he deplored its lack of restraint, since for him Poussin embodied 'the master of gravity'.<sup>46</sup> Thus the Pointel *Self-Portrait* did not entirely fit in with his mental picture of Poussin; the work did not bear the hallmark of gravitas that in contrast characterizes the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*. While Gimpel came to no conclusions based on the connection he had made, he did not abandon the idea of purchasing a work that nonetheless remains emblematic.

The formal examination was combined with an analysis of the written documents. First he focussed his attention on the master's letters, copying out in full the passages relating to the two Pointel and Chantelou *Self-Portraits*. He meticulously revised his notes to add new material or make changes. He also researched the inscription *De lumine et colore (Traité des Lumières et des Ombres or De lumine e ombre, colori et mesure)* featured on the spine of the book. For a long time the book was thought to be a treatise that Poussin had left at his death. The reference to a piece of writing of a technical nature, illustrating the image of the painter as a man of letters, had spawned many a discussion that intrigued the art dealer just as much. When Chantelou enquired into this matter in 1666, however, the artist's brother-in-law Jean Dughet denied the book's existence, a point duly noted by René Gimpel.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to these analyses, he restored a description of the painting in his possession in the shape of a note:

<sup>45</sup> He carefully compared and examined these engravings from the British Museum (inv. Jean Pesne, 1868,0808.2503; inv. John Corner, 1914,0810.225; inv. Unknown, 1868,0822.1174).

<sup>46</sup> 'Le maître de la gravité', Gimpel, *Journal*, 397–398 (7 July 1924). In 1924, the Wildenstein Company acquired a Poussin's painting called *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, retitled *The Holy Family*, from the Duke of Westminster's collection. Gimpel dedicated a passage in his *Diary* to this remarkable purchase – the painting exceptionally reached more than £5,000 following a misunderstanding within the company which led to an operation speculation – which is mentioned again in a note added in 1935. See for a reproduction [www.bundesmuseen.ch/roemerholz/00440/00657/00737/00826/00838/index.html?lang=fr](http://www.bundesmuseen.ch/roemerholz/00440/00657/00737/00826/00838/index.html?lang=fr) (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Jean Dughet to Chantelou, 483–486, no. 214; Claire Pace, *Félibien's life of Poussin*, London: A. Zwemmer, 1981, 128–129 (facsimile no. 78) and note 162; Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: friendship and the love of painting*, 145–174.

Described in Smith's *Catalogue raisonné*, vol.8, n°1. A portrait of the artist when 55 years of age, represented in a three-quarter view with the eyes turns towards the spectator. His dark hair is parted in front, and falls in clusters on each side of his head. The body is enveloped in an ample mantle, concealing every part but the hands, one of which holds a porte-crayon, the other a large book on its edge. This background composed of a table, on which is inscribed in Latin, the name, quality and age of the painter and dates, Rome, 1649. This tablet is supported by two infants, bearing the ends of a festoon of laurels. Engraved by J. Pesne.<sup>48</sup>

He also emphasized the inscription providing a clue to the painter's identity and status: 'NICOLAUS POUSSINUS ANDELIENSIS ACADEMICUS ROMANUS PRIMUS/PICTOR ORDINARIUS LUDOVICI IUSTI REGIS GALLIAE ANNO DOMINI/1649 Romae, AETATIS SUAE.55'. The work does not carry a signature,<sup>49</sup> but the Latin writing offers added value in helping towards explicit identification of the subject. The description of the picture provided by René Gimpel is different from Walter Friedländer's; Gimpel is more interested in the composition's layout, and not so much its state of conservation, quality or extrinsic elements. To that extent, this note does not quite follow the pattern used for René Gimpel's published catalogues; they usually focus on the subject depicted, the analogy with other similar works, the provenance or the signature.<sup>50</sup> While he studies the artist's letters, his text makes no mention of them, nor does it discuss the painting's provenance. A little succinct information about the pedigree does however appear on a label on the back of the picture, placed on the stretcher by René Gimpel: 'Described in Smith Catalogue VIII., Collection Matthew Anderson 1861, Sir Bayan Leighton [*sic*]' (figure 9). Thus the painting preserves a memory of its pedigree.

Faced with any work of art, the dealer considered that his job involved determining 'its state of conservation, its price, and its chance of authenticity'.<sup>51</sup> Attribution was a presale milestone; it was instrumentalized for the benefit of the fiduciary relationship, the 'contract of trust',<sup>52</sup> in the words of Michel de Certeau,

<sup>48</sup> *Le Portrait de Poussin par lui-même, 1649*, notice written by René Gimpel. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>49</sup> On Poussin and the signature, see Charlotte Guichard, 'La signature dans le tableau aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles: identité, réputation et marché de l'art', *Sociétés & Représentation*, 1:25, 2008, paragraph 25, note 32, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-societes-et-representations-2008-1-page-47.htm> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>50</sup> See René Gimpel, *Collections René Gimpel, tableaux et objets d'art*, Paris: Édition 'Les Arts', [1924]; René Gimpel, *Collections René Gimpel, tableaux et sculptures (Art ancien)*, Paris: Édition 'Les Arts', [1935]; Gimpel, *Journal*, 260 (August 1921). He bought Les 'Arts' editions in 1921.

<sup>51</sup> See Letter from René Gimpel to John D. Rockefeller, 8 July 1931. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>52</sup> 'contrat de confiance'. Michel de Certeau, 'La pratique sociale de la différence: croire', in André Vauchez, ed., *Faire croire. Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Rome: École française de Rome, 1981, esp. 363; see also David Freedberg, 'Prologue: Why connoisseurship matters', in Katlijne van der Stighelen, ed.,

that the dealer established with his client. Once authentication was secured and well-argued, Gimpel had the picture shipped to the United States, along with the Jean Pesne engraving. He wanted the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to purchase it.<sup>53</sup>

From 1902 to 1938, René Gimpel made intermittent visits to the United States where he worked to build up loyalty among a vast international clientele composed of eminent collectors and museums wishing to increase their assets. After around 1925, his transatlantic trips became more infrequent, as the 1929 Wall Street crash was followed by an economic slump. Gimpel employed a range of different strategies in order to keep up the professional connections he had made over the years. Although he had built up his reputation in the field of Old Masters art, he was quick to get involved as a modern art dealer. To do this, he improvised temporary associations with agents commuting between Europe and America for them to run his branches while he was away.<sup>54</sup> From now on, he was running two businesses, one as a gallery owner, the other as an old art dealer, seeking to strengthen his network of buyers as well as his own skill set.

Around this time, the paintings and drawings of Nicolas Poussin were being exported to the United States. The Durlacher and Knoedler galleries were shining beacons for this century in New York and supplied the major American museums vying with each other to acquire an 'example of the great French classicist'.<sup>55</sup> Their programmes of exhibitions evidence the spread of this transatlantic taste for Nicolas Poussin. René Gimpel monitored the situation closely, and was especially receptive to this high-growth market; thus he sought to be a part of this trend in by placing

---

*Munuscula amicorum. Contributions on Rubens and his Colleagues in Honour of Hans Vlieghe*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, vol.1, 36–37.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to René Gimpel Gallery, 26 January 1937: Poussin's painting and Pesne's engraving are in the museum; Stockbook Sidès, no. 1, 7 November 1935 to [1938], List and objects' numbers sent by René Gimpel from London or Paris, 29 and 31 December 1936, 68, 80 and 83; no. 700, 'Poussin Lac de Bolzano' (franc 25,000), no. 707: 'Portrait de Poussin' (£3,000). Furthermore, he bought undeterminate paintings by Gaspard Poussin (no. 708, £40) and Claude Lorrain (no. 709, £20) at this time.

<sup>54</sup> From 1934–1935 onwards, Gimpel appointed agents in order to administer his branches in Paris (8 Place Vendôme), Bruxelles (62 rue Royale) and New York (2 East 57th Street), Alfredo Sidès and Jacques Furst in particular. See Contract with Alfredo Sidès, 1935; Stockbooks Sidès, activities summary, 1935–1937; Correspondence between René Gimpel and Jacques Furst, 1936–1939. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>55</sup> Edsel B. Ford, Albert Kahn, Edgar B. Whitcomb *et al.*, 'Annual report of the arts commission for the year 1936', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit*, 16:5, February 1937, 71. Following the purchase of the painting *Selene and Endymion* (inv. 36.11) in 1936, the Detroit Museum aligned with the trend by organizing an exhibition dedicated to this time period: *Seventeenth Century French Painting: Georges de la Tour, the Brothers Le Nain, Poussin, Lorrain*, 22 January–25 February 1937 (see the *Annual report* of 1937, 17:5, February 1938, 43). Regarding the galleries, see Louis Carré, ed., *Loan exhibition of paintings by Georges de La Tour, Antoine Le Nain, Louis Le Nain, Mathieu Le Nain*, New York: Knoedler and Co., 1936; Durlacher Bros., *An exhibition of paintings & drawings by Claude Lorrain, 1600–1682*, New York: Durlacher Bros., 1938. In 1940, the first American exhibition dedicated to Poussin opened its doors at the Galerie Durlacher: Durlacher Bros., *Loan exhibition of paintings by Nicolas Poussin for the benefit of the Scholarship Fund, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University*, New York: Durlacher Bros., 1940.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

the Pointel *Self-Portrait* in an American institution that he admired. His preference for where to sell it went to Boston, rather than offering the picture to the Louvre, which already had the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*. Since 1915, which was when the Museum of Fine Arts bought a panel by Barna da Siena from Gimpel, the art dealer had constantly been reminding the institution of his presence, notably through donations.<sup>56</sup> Being also close to the Fogg Museum and to Harvard University, Gimpel was in a good position to observe the museum's acquisitions policy. In a series of recommendations made to his agent, Alfredo Sidès, he noted in 1935: 'I am on very close terms with the new director Mr. Georges Harold Edgell. This man's policy is to buy paintings, because he finds the museum sufficiently endowed in other branches, but very weak especially in old paintings, although it does possess a few very fine canvases'.<sup>57</sup> Any leading museum inclined to favour old art will have a Poussin on show in its galleries. On this occasion, his second New York-based agent, Jacques Furst, played the role of go-between with the museum management. But after some hesitation, the institution finally decided against acquiring the painting<sup>58</sup>: Edgell was looking not for a portrait by Poussin, but a landscape. To make up for this refusal, Furst promptly offered a landscape by the master titled *Lake Bolsena*, which actually was a work regarded as painted by his pupil and brother-in-law, Gaspard Dughet, after a now-lost composition by Poussin and which is now de-attributed.<sup>59</sup> But the museum again turned him down; Furst

<sup>56</sup> Gimpel, *Journal*, 89 (21 August 1918). The artwork was attributed to Lorenzo da Monaco (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 15.1145). Early on, Gimpel established professional relationships in Boston. See Letter from René Gimpel to Nathan Wildenstein, 17 December 1909, René Gimpel papers, Correspondence, 1903–1921. Washington, Smithsonian Institution, real 11029.

<sup>57</sup> 'Je suis très intime avec le nouveau directeur Mr. Georges Harold Edgell. La politique de cet homme est d'acheter des tableaux car il trouve le musée assez riche dans des autres branches, mais très faible surtout en ancien, quoiqu'il possède quelques très belles toiles', Unnamed notebook, recommendations addressed to Sidès about the American museums, 29 October 1935, 19–20. Edgell had met Gimpel beforehand at his gallery in Paris in the month of August 1934. Daily notebook (1933–1935), entry from 20 August 1934, 105. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>58</sup> Letters from Edgell to Furst, 30 January 1937 and 5 February 1937. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. Following the refusal, Jacques Furst wrote to Edgell: 'I received your letter this morning and both Mr. Gimpel and myself are very sorry that the Museum did not find it possible to acquire the important Poussin portrait. However, we fully understand your point of view', Letter from Furst to Edgell, 8 February 1937. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Archives. I am thankful to Maureen Melton for her research in the archives.

<sup>59</sup> 'I am sending you by this same mail a photograph of the Poussin landscape 'Lac de Bolsena', which Doctor [Paul] Sachs admired so much in New York', Letter from Furst to Edgell, 8 February 1937. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Archives. See also Exchanges of letters between Jacques Furst and the Boston Museum, 15 February 1937. Gimpel stock no. 700, 'Lac de Bolzano', formerly in Aureliano de Beruete collection. On 14 December 1936, his notebook indicated that the sale of a Poussin painting, linked to the Beruete collection, had been settled up. Daily notebook (1936–1937), 81–93. He lent the painting to the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1937 (Letter from the Museum to Gimpel, 2 March 1937). Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. See Marie Nicole Boisclair, *Gaspard Dughet, sa vie et son œuvre: 1615–1675*, Paris: Arthéna, 1986, 304, no. R.15, and 251, no. 257. The artwork,

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

reported back to Gimpel: 'The Poussin wanted by the museum must be a landscape from the early period, preferably with figures (...)'.<sup>60</sup> The Pointel *Self-Portrait* definitely did not meet the selection criteria, and the museum went on two years later to purchase *Mars and Venus*, a landscape with figures from the 1630s.<sup>61</sup>

Despite these setbacks, Jacques Furst undertook to mount a major Poussin exhibition not previously seen in the United States. Around the same time, an exhibition devoted to Claude Lorrain at the Durlacher Gallery was coming to an end. That event was a huge success and inspired Gimpel and Furst, who planned to request the loan of paintings and drawings from various museums and galleries, to go on show alongside their own paintings, including the *Self-Portrait*.<sup>62</sup> But the project was plagued by administrative and financial constraints and René Gimpel had the painting sent home to France.

In Paris he devoted to it the monographic exhibition of 1937 at his gallery, placing the emphasis on a singular painting on which he conferred the status of 'masterpiece'. Certification, negotiating to sell a *Self-Portrait* of which the Louvre possessed the matching piece, a planned exhibition in the United States and a monographic exhibition in Paris were all operations in line with market requirements and aimed at sealing official approval on the value of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*. However, for all his close scrutiny and convictions, René Gimpel was misguided as to the authorship of the work, incorrectly attributing the painting to Nicolas Poussin. While his notes remain terse and provide partial information about what he was trying to do, the context and the strategies he employed in order to establish the picture's status and have it accepted reveal certain logical steps towards attribution that offer telltale clues to his mistake.

### Rituals and weak points of the attribution

---

currently demoted, was sold in an auction in 1949: Hiram H. Parke *et al.*, *Old Masters Primitive and Early Renaissance Paintings, French and other Nineteenth century canvases, property of the Estate of the late Rene Gimpel Jr., Hans Skutetzky, and other owners*, New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries Inc., 1949, 10, no. 25.

<sup>60</sup> 'Le Poussin que désire le musée doit être un paysage tôt d'époque et si possible à personnages (...)', Letter from Furst to René Gimpel, 4 November 1938. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>61</sup> The Museum bought the painting *Mars and Venus* in 1940. See Pierre Rosenberg, ed., *France in the Golden Age: seventeenth-century French paintings in American collections*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982, 304–305, no. 86. Regarding Nicolas Poussin's work in the United States, see in this catalogue 302–315, no. 84–94. For a reproduction of the painting *Mars and Venus*, see <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/mars-and-venus-32734> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Furst to René Gimpel, early February 1938, 25 February 1938 and 4 November 1938. Sidès and Furst hoped to add the *Self-Portrait*, which had been sent back to France, to the exhibition: 'Let's hope that we will have the money to organize March an exhibition on Poussin but income very uncertain wait stop (...)' ('Espérons avoir argent pour organiser mars une exposition Poussin mais rentrée très incertaine attendez stop (...)'). Telegram from René Gimpel to Sidès, Stockbook Sidès, no. 1, 1935–1937, 90. In New York and Paris, the negotiations with other clients were pursued in vain. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

As at once an art dealer and gallery owner, as well as a diarist, publisher, collector and expert for the courts,<sup>63</sup> during his career on both sides of the Atlantic, René Gimpel was active in a whole range of fields.<sup>64</sup> Having learned the ropes of his trade, maybe not through books, but mostly empirically, he built up his knowledge acquired in contact with artworks and developed the essential tools for apprehending them: 'There is more art in one work of art than in a million art books', was his conclusion in his *Aphorisms*.<sup>65</sup> While he highlights the self-tutored art dealer building up *in situ* his practical knowledge of art, particularly in museums, he was also a regular user of the Frick Library, collected his own library of autograph manuscripts, and had serious ambition as a man of letters.<sup>66</sup> From his *Diary*, which he kept from 1918 until 1939, to his stage plays, as well as his technical papers published in *Art et décoration* or *The Connoisseur*, he devoted a great deal of his time to writing. On both continents, he cultivated a polyvalent profil; he was active in commercial and academic circles and in learned societies campaigning for the study of the arts and the heritage, beginning with the Society of French Art Historians in Paris.

In his connoisseurial work, valuing artworks was the outcome either of his individual approach or collective dialogue. In order to test his knowledge, he would ask connoisseurs for their opinion according to their specialism, personalities like Bernard Berenson, Max J. Friedländer or Charles Sterling. But unlike his connoisseurial peers, he did not conceptualize a methodology of connoisseurship or publish any *catalogues raisonnés*. Without however revealing anything in so many words, his approach can be deduced from the pages of his *Diary* – which however does not present a comprehensive account of his practices as a positive document – and miscellaneous writings on the subject of purchases, sales, visits to collections, discussions and sometimes disagreements with experts or clients.

One example of this would be with Helen Clay Frick in 1922. Finding herself comparing two near-identical *Piètas* (figures 10–11), Helen Clay Frick appointed various experts in order to examine these 'twin' paintings. They included René Gimpel, reputed for his knowledge of medieval art and the primitives.<sup>67</sup> Which was

<sup>63</sup> List of the clerk of the Trade Tribunal and Customs expert, Paris. Gimpel, 8 Place Vendôme, was an expert in ancient art (Medieval to eighteenth century). See for example Francis Campbell, ed., *Annuaire de la curiosité et des beaux-arts et de la bibliophilie: Paris, départements étrangers*, Paris: [s.n], 1937, 16 and 205–206. On the expert's status in France, see Raymonde Moulin and Alain Quemin, 'La certification de la valeur de l'art. Experts et expertises', *Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 48:6, 1993, esp. 1428–1433.

<sup>64</sup> His official title was 'antique dealer' according to his tax returns, notably those from 1937. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>65</sup> René Gimpel, *Aphorisms*, undated. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>66</sup> Inventory of his library, Paris, 25 November 1945. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. His library as well as his collections are part of the 'instrumentarium' of the connoisseur. See Pascal Griener, *La République de l'œil. L'expérience de l'art au siècle des Lumières*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008, esp. 190 and 216–218.

<sup>67</sup> Helen Clay Frick acquired, c. 1922, a *Pièta*, which is currently attributed to an artist from Konrad Witz's circle. In 1907, her father, Henry Clay Frick had also purchased a *Pièta*, which was almost identical, with the only difference that it depicts a donor kneeling on the left-



the original panel and which was the copy? More than the outcome, the important thing to look at here are the operations guiding the art dealer's gaze. 'My pen will race on the paper as my eyes do over the two pictures, following no rules, and yet methodically', he announces.<sup>68</sup> His aim was to clarify the status of each panel and ultimately '(...) to find, if not the identity of the painter of the original [*Pietà without donor*], at least his nationality and maybe his region'.<sup>69</sup> His examination focusses on the composition, the application of the colours, and the handling of the landscape and characters. His approach does not involve placing either work in its context, or thinking in typological terms; from the outset he leaves it 'to the iconographers'<sup>70</sup> to determine how the respective masters made the subject their own. The fourteen pages covered with his ink offer a qualitative and stylistic analysis of the two *Piètas*. Using the language of aesthetics, he sets about reconstructing the creator's technical, and even psychological approach, in the manner of Bernard Berenson aspiring to recreate the artist's personality with the help of qualitative analysis.<sup>71</sup> He moves on from overall consistency to consider the detail morphological, isolating specific secondary areas (the sun, the characters' lips and noses), somewhat in the Morellian manner.<sup>72</sup>

---

side of the painting. Today, it is attributed to a master from Southern France. With regard to the two paintings and his analysis: John Pope-Hennessy, Joseph Focarino *et al.*, *The Frick Collection: an illustrated catalogue*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968, vol.2, 124–129 and 2003, vol.9, 357–362. Expert opinion differed distinctly in the 1920s. See Gimpel, *Journal*, 315 (26 March 1923) and 325–326 (26 March and 9 April 1923) as well as 334–335 (March–April 1923). Expert report, René Gimpel, 'Sur le tableau au Donateur et sur l'Original', New York, 5 February 1923, manuscript document, unpublished and correspondence with Helen Frick, 30 May, 14 and 15 June 1923. Frick Collection Archives, New York. Also see the expert report written by Joseph Duveen, Gimpel's brother-in-law, 22 March 1923. René Gimpel papers, Correspondence, 1903–1931. Washington, Smithsonian Institution, real 11029.

<sup>68</sup> 'Ma plume va courir sur le papier comme mes yeux sur ces deux tableaux, sans règle mais cependant avec méthode', Gimpel, 'Sur le tableau au Donateur et sur l'Original', 1.

<sup>69</sup> '(...) trouver sinon l'identité du peintre de l'Original [*Pietà sans donateur*], au moins sa nationalité et peut être sa région', Gimpel, 'Sur le tableau au Donateur et sur l'Original', 7.

<sup>70</sup> 'le soin aux iconographes', Gimpel, 'Sur le tableau au Donateur et sur l'Original', 2.

<sup>71</sup> Bernard Berenson, *The Sense of Quality: study and criticism of Italian art*, New York: Schocken Books, 1962 [1901], viii–ix; Bernard Berenson, 'Rudiments of Connoisseurship (a Fragment)', in Bernard Berenson, *Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, London: G. Bell and sons, 1902, 111–148: 'The document always needs to be confirmed by connoisseurship' (116) and 'The Sense of Quality is undubitably the most essential equipment of a would-be connoisseur' (147). From the 1910s onwards, Gimpel came into contact with Berenson and read his texts. Both maintained a long correspondence. On Berenson, see the recent book Joseph Connors and Louis A. Waldman, eds., *Bernard Berenson: formation and heritage*, Florence: Villa I Tatti, 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Gimpel, 'Sur le tableau au Donateur et sur l'Original', 7–8. On Giovanni Morelli, see in particular Valentina Locatelli, *Metamorfosi romantiche: le teorie del primo romanticismo tedesco nel pensiero sull'arte di Giovanni Morelli*, Pasion di Prato: Campanotto, 2011.

Such attention shown to autograph details is explicitly manifest in the case of Vermeer, the difference being that it focusses on the signature.<sup>73</sup> For over ten years, Gimpel frantically researched this artist, looking for a self-portrait or signatures hidden in his paintings, until in 1930 he presented his analytical findings at the History of Art Congress in Brussels, a place where 'intellectual jousts are to the detriment not of men but of ideas and things (...)'.<sup>74</sup> To expand on his verdict, he compared the master's various works which he observed while on his travels, exercising his eye and his memory, in order to penetrate Vermeer's creative process. He inquired into the 'objective' traces revealing the artist's pictorial language, although aware that the signature, monogram and date remained falsifiable. Whenever René Gimpel 'meets' a work of art, he indicates whether he 'believes' or 'does not believe' in it depending on the – decisive – impression it has on him, taking the view that a contentious artwork fails to give off the same 'artistic feeling'<sup>75</sup> as a work touched by the master. Inasmuch as it is deprived of its uniqueness and rarity, the radiance of the inauthentic work is diminished, if not entirely obliterated.<sup>76</sup>

Faced with the Poussin *Self-Portrait*, the rituals of attribution are based more on the documents, and not so much on the painting *per se* and on analogies. The state of preservation, the quality and stylistic unity of the work are, in this particular instance, all intrinsic criteria that are not touched upon. René Gimpel acquires a work attested by primary seventeenth-century sources. He bases his judgement chiefly on the artist's letters and the Pesne engraving, a set of exhibits that he examines closely.<sup>77</sup> Confronted with a self-portrait that materializes the very image of the creative artist, he attempts, in an almost postromantic quest, to capture Nicolas Poussin's approach by going back to writings in the artist's own hand.

<sup>73</sup> In his search, Gimpel acquired a version of *The Geographer* from the Péreire and Du Bus du Gisignies collections, attributed to Vermeer by the main specialists of the Dutch school, such as Théophile Thoré and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot. See René Gimpel, 'The Geographer', by Vermeer of Delft', *The Connoisseur: an illustrated magazine for collectors*, 59, January–April 1929, 182; also see Gimpel, *Journal*, 241–242 (15 December 1921), 261–262 (6 October 1921), 265–266 (11 December 1921), 329 (23 May 1923), 330 (24 May 1923), 333 (5 June 1923), 509 (10 January 1928), 541–542 (3 February 1931), 630–631 (2 March 1931). The painting is currently attributed to Olivier van Deuren (seventeenth/eighteenth century, San Francisco Museum of Art, inv. 75.18.15). For a reproduction, see <http://art.famsf.org/olivier-van-deuren/geographer-751815> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>74</sup> '[I]es luttes intellectuelles ne se font pas au détriment des hommes mais des idées et des choses (...)', Letter from René Gimpel to Jules Bache, 6 December 1930. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>75</sup> 'sentiment artistique'. Gimpel expressed himself notably in these terms in front of a Rembrandt painting, the 'Rembrandt Gagarine'. See Gimpel, *Journal*, 390 (May 1924). The work is a part of Rembrandt's corpus today: Josua Bruyn, Bob Haak, Simon H. Levie *et al.*, eds., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings: 1635–1642*, Berlin: Springer, 2014, 305–311, no. A130.

<sup>76</sup> This view echoes the decline of the 'aura' conceptualized in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin to describe the mass production of artefacts. See Walter Benjamin, *L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique*, Paris: Éd. Allia, 2003 [1955], and the recent study: Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura', *Critical Inquiry*, 34:2, 2008, 336–375.

<sup>77</sup> Frequent visitor of the Musée du Louvre, Gimpel undoubtedly examined Chantelou's *Self-Portrait* without nonetheless explicitly mentioning it.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

Unaccustomed to the work of the painter from Normandy, he thus seems to latch onto the written word. Just as the signature or the monogram do, the documents (archives, inventories, catalogues, etc.) provide positive information about the work and its creator, as Max J. Friedländer conceived him at the time in his book *On Art and Connoisseurship*; they feature among the 'objective criteria of authorship', but they nonetheless need to be read with caution.<sup>78</sup>

Having consulted Nicolas Poussin's letters, René Gimpel is conscious of the fact that the *Self-Portraits* stirred interest immediately upon completion. The painter himself indicates that he had a copy made of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* in Rome, sometime in 1649/1650. The letter he sent to his patron on 29 May 1650 mentions that his self-portrait is finished and that 'some of [his] friends' wanted a copy of it.<sup>79</sup> On 19 June 1650, he informed Chantelou that dispatch of the painting had been deferred, this time on the pretext that 'one of my good friends' was 'fervently' requesting a copy of it.<sup>80</sup> Poussin does not elaborate upon who the friend or friends actually were. On the other hand, with regard to the Pointel *Self-Portrait*, none of this kind of information made its way into any of his letters. Poussin makes no hints to the effect that certain admirers wished to obtain a copy or that a copy of the painting was actually ever made,<sup>81</sup> although the likelihood that this did happen remains high. But during the interwar period, the unstable state of knowledge of the Pointel *Self-Portrait* influenced Gimpel's interpretation of it to some degree.

Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, also has documentary value and, although unsigned and lacking 'gravitas', expresses an indissociable connection with its creator. The art dealer placed particular value on self-portraits inasmuch as they enable an immediate rapport to be established with the artist. Moreover, while there are gaps in the pedigree of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*, it does come from some renowned English collections and is attested in the Smith catalogue, a reference upon which the dealer routinely relied; he recopied the entire notice.<sup>82</sup> Most of all, the *Self-*

<sup>78</sup> Max J. Friedländer, *On Art and Connoisseurship*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1942, chapter 24, 163–171. On Friedländer, see Simon Elson recent book *Der Kunstkenner Max J. Friedländer: biografische Skizzen*, Cologne: W. König, 2016. Gimpel corresponded with Friedländer who he met in 1920 in Berlin (Gimpel, *Journal*, 226 (28 September 1920)).

<sup>79</sup> 'quelques-uns de [s]es amis', Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 29 May 1650, 414–415, no. 181.

<sup>80</sup> 'quelqu'un de mes bons amis (...) ardemment', Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 19 June 1650, 415–416, no. 182. Blunt notes in 1947 that: 'It is not clear whether one or more copies were made'. See Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 222, note 34. The identity of this friend or of his friends has not been determined and has only raised assumptions.

<sup>81</sup> There is, at present, no correspondence between Pointel and Poussin that has been preserved. See Jacques Thuillier and Claude Mignot, 'Collectionneur et peinture au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Pointel et Poussin', *Revue de l'art*, 39, 1978, 39–40.

<sup>82</sup> René Gimpel, Extract of Smith's *catalogue raisonné*, vol. 8, pages 1 and 2, in French and in English. Archives Gimpel Fils, London. As Wilhelm von Bode's Rembrandt catalogue or Gustav Waagen's book, Smith's catalogue constitutes an essential reference since Gimpel frequently quote this writing. See for example Letter from Gimpel & Wildenstein to John Beatty, 19 January 1909. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art records, 1883–1962, bulk 1885–1940, box 46. On Smith, see

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

*Portrait* was the subject of certification by Walter Friedländer, who conducted an in-depth examination of the painting, judging it to be authentic. This evidence lent weight to René Gimpel's assessment, especially as the work was widely admired, and its provenance was documented. Hence there were plenty of guarantees coming together to remove any doubt as to its paternity.

Now, in his *Aphorisms*, he calls into question both the documentary evidence and the expert appraisal certificates: 'The pedigree is a faked passport (...) Some pedigrees are ready before the picture'.<sup>83</sup> Weaving through his own experiences in Europe and America, René Gimpel paints a critical, and even nostalgic portrait of the art trade.<sup>84</sup> In order to meet the high demand coming from America, certain experts would vie with each other to maintain their supremacy and sell on for extremely fancy prices extremely well certified works attributed to renowned artists. The certificates accompanying the transactions would sometimes paper over an incorrect assessment. Gimpel frowned upon 'this business that burns finger and souls',<sup>85</sup> and thereby helped to lower the quality of collections. But in the case of the *Self-Portrait*, a discrepancy is to be noted between the theory and the practice. Here the attribution obeys a belief system that provides certitude and clouds the art dealer's judgement. The dealer remained convinced of the painting's unique character, as a rare work of 'museum quality', since his immediate ambition was to offer it to a major institution. The museum valued the authentic artwork created by an artist whose name was significant in the development of art history. Through this purchase and the rediscovery of a work previously labelled as 'lost', Gimpel's intention was to fill in a gap in art. This operation had a historiographical impact: the prospect of extending the body of work of an artist especially sought-after during the interwar years, making his portrait part of the heritage and shedding fresh light on its production, became mixed up with the attribution procedure. For the latter was a response to the market situation, regulated by fluctuating supply and demand. As the sociologist Howard Becker emphasizes, the act of discovering,

---

Antoinette Friedenthal, 'John Smith, his Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters (1829–1842) and the 'stigma of PICTURE DEALER'', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 9, December 2013, 1–20, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/friedenthal.pdf> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>83</sup> Gimpel, *Aphorisms*, undated. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>84</sup> Gimpel, *Journal*, 548–549 (4 March 1929) and 589 (December 1929). This phenomenon reached private as well as public collections. Friedländer shared this point of view on this 'kill-joy expertise-system'. See Editorial, 'Expertises' – An American Passion', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 52:302, May 1928, 209 and Friedländer, *On Art and Connoisseurship*, 179–183. Numerous texts account for the counterfeit market during the interwar period and discuss high-profile trials, such as the trial of Leonardo da Vinci's *Belle Ferronnière* in 1923. Also see Gimpel, *Journal*, 356 (5 September 1923) and 360 (16 September 1923) as well as 366–368 (October 1923). See on this topic John Brewer, *The American Leonardo. A Tale of Obsession, Art and Money*, London: Oxford University Press, 2009 and Thierry Lenain, 'Art Forgery as the Connoisseur's Nightmare', in Thierry Lenain, *Art forgery: the history of a modern obsession*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, 234–310.

<sup>85</sup> 'ce métier qui brûle les doigts et les âmes', Letter from René Gimpel to Jules Bache, 6 December 1930. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

the fact of the art worlds competing 'for the scoop',<sup>86</sup> worked towards turning a trend into a permanent feature by creating a monopoly. For the art dealer, this acquisition was an opportunity to make inroads into a new market, with new clients, and thereby enhance his reputation. The attribution of a painting to an artist thus involves striking a subtle balance between the documentary approach and formal examination.<sup>87</sup>

### From the documents to the X-rays

In the form of a memorandum very likely drafted probably in the late 1930s, René Gimpel draws up a long list of questions that condense the logical processes he would mobilize whenever he was apprehending a picture: 'To whom do you attribute the painting? To your mind is this a definite attribution and upon what assertion is it based? Have you received the opinion of an expert, if so which expert and when and what was that opinion? (...)'.<sup>88</sup> He continues his essay by underlining the need to query all at once the work's state of preservation, its provenance, and any restorations, technical examinations and documentary studies that it has come in for. Most of all, he questions the contribution of X-rays to the field of expert appraisal. For both the expert and the art dealer, he writes, 'this giant microscope' makes it possible to see what is invisible to the naked eye, and draw up a full status report on the painting, taking into account the deterioration it has sustained over time. Making use of new technology provides '(...) undeniable facts upon which he can base his judgement more easily and with greater assurance (...) The most skilled experts were put off, and prior to the advent of X-rays could never rediscover the master's hand', he stresses.<sup>89</sup> The technical examination increases the reliability of the verdict: it offers the connoisseur 'a certain guarantee that previously only came to him from within (...)'.<sup>90</sup> While this interpretive framework sums up his method, René Gimpel applied it flexibly however on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>86</sup> 'pour la primeur', Howard S. Becker, *La bonne focale: de l'utilité des cas particuliers en sciences sociales*, Paris: La Découverte, 2016 [2014], esp. 151–153. Also see Francis Haskell, *Rediscoveries in art: some aspects of taste, fashion and collecting in England and France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976 (the foreword in particular) and Catherine Scallen, *Rembrandt, reputation and the practice of connoisseurship*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004, esp. 241–279.

<sup>87</sup> Esp. see David Ebitz, 'Connoisseurship as Practice', *Artibus et Historiae*, 9:18, 1988, 208–210.

<sup>88</sup> 'A qui attribuez-vous le tableau? Est-ce dans votre esprit une attribution certaine et sur quelle assertion elle est basée? Avez-vous reçu l'opinion d'un expert et de qui et de quelle époque et quelle fut-elle? (...)', René Gimpel's text and draft, [scientific research center], (c. 1940) and unpaginated. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>89</sup> 'microscope géant (...) des faits indéniables sur lesquels il peut plus facilement et avec plus d'assurance fixer son jugement (...) les experts les plus habiles furent troublés et n'ont jamais pu retrouver la main du maître avant l'arrivée du rayon X', René Gimpel's text and draft, [scientific research center], undated (c. 1940) and unpaginated. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>90</sup> 'une certaine garantie qu'il ne tenait avant que de lui-même (...)'. Notably to detect forged signatures. René Gimpel's text and draft, [scientific research center], undated (c. 1940) and unpaginated. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

There is no doubt that he adhered during the 1940s to the 'scientific dream'<sup>91</sup> propagated by the growth of appraisal technologies at museums. While he took the view that X-rays could not replace the connoisseur's skills, like Max J. Friedländer,<sup>92</sup> he considered that science could make a useful contribution to them. His ambition echoed a trend that became general during the period 1930–1940. On the strength of their critical viewpoints, Alan Burroughs (Fogg Museum) and William Constable (Boston Museum),<sup>93</sup> both museum curators, aspired to introduce more systematic exchanges among experts, art historians and museum professionals, whose activities tended to intersect despite their respective assignments. In England, a series of articles published in the *Burlington Magazine* also reported on the advantages of X-ray photography for Old Masters studies.<sup>94</sup> René Gimpel was receptive to these various initiatives, and in turn campaigned for greater transparency, recommending greater dialogue among persons possessing knowledge about art in order to demystify the connoisseur's view. If this is a basic argument that he mobilized to seal a relationship of trust with his clients, his posture crossed thus the theoretical boundary between connoisseurship – based on intuition and a practised eye – and documentary and scientific analysis – reputedly objective and reliable.<sup>95</sup> Gimpel cultivated his dual image as the dealer-scholar *par excellence*, operating his dealership alternately as an insider and as an outsider.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>91</sup> 'rêve scientifique', Philippe Bordes, Frédéric Elsig, Charlotte Guichard, Peter Parshall and Philippe Sénéchal, 'Le connoisseurship et ses révisions méthodologiques', *Perspective*, 3, 2009, 353, <https://perspective.revues.org/1303> (accessed 18 May 2017). See also Jacques Thuillier's text first published in *Techne*, 'Poussin et le laboratoire', *Techne: la science au service de l'histoire de l'art et des civilisations*, 1, 1994, 13–20, reprint in Nicolas Milovanovic and Serge Lemoine, eds., *Les écrits de Jacques Thuillier. Nicolas Poussin*, Dijon: Faton, 2015, vol.1, esp. 348–349.

<sup>92</sup> Friedländer, *On Art and Connoisseurship*, chapter 27, 184–196 and chapter 28, 197–199. The new technologies, like the photography, are 'an unvaluable auxiliary' (197).

<sup>93</sup> William Constable, *Art History and Connoisseurship: Their Scope and Method*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938; Alan Burroughs, 'X-Rays and Picture Restoration', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 56:327, June 1930, 336; Alan Burroughs, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938. Also see Francesca G. Bewer, *A Laboratory for Art: Harvard's Fogg Museum and the Emergence of Conservation in America, 1900–1950*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Art Museums, 2010. René Gimpel and Jacques Furst were in contact with Constable in Boston (Correspondence between Furst and Gimpel, February 1938, Archives Gimpel Fils, London).

<sup>94</sup> At the same period, Paul Ganz's plan to establish an international control office in order to bring together analytical equipment on artworks: Paul Ganz, 'An Unpublished Holbein Portrait', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 56:324, March 1930, 124. According to Kennedy North, it is necessary to dialogue: 'But the X-rays themselves are useless. They can only lay facts before the inquiring mind'. See S. Kennedy North, 'Old Masters and X-Rays', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 56:325, April 1930, 197.

<sup>95</sup> On this topic, see the example developed in David Bellingham, 'Attribution and the Market: The Case of Frans Hals', in Megan Aldrich and Jos Hackforth-Jones, eds., *Art and authenticity*, Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2012, 22–36. See also David Carrier, 'In Praise of Connoisseurship', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 61:2, 2003, 159–169.

<sup>96</sup> On this porous limit, see Elizabeth Mansfield, ed., *Art history and its institutions: foundations of a discipline*, London: Routledge, 2002, esp. 1 and Ivan Gaskell, 'Tradesman as scholars:

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

Despite his fondness for new technology, René Gimpel failed to use it on the Poussin *Self-Portrait*. With war looming, the political situation forced him to cut back his business activity and then to flee Paris. He joined the Resistance as early as 1940, and was imprisoned in Lyon and later in the South of France. During his captivity, he kept up a correspondence with his sons, especially Jean Gimpel, on the subject of a centre for scientific analysis relating to the conservation and restoration of works of art. The project's aims would be to 'examine the artists' technique' and 'ensure extra longevity for works of art (...)'.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the laboratory there would be a library, with 'a vast amount of documentation', like the library built up by Bernard Berenson and Joseph Duveen. Inspired by the Louvre museum laboratory founded in 1931, the centre would be open to all researchers and experts in the interests of converging knowledge.<sup>98</sup>

In the debate over the postwar de-attribution of the Nicolas Poussin *Self-Portrait*, Jean Gimpel had learnt this lesson and tried to put keenly it into practice.

### The temporary radiance of an authentic masterpiece

The painting remained in France until the war without finding a buyer. In order to protect his property from exactions during the Occupation, René Gimpel spread his stocks over different locations in New York, London, the South of France and Monaco. After his death in 1945, his three sons, Peter, Jean and Ernest, undertook to recover the scattered works and to organize the succession.<sup>99</sup> The *Self-Portrait* seems

---

interdependencies in the study and exchange in art', in Elizabeth Mansfield, ed., *Art history and its institutions: foundations of a discipline*, London: Routledge, 2002, 146–162.

<sup>97</sup> 'd'étudier la technique des artistes' and 'de conserver aux œuvres d'art une vie plus longue (...)', Exchanges of letters between René Gimpel and Jean Gimpel, Saint-Sulpice-La-Pointe prison and Marseille, esp. 14 October 1942, 2 November 1942, 30 November 1942. René Gimpel was imprisoned in Saint-Sulpice-la-Pointe then at the Mont-Luc prison in Lyon, before being deported to the Neungamme concentration camp where he died on 3 January 1945. Gimpel also spoke about this project to his secretary and retainer, Odyle Firet-Poirier, in a letter dated circa 1940. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>98</sup> 'une documentation énorme'. Letter from René Gimpel to Jean Gimpel, c. Autumn 1942. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. On the laboratories in France, see Jean-Pierre Mohen, 'L'art et la science: histoire du laboratoire de recherche des musées de France', *La revue pour l'histoire du CNRS*, 2, 2000, unpaginated, <http://histoire-cnrs.revues.org/1448> (accessed 18 May 2017) and Christian Lahanier, 'Naissance de la recherche scientifique au Laboratoire de recherche des musées de France (LRMF)', *Histoire de la recherche contemporaine*, 2:2, 2013, 132–141, <http://hrc.revues.org/290> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>99</sup> On the firm history, see Kostyrko, 'René Gimpel's 'Diary of an Art Dealer'', 619. Between 1937 and 1940, stocks movement is in part documented via different inventories and letters. In this respect, on 29 September 1939, Gimpel sent a group of paintings to Jacques Chenue's convoy company in London. Poussin's *Self-Portrait* was probably amongst these paintings. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. The Gimpel stocks and collections were partially spoliated during the German Occupation. Also see Death table and inheritance declaration of René Gimpel, 8 November 1946, no. 1686. Archives de Paris, APS, DQ7-31399.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

to have been included in a batch of paintings by Titian, Boucher and Fragonard discovered in a garage in London.<sup>100</sup>

To honour the memory of their late parent, René Gimpel's sons opened a gallery in London they called the Gimpel Fils Gallery – a venture that they wanted to be in the image of their father's reputation, 'very commercial [and] preserving high artistic standards'. Their strategy involved selling off pictures, 'preferably old ones in order to follow R.G.'s [René Gimpel] idea tending towards turning the stock into modern paintings not so difficult to defend'.<sup>101</sup> In the winter of 1946, they opened their maiden exhibition entitled *A Selection from five centuries of French Painting* (20 November–31 December 1946). Among the works by Fragonard, Monet and Picasso on show, it featured the Nicolas Poussin *Self-Portrait*, which received extensive critical coverage.<sup>102</sup> In his report on the exhibition published in the *Burlington Magazine*, Denys Miller Sutton devotes his entire article to the Poussin painting, along with a reproduction. While he highlights the exemplary value of this painting as renewing Poussin's image, he does however see it as being an early version of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* and not as an independent work.<sup>103</sup> This view became widespread after the war; two exhibitions held at the Louvre and the Petit Palais mention the Pointel *Self-Portrait* as being a 'replica' of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* kept in 'an English collection', i.e. the Gimpel collection.<sup>104</sup> In the 1950s a succession of exhibitions and publications would bolster the painting's reputation, while it gradually achieved more autonomous status. Whereas it became better known in dealer circles, academia and the museums soon showed an interest as well: the *Self-Portrait* did not go unnoticed by Anthony Blunt, a close friend of the Gimpel family. As a recognized Nicolas Poussin specialist, Blunt in turn conducted an in-depth examination of the Poussin portraits. Informed by Walter Friedländer in 1936 of the discovery of the Pointel *Self-Portrait* in London, he published the results of his research in the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* in 1947, in order to 'clear

<sup>100</sup> They made an astonishing discovery in a garage in London, which narrowly missed getting destroyed in the bombings: Unknown, 'Secret of a garage', *Londoner's Diary*, 8 November 1946, unpaginated. See Bord of trade to Peter Gimpel, paintings in England, 18 August 1944, with annexed list, letter from Serge Lemonnier to Ernest Gimpel, 3 March 1946, letter from Peter Gimpel to Serge Lemonnier, 23 January 1951, Estate of René Gimpel. Archives Gimpel, London, unpublished.

<sup>101</sup> 'très commerciale [et] conservant une haute tenue artistique (...) de préférence ancien pour suivre l'idée de R.G. [René Gimpel] tendant à transformer le stock en tableaux modernes moins difficile[s] à défendre', Letter from Ernest or Pierre Gimpel to Serge Lemonnier, testamentary executor, 10 June 1945. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>102</sup> Gimpel Fils, *A Selection from Five Centuries of French Painting*, London: Gimpel Fils, 1946, no. 3, unpaginated: 'Canvas 26 1/2 x 55 in. (...) Engraved by Pesne in the 17th century. Engraved by Corner in the 19th century'.

<sup>103</sup> Denys Sutton, 'Five Centuries of French paintings', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 89:526, January 1947, 22: '(...) presumably the first version of the artist's well-known *Self-Portrait* in the Louvre (...)'.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>104</sup> André Chamson, ed., *Chefs-d'œuvre de la peinture française du Louvre: des primitifs à Manet*, Paris: Éd. Musées nationaux, 1946, 73, no. 87; Georges Salles, et al., *Chefs-d'œuvre de la peinture*, Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1945, 19–20, no. 37.



Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

up a certain confusion which still exists about the portrait of 1647'.<sup>105</sup> His study combines a qualitative and stylistic analysis of the *Self-Portrait* ('internal evidence') with an examination of the pedigree and the related documentary sources ('external evidence'). He stresses the fact that the painter only made two self-portraits, not three, as Walter Friedländer notably mistakenly wrote in 1914. Among the numerous copies and derivative works he lists, Blunt asserts that the Gimpel version matches the original picture painted by Nicolas Poussin. His was an authoritative judgement.<sup>106</sup> In 1947 the first issue came out of the *Bulletin de la Société Nicolas Poussin* founded by Thérèse Bertin-Mouroit, which included a study by Bernard Dorival, curator of the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris.<sup>107</sup> His essay opened on the first page with the reproduction of a detail from the Gimpel *Self-Portrait*, Nicolas Poussin's features. The writer compares the Louvre version with the Gimpel, its 'younger' version of lesser quality, without questioning its attribution. In 1951–1952 the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London loaned the painting for an exhibition honouring Nicolas Poussin at Newcastle-upon-Tyne,<sup>108</sup> where the work's value was enhanced; indeed in 1954 the *Self-Portrait* joined the selection of 'masterpieces' presented at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.<sup>109</sup> Now with the standing of a museum piece ranking as a flagship work, the painting acquired a reputation in both Britain and France.<sup>110</sup>

### One copy concealing another

But in Germany some diametrically opposite observations were to be heard. In 1952, the art historian Kurt E. Simon identified a *Self-Portrait* by Poussin in the storerooms of the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum. The picture was listed in 1819 in the inventory of

<sup>105</sup> Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 219.

<sup>106</sup> In spite of the identified copies, he mentioned that: 'The quality of the Gimpel picture points almost conclusively against its being a copy. It has been rubbed in parts and has therefore in some places lost that precision which we expect in Poussin at that period. But the subtlety of the drawing, particularly in the foreshortened hand, and the convincing quality of the modelling in those parts which are perfectly preserved are more than even Poussin's most skilful copyists ever attained', Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 222, plate A. On Blunt, see Michael Kitson, 'Anthony Blunt's Nicolas Poussin in context', in Katie Scott and Genevieve Warwick, eds., *Commemorating Poussin. Reception and Interpretation of the Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 211–230.

<sup>107</sup> Dorival, 'Les Autoportraits de Poussin', 39–49, figure 45. In 1952, Charles de Tolnay considered both *Self-Portraits* (Pointel and Chantelou) as 'antithetical pendants' ('pendants antithétiques'). See Charles de Tolnay, 'Le portrait de Poussin par lui-même, au musée du Louvre', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 3, September 1952, 110, note 3.

<sup>108</sup> The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Scotland at Hatton Gallery Upon Tyne; it focussed on Nicolas Poussin and the *Seven Sacraments* (second series), owned by the museum (inv. NGL 067.46 A–G). See Hatton Gallery, Ralph Holland *et al.*, *Exhibition Nicolas Poussin, Seven Sacraments*, New Castel Upon Tyne: Hatton Gallery, 1951–1952, 10, no. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Musée des arts décoratifs, ed., *Chefs-d'œuvre de la curiosité du monde*, Paris: Les Presses Artistiques, 1954, no. 38, reproduced plate 16, unpaginated.

<sup>110</sup> For example, the Colonel Brocklebank wished to purchase it but in vain: Exchanges of letters between Peter Gimpel and the Colonel, 31 December 1946 and 3 January 1947. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

the collections of the English banker Edward Solly, acquired by the State in 1821; the collections were partially transferred to the Stadtmuseum of Königsberg's Kunstverein in 1937.<sup>111</sup> The painting, classified as 'Roman school', was added to the convoy and throughout the nineteenth century it was a part of the Berlin collections then undergoing major restructuring.<sup>112</sup> In 1864, the art historian Gustav Parthey listed at the Stadtmuseum a *Self-Portrait* by Poussin which he considered to be an old copy after the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*.<sup>113</sup> Thirty years on, the picture's status remained unchanged, and in the pages of the Gemäldegalerie catalogue of 1886 it was described as an 'Old copy after Nicolas Poussin'.<sup>114</sup> Held in low regard, it languished for over a hundred years in Königsberg, before rejoining the Gemäldegalerie, which opened its doors at the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum in 1904. Revealed by Simon after the 1939–45 war, the painting was now interpreted as being 'for the original'.<sup>115</sup>

The reappearance of the Berlin version not only dented the reputation of the London copy, but also had the Poussinists doubting, beginning with Charles Sterling, who promptly de-attributed the picture: 'The original was recently discovered in the storerooms of the Berlin Museum. A copy currently belongs to M. Gimpel Fils, London'.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> On the Solly collection, see Robert Skwirbli, 'Ein Nationalgut, auf das jeder Einwohner stolz sein dürfte'. Die Sammlung Solly als Grundlage der Berliner Gemäldegalerie', *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 51, 2009, 69–99; Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli, ed., *Giovanni Bellini e la pittura veneta a Berlino: le collezioni di James Simon e Edward Solly alla Gemäldegalerie*, Scripta: Verona, 2015, esp. 13–57. The painting is mentioned in the collections inventory: *Vorläufiger Verzeichnis des Gemälde Sammlung der Herrn Eduard Solly zu Berlin unter Vorbehalt von Nachträgen*, Römische Schule, no. 33, Portrait des Malers, 1819, no. 3028, manuscript. Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Records Nicolas Poussin, Selbstbildnis des Künstlers, no. 1488.

<sup>112</sup> Tilmann von Stockhausen, *Gemäldegalerie Berlin: die Geschichte ihrer Erwerbungs politik, 1830–1904*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, 2000. For a long time, the catalogues (among them the Waagen catalogue of 1830) and inventory of the Königlichen Museen's collections remained silent regarding the painting. This gap, notes Tilmann von Stockhausen, accounts notably for socio-political difficulties that hindered the reorganization of the heritage. See Tilmann von Stockhausen, 'The Failure of Provenance Research in Germany', in Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds., *Provenance: an alternate history of art*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012, 124–136.

<sup>113</sup> Gustav Parthey, *Deutscher Bildersaal: Verzeichniss der in Deutschland vorhandenen Oelbilder verstorbenen Maler aller Schulen*, Berlin: G. Parthey, 1864, vol.2, 296, no. 5: 'Nach Nicolas Poussin (...) Alte Kopie. Leinwand. Br. 2F. 1Z; Höhe 2F. 6Z [78 x 65 cm], Königsberg Stadtmuseum'.

<sup>114</sup> Julius Meyer, Wilhelm von Bode, Hugo von Tschudi *et al.*, eds., *Verzeichnis der im Vorrat der Galerie befindlichen sowie der an andere Museen abgegebenen Gemälde*, Berlin: W. Spemann, 1886, 149, no. 1488: 'Poussin. Alte Kopie nach Nicolas Poussin (...) Französische Schule'.

<sup>115</sup> 'für das Original erklärt', Dr. P. [Kurt E. Simon], 'Poussins Selbstbildnis', *Weltkunst*, 23:11, 1 June 1953, 9. Henning Bock and Rainer Michaelis, eds., *Gemäldegalerie Berlin: 200 Meisterwerke der europäischen Malerei Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, Berlin: Nicolai, 2010, 414 and 432.

<sup>116</sup> 'L'original a été découvert récemment dans les réserves du Musée de Berlin. Une copie appartient actuellement à M. Gimpel Fils, Londres', Charles Sterling, *La nature morte: de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Paris: P. Tisné, 1959 [1952], 135, note 109.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

However some contradictory reactions began to occur: while Charles Sterling reversed his judgement, the Gimpel Fils Gallery loaned out its copy to Durham University<sup>117</sup> and accepted publication of the painting in the monograph by the historian René Crozet, *La vie artistique en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1598–1661: les artistes et la société*.<sup>118</sup> Now there were two copies side by side, both deemed original. This situation could not go on, and in 1955 the Berlin Gemäldegalerie responded. Its director Hans Werner Grohn got in touch with Bernard Dorival, then with the Gimpel Fils Gallery, requesting some photographs of the painting.<sup>119</sup> He then noted the superior facture of the Berlin version, which in any case was a better match for the Jean Pesne engraving, and these observations permitted him to think that the Gemäldegalerie was in possession of the original. In 1956, the *Self-Portrait* now attributed to Nicolas Poussin entered the collections catalogue, with the indication, 'A portrait of the same composition is now in the collection Gimpel Fils, London'.<sup>120</sup> That same year, the Gemäldegalerie loaned the picture to the Kunsthhaus in Zurich, where it was put on public display as being the original,<sup>121</sup> while the English version coming from the art market created mistrust and was likely just a copy. At a time when the specialists were making efforts to establish both the chronology and the paternity of Poussin's works, the existence of two identical paintings caused controversy.

To put an end to it, the Gimpel Fils Gallery and the Gemäldegalerie undertook to determine with confidence the respective status of the two similar *Self-Portraits*. De-attribution of either painting would have major consequences for the party concerned: for the museum, it would mean parting with one of the finest pieces in its heritage; for the Gimpel Fils Gallery, it would mean selling off a now inferior work at a lower price. In both cases, the loss was symbolic; loss of authority, loss of influence with respect to a painting that contributed to their renown.

This led to an authentication process on the two paintings, linked to two major events registering the progress of twentieth-century Poussin studies: the *Nicolas Poussin* exhibition at the Musée du Louvre in 1960, and the retrospective of 1994–1995 at the Grand Palais in Paris and the Royal Academy in London, both with their attendant publications, colloquia and scientific studies.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from the Durham University to Peter Gimpel, 12 March 1952. Records Autoportrait Poussin, Archives Gimpel Fils, London (abbreviated hereafter, *Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils* file).

<sup>118</sup> René Crozet, *La vie artistique en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1598–1661: les artistes et la société*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, 45, figure 3. The inscription *De lumine et colore* was not clearly visible on the reproduction. Letter from Prof. René Crozet, art historian, to Jean Gimpel, 17 February 1952 and 11 March 1952. *Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils* file.

<sup>119</sup> Correspondence between Hans Werner Grohn and Peter Gimpel, 18 April 1955, 29 April 1955 and 3 May 1955. *Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils* file; letter from Grohn to Bernard Dorival, 2 March 1955. Records Nicolas Poussin, *Selbstbildnis des Künstlers*, no. 1488, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (abbreviated hereafter, *Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie* file).

<sup>120</sup> 'Ein Bildnis gleicher Komposition befindet sich heute in der Sammlung Gimpel Fils, London', Hans Werner Grohn, ed., *Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen, 1956, 35, no. 99.

<sup>121</sup> Kunsthhaus, ed., *Unbekannte Schönheit: bedeutende Werke aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, Zurich: Berichthaus, 1956, 71, no. 202 ('(...) wohl nur um eine Kopie').

### An underlying debate and new investigations

Among the works selected in Paris for the 1960 exhibition (May–July 1960) was the recently rediscovered Berlin *Self-Portrait*.<sup>122</sup> The extra publicity given to the Berlin picture, whose authenticity remained moot, tended to consolidate its status and allay any doubts people may have had about it. Thus in the catalogue entry, Anthony Blunt corrected his earlier attribution of 1947 with regard to the Gimpel *Self-Portrait*, the Berlin one being superior in quality. Charles Sterling, who authored the Poussin biography, restated his change of mind by using a similar argument. They both observed the twin paintings at distinct periods. Through comparison and recall, they managed to establish a hierarchy between the two works inferred from a qualitative approach. However they do not spell out any other reasons that may have guided their thinking. Quality in itself functions seems to be a criterion of authenticity; the Berlin picture's better facture, its substantial superiority, enable one to recognize the master's hand in it.

While this perspective tended to spread in the field of Poussin studies, other opinions expressed a more reserved stance, like Pierre du Colombier: 'The Pointel portrait used only to be known by a version on the art market. The one exhibited (No.89, *bis*) coming from East Berlin will be a revelation for most visitors (...). It is certainly of remarkable quality, though one cannot say definitely that it is the original'.<sup>123</sup> Reactions and contrasted views ensued as part of some subtle power games.

In the wake of the 1960 exhibition, Jean Gimpel with the Gimpel Fils Gallery re-opened the file in his charge in order to elucidate the identity of the two paintings. While in Paris the show was accompanied by scientific examinations directed upstream by Madeleine Hours,<sup>124</sup> on the other side of the Channel, Stephen Rees-Jones published in the *Burlington Magazine* the findings of his own research at the Courtauld Institute laboratory. Jean Gimpel promptly called upon Rees-Jones to

<sup>122</sup> Germain Bazin, Anthony Blunt, Charles Sterling and Madeleine Hours, *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Éd. Musées nationaux, 1960, 119, no. 89 bis (notice) and 260–261 (biography) as well as 119–120, no. 90 (Chantelou *Self-Portrait*). In addition, André Chastel reported that the original was found in Berlin (vol.1, 300–301, note 7). Jacques Thuillier published the *corpus pussinianum* in 1960: 'Pour un "corpus pussinianum"', in André Chastel, dir., *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1960, vol.2, 38–249. See also Denis Mahon, 'Poussiniana: afterthoughts arising from the exhibition', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, July-August 1962, 127–129. In the 1960s, different research were dedicated to the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*: Georg Kauffmann, 'Das Selbstbildnis von 1650', in Georg Kauffmann, *Poussin-Studien*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960, 82–98; Donald Posner, 'The Picture of Painting in Poussin's *Self-Portrait*', in Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard and Milton J. Lewine, eds., *Essays in the History of Art Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, London: Phaidon, 1967, 200–203.

<sup>123</sup> Pierre du Colombier, 'The Poussin exhibition', *The Burlington Magazine*, 102:688, July 1960, 288.

<sup>124</sup> Madeleine Hours, 'Nicolas Poussin: étude radiographique au Laboratoire du Musée du Louvre', *Bulletin du laboratoire du Musée du Louvre*, November 1960, 30–55, no. 5. The Chantelou *Self-Portrait* was X-rayed, see results Bazin, Blunt, Sterling, Hours *et al.*, *Nicolas Poussin*, 343; Madeleine Hours, ed., *La vie mystérieuse des chefs-d'œuvre: la science au service de l'art*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1980, 15–23 and 47–78.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

take a close look at the *Self-Portrait* at the Courtauld Institute.<sup>125</sup> Jean Gimpel began by following in his father René's footsteps in the fields of conservation and restoration of works of art, before going on to make a name for himself as a medieval art historian.<sup>126</sup> After the war, he worked with the laboratories of the Brussels Royal museums and the museums of France, and took part in the examination of paintings such as, for example, *Tobias and the Angel*, renamed *Lady with Her Daughter* (figure 12), a painting inherited from René Gimpel which had come in for multiple repaintings over the centuries and whose attribution to Titian had long divided specialists.<sup>127</sup> In favour of interdisciplinary dialogue, he took the view that new technologies both attenuate the enforced 'muteness' of artworks and enable one's knowledge about art to be taken deeper, thus allowing *ad hoc* means of conservation to be envisaged.<sup>128</sup> In the case of *Self-Portrait*, Jean Gimpel favoured the laboratory route. By calling in Rees-Jones, he was pursuing a clear purpose: 'When we will have finished the scientific work we must write to the Berlin museum to have the same work done there'.<sup>129</sup> While the Gimpel *Self-Portrait* was at the laboratory, the new monograph by Walter Friedländer came out, recording his 'conversion'<sup>130</sup> to the Berlin version, to quote Pierre Rosenberg's felicitous expression. Friedländer thus presented the opposite view to his written opinion of 1936 on the certificate he produced for René Gimpel.<sup>131</sup> At the Gimpel Fils Gallery an exhibition was held in 1966 in tribute to accompany the publication of the English edition of René Gimpel's *Diary*.<sup>132</sup> As the technical analyses were still in progress, despite criticism the gallery upheld the attribution of the *Self-Portrait* to Poussin. But that same year saw the publication of Anthony Blunt's *catalogue raisonné*, a amount of erudition advancing a contrary opinion. The work opens with a section dedicated to the artist's authenticated self-portraits; it includes the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* and the Berlin *Self-Portrait*, now replacing the Gimpel version 'regarded as the original

<sup>125</sup> Stephen Rees-Jones, 'Notes on Radiographs of Five Paintings by Poussin', *The Burlington Magazine*, 102:688, July 1960, 302 and 304–308.

<sup>126</sup> In 1954, Jean Gimpel received a certificate from the International Institute for the Conservation of Museum Objects of the National Gallery of London, 17 June 1954. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished. In 1949, the pioneering exhibition *L'Œuvre d'art et les méthodes scientifiques* commanded his whole attention. See Madeleine Hours and Mme. Anglade, eds., *L'Œuvre d'art et les méthodes scientifiques*, Paris: Éd. Musées nationaux, 1949.

<sup>127</sup> See Jaynie Anderson, 'Titian's Unfinished 'Portrait of a Patrician Woman and Her Daughter' from the Barbarigo Collection, Venice', *The Burlington Magazine*, 144:1196, November 2002, 671–679. Letter from Jean Gimpel to Prof. Nino Cordovado, 20 April 1948. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from Jean Gimpel to René Gimpel, undated (c. October–November 1942). Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Jean Gimpel to Stephen Rees-Jones, 15 Septembre 1962. *Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file*.

<sup>130</sup> Term taken from: Pierre Rosenberg, 'Konrad Oberhuber et Poussin', *Artibus et Historiae*, 31:62, 2010, 13.

<sup>131</sup> Walter Friedländer, *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Éd. Cercle d'art, 1965, 168–169; Walter Friedländer, *Nicolas Poussin: A New Approach*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966, 171–173.

<sup>132</sup> Ernest, Peter and Jean Gimpel, *Homage to René Gimpel. Memorial Exhibition to mark the publication of his diary*, London: Gimpel Fils, 1966, 6, no. 1.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

before the discovery of the Berlin painting'.<sup>133</sup> The work's demotion was pronounced, causing a great stir in the London press.<sup>134</sup> The Berlin copy was then recognized as authentic, although the Gimpel version was not rejected out of hand.<sup>135</sup> His status was put into question: did many copies of the 1649 *Self-Portrait* exist? Was the painting an ancient copy, a fake, or a replica by the master himself?<sup>136</sup>

For the *catalogues raisonnés* were accompanied by research aimed at decoding the recently rediscovered Pointel *Self-Portrait*. While the reappearance of the Berlin copy led to a remodelling of the corpus of Nicolas Poussin's works, it also had historiographical consequences that called for scientific adjustments, beginning with a reassessment of the sources, background and history of creation of the two *Self-Portraits*, the artist's approach, etc. As the crucible for multiple interpretations, the Pointel *Self-Portrait* spawned a great deal of research.

In the build-up to the 1994–1995 retrospective, the dispute rose to a new pitch. Unhappy with the analyses carried out on either *Self-Portrait* to date, Jean Gimpel pleaded not only for further laboratory investigations, but also for the two copies to be compared side by side. To this end he compiled a dossier composed of letters and primary sources, secondary literature and press cuttings, photographs and restoration files relating to the Poussin *Self-Portraits*. About thirty letters, no less, were exchanged between France, England, Germany and the United States over the period 1984–1996. And at least a dozen players from distinct professional backgrounds joined the discussion: the Gimpel Fils Gallery, represented chiefly by Jean Gimpel; the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, represented by its curator of paintings Erich Schleier, who succeeded Hans Werner Grohn; the managing director of the Musée du Louvre, Pierre Rosenberg, and the director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Richard Verdi, who together organized the 1994–1995 retrospective; the art historians Stephen Conrad – who played an important role of intermediary –, Christopher Wright and Sir Denis Mahon; the legal expert, professor and art critic François Duret-Robert; Yvan Parrault, president of the Cercle Nicolas Poussin and the Musée des Andelys; and lastly the restorers and scientists Stephen Rees-Jones,

<sup>133</sup> Blunt, *The paintings of Nicolas Poussin*, 7–8, no. 1–2.

<sup>134</sup> The press will later reconsider this event: Geraldine Norman, 'When Blunt view of a 'Poussin' changed', *The Times*, 29 November 1979, unpaginated, Peter and Jean Gimpel interview, and Alan Coren, 'The Glunt Affair', *Punch*, 12 December 1979, 1113–1114.

<sup>135</sup> Notably Jacques Thuillier, who mentioned in 1974 and 1994 that several copies existed: Jacques Thuillier, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Flammarion, 1974, 105, no. 163 and 163a; Jacques Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Flammarion, 1994, 260, no. 186 and 269. Whereas since 1979 the museum strengthened the painting from Berlin (Eberhard Bartke, ed., *Tesori d'arte dai Musei di Stato di Berlino, Repubblica Democratica Tedesca*, Roma: De Luca, 1979, 86, figure 88.2; Irene Geismeyer, Hannelore Nützmänn and Rainer Michaelis, eds., *Gemäldegalerie. Malerei 13.–18. Jahrhundert im Bodemuseum*, Berlin: Henschel, 1990, no. 240, 134–135), the art historians Kurt Badt and Doris Wild included the Berlin painting in their catalogues under 'authentic artworks'. See Kurt Badt, *Die Kunst des Nicolas Poussin*, Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1969, vol.2, 216–217, no. 157 and 158; Doris Wild, *Nicolas Poussin*, Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1980, vol.1, 144–147 and vol.2, 137, no. 147.

<sup>136</sup> See Jean-Marie Benoist, 'Les jumeaux de Poussin, ou quand Nicolas Poussin imitait Nicolas Poussin', *Connaissance des arts*, March 1980, 88–89, no. 337. The writer raised, in this regard, key questions to which contemporary publications do not answer explicitly.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

Nicholas Eastaugh and Mario Modestini. The aim was to put forward arguments, but also to pool their respective skills, their different methods and knowledge in order to 'end the controversy'.<sup>137</sup>

### Two *Self-Portraits* faced with laboratory examinations

To begin with, the Berlin copy came in for X-ray examination by the Rathgen Research Laboratory located in the German capital. The results proved unsatisfactory, which is why the work was dispatched to New York and placed in the care of a freelance restorer and former curator of the Kress Collection, Mario Modestini.<sup>138</sup> A full report was not written up of the analyses carried out in New York. Claudia Laurenze, a restorer at the Gemäldegalerie, was actually present during some of the work and drew up a brief account of what was done.<sup>139</sup> Modestini first cleaned the painting darkened by a yellowish, oxidized varnish dating from the nineteenth century. Secondly, he reversibly covered over the inscription *De lumine et colore* on the spine of the book, on the grounds that it impaired the composition. Although old, the inscriptions set above the craquelures were a later addition.<sup>140</sup> Lastly, he touched up a few scratch marks and abraded areas. Overall, the painting is in a good state of conservation, although it has been mutilated along the left and top edges, probably at the time of the first restoration work conducted by Schmaeling in 1951–1952.<sup>141</sup> A comparison of the picture with the Pesne engraving and with the Pointel and Solly collections inventories, which indicate its dimensions in 1660 and in 1819, reveals that the painted composition is incomplete and lost a few centimetres over time.<sup>142</sup>

As for the Gimpel copy, the X-ray analyses initially carried out by the Courtauld Institute's Scientific Department also produced few results.<sup>143</sup> (figure 13) The Gimpel Fils Gallery contacted the Fogg Art Museum, which ran a reputable

<sup>137</sup> 'clore la controverse', expression taken from: Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau*, 291–292.

<sup>138</sup> The laboratory is founded in 1888. Letter from Schleier to Conrad, 29 March 1993 and 30 May 1994. Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie and Gimpel Fils files. On Modestini, see Dianne Dwyer Modestini with Mario Modestini, 'Mario Modestini, Conservator of the Kress Collection, 1949–1961', in Marilyn Perry *et al.*, ed., *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, Archetype: London, 2006, 43–62.

<sup>139</sup> The first results were received by Erich Schleier in the Spring 1993. Letters from Schleier to Conrad, 27 and 28 April 1993, 30 May 1994, and letter to Pierre Rosenberg, 23 April 1993. The file mentions 'ohne Dokumentation' and 'kein Bericht' regarding the restorations. Letter from Schleier to Hanna Feyerabend, academic student, 27 December 1996. Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie and Gimpel Fils files.

<sup>140</sup> Letters from Schleier to Conrad, 22 July 1993, 25 April 1994, 5 May 1994. Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie file.

<sup>141</sup> Schmaeling carried out a relining, a varnish regeneration and retouches on the painting. Letter from Schleier to Conrad, 29 March 1993. Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie file.

<sup>142</sup> See Thuillier and Mignot, 'Collectionneur et peinture au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Pointel et Poussin', 48, no. 4 and *Vorläufiger Verzeichnis des Gemälde Sammlung der Herrn Eduard Solly zu Berlin unter Vorbehalt von Nachträgen*, no. 33, 1819, PK SMB (79 x 64 cm).

<sup>143</sup> Letter from Conrad to Schleier, 4 September 1993. Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie file.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

research centre, and exchanges took place with the curator Konrad Oberhuber.<sup>144</sup> Finally Jean Gimpel entrusted the painting to Nicholas Eastaugh, an Independent Technical Researcher based near London, for him to carry on the investigation using state-of-the-art technology. First of all, observation of the painting under the microscope revealed that, unlike on the Berlin copy, the two inscriptions are integral parts of the pictorial surface and hence contemporaneous with the painting as a whole.<sup>145</sup> However, they are old, as the slow to form *craquelures* and deep cracks pass through the different layers of material. Furthermore, energy dispersive X-ray spectrometry and micro-chemical analyses uncovered no anachronistic pigment.<sup>146</sup> Secondly, X-ray examinations revealed an underlying composition above the artist's head previously observed by Rees-Jones. Since certain pigments remain more opaque to X-rays, as things stand the restorer cannot say for sure that there are 'obvious *pentimenti*', which would make the copy theory more unlikely.<sup>147</sup> Thirdly, the painting is in a poor state of preservation. In addition to various gaps in the picture, the background lacks relief, and especially the *putti*. The picture is uneven in quality, presenting several repainted areas, including one large one that distorts the right side of the painter's face. On account of the damage, it was not possible to remove either the dirt or the varnish that darken the canvas. While the work had probably been partly scraped and clumsily restored at some unknown date, the stretcher and canvas are of the sort that Poussin typically used. Finally, its dimensions remain close to the original size; the picture is nearer to the format of the Pesne engraving, with the top of the composition perceptible and the sitter better centred.<sup>148</sup>

Additional studies would be necessary in order to establish more reliable comparisons. But the scientific analyses led to a host of observations, in the light of

<sup>144</sup> Letter from Konrad Oberhuber to Carole Berman, Fine Art Society, London, 18 July 1984. He prepared an exhibition on the early works of Poussin: Konrad Oberhuber, ed., *Poussin, the early years in Rome: the origins of French classicism*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1988. Oberhuber refused to comment the painting via a transparency and without having examined it *de visu*. But he felt 'weakness' in the Gimpel painting. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file.

<sup>145</sup> In 1947, Blunt believed the opposite. Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 222. The inscription remains visible on the London copy, contrary to what was written by Georges Wildenstein (Wildenstein, *Les graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 19–20, no. 1) or Cropper and Dempsey (*Nicolas Poussin: friendship and the love of painting*, chapter 4, 325, note 4). Letters from Eastaugh to Conrad, 12 September, 27 November and 29 December 1993. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file.

<sup>146</sup> Letters from Eastaugh to Jean Gimpel and Conrad, 29 December 1993. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils and Gemäldegalerie files. The samples contain ochre pigments, a combination of yellow tin and lead, used in the seventeenth century, notably in Rome and in Naples. See Elisabeth Ravaud, 'Étude techniques des deux *Saintes Familles* du musée du Louvre', in Nicolas Milovanovic and Mickaël Szanto, dir., *Poussin et Dieu*, Paris: Hazan, 2015, 452, 454.

<sup>147</sup> Letters from Rees-Jones to Jean Gimpel, 10 June 1993 and to Eastaugh, 17 August 1993; letters from Eastaugh to Conrad and/or Gimpel, 12 September, 17 November 1993 and 29 December 1993. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file. Eastaugh compared the X-rays obtained with those of the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* published by Madeleine Hours in 1960 (*Bulletin*, 1960, 34, no. 5) and noted that they do not reveal any *pentimento*.

<sup>148</sup> Letters from Eastaugh to Conrad and Jean Gimpel, 17 November 1993 and 29 December 1993. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file.



Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

which the immediate comparison of the two copies, and the critical examination of the documentary sources, would enable the laboratory findings to be confronted.<sup>149</sup>

### **A direct comparison between the Poussin portraits: testing the quality, corroborating the judgement**

Meanwhile came the opening of the Paris retrospective (27 September 1994–2 January 1995), an event of resounding international importance bringing together the most eminent Poussin specialists. The catalogue notice presented the Berlin *Self-Portrait* and summarized what was known about the painting. The Gimpel version, reproduced in black and white alongside a colour photograph of the Berlin picture, was labelled as follows by Pierre Rosenberg, who had examined the painting in London ahead of the exhibition's opening: 'replica, after Nicolas Poussin, Self-Portrait, London, Gimpel collection'.<sup>150</sup> As a follow-up to the retrospective, an exhibition-dossier entitled *Autour de Poussin* took place.<sup>151</sup> This event sought to spark a debate based on works raising issues of attribution or dating upon which researchers were unable to agree. However, the Pointel *Self-Portraits* dossier did not come up for discussion. The comparison of the two paintings is organized on the fringe of the two public exhibitions, in the presence of Pierre Rosenberg, Erich Schleier, Stephen Conrad and Jean Gimpel among others. The juxtaposition of the two pictures helped to assess the artist's touch and style with a fresh gaze, as a material, technical and stylistic whole. The art historian and philosopher David Carrier does however mention that this operation also involves 'complex acts of interpretation'.<sup>152</sup>

In order to qualify the previously formed 'clear-cut opinion', Jean Gimpel drew up a status report on the examinations conducted by Nicholas Eastaugh on the *Self-Portrait* in his possession. He immediately pointed out how the current physical state of either picture conditioned one's perception of them: the Berlin painting appeared to be 'aesthetically superior' – having been cleaned, restored and

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Conrad to Jean Gimpel, 3 May 1993, letter from Schleier to Conrad, 22 September 1993, letter from Rémy Gimpel to Schleier, 8 September 1994. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils and Gemäldegalerie files.

<sup>150</sup> 'réplique, d'après Nicolas Poussin, Autoportrait, Londres, collection Gimpel', Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 1994, 425–431, no. 189 and 190. In the preamble of the catalogue, Pierre Rosenberg alludes to the underlying debate regarding the self-portraits (16), and considers in particular a drawing, possibly a self-portrait by Poussin, whose paternity is debated (London, British Museum, inv. 1901,0417.21). For a reproduction, see [http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00258/AN00258035\\_001\\_1.jpg](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00258/AN00258035_001_1.jpg) (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>151</sup> Gilles Chomer and Sylvain Laveissière, eds., *Autour de Poussin*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, esp. 41–62.

<sup>152</sup> David Carrier, 'On the Philosophy of Connoisseurship', in David Carrier, *Poussin's paintings: a study in art-historical methodology*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, esp. 91; also see Oskar Bätschmann, 'Les interprétations de Poussin', in Pierre Rosenberg and Louis-Antoine Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, 94. According to the author, 'the frontier between connoisseurship and interpretation is unclear' ('La limite entre connoisseurship et interprétation est floue').

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

retouched – while he admitted the weakness of the London picture – damaged and not cleaned.<sup>153</sup> The treatment of the cheek seriously reduced the artist's face on account of the repainting. Whereas the investigations had proven that both pictures were old (seventeenth century), attention was drawn to certain differences relating to the inscriptions. Research carried out on this aspect by Yvan Parrault showed that the Gimpel copy is more faithful to the Pesne engraving.<sup>154</sup> Despite the close link existing between the painting and the engraving, these observations are not enough to qualify the verdict reached. The impression produced by juxtaposing the two works backed up those members of the assembly in favour of the Berlin copy: the subject is unquestionably the same, but the painting's high quality determines its authenticity. In 1994, Jacques Thuillier, a Poussin specialist of repute (who took no direct part in the confrontation), albeit still tentatively, argued the verdict reached about the two copies. Comparing the *Self-Portraits* with Poussin's output in the 1650s, he discerned in the Berlin painting 'a similar tone and the facture of certain sections, such as the penholder with its impasto light areas are solid enough to take one back to the hand of Poussin'. And he added: 'And yet it must be confessed that all the doubts have not vanished'.<sup>155</sup> The experts' 'visual convictions'<sup>156</sup> based on their formal experience of the work, are guided by a well-trained eye which, by establishing comparisons and associations, manages to recognize the artist's brush. The character of the touch, the stylistic and technical consistency of the painting, or its degree of completeness, representativeness and belonging to the body of the master's work, are all assessment criteria.<sup>157</sup> The qualitative judgement ultimately builds up a gradation between the two *Self-Portraits* in presence. If scientific examinations offered an extra 'instrument' capable of shedding light on the state of a

<sup>153</sup> 'opinion tranchée' (...) 'esthétiquement' meilleur', 'L'autoportrait de Poussin de la collection Gimpel', written account established by Jean Gimpel for the confrontation of the two paintings, 11 October 1994. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file.

<sup>154</sup> The inscriptions in block capitals are not exactly similar, and they are not in the same place (*Endeliensis-Andelyensis*, *PRImus* and *Suae* in lowercase and in the opposite direction of the painting). Report written by Jean Gimpel, 11 October 1994; report by Yvan Parrault addressed to Jean Gimpel, 8 October 1994, and to François Duret Robert, 26 December 1994. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils and Gemäldegalerie files. As Parrault stressed, in the seventeenth century, the term 'Andelys' was spelled with an 'i', while the 'y' imposed itself progressively. The Berlin version contains a 'y' – like the Chantelou version – while the London version and the Jean Pense engraving contain an 'i'. On the emblematic value of the 'y', see Marin, 'Variations sur un portrait absent', 103. For a reproduction on the Chantelou engraving by Pesne, see <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84048803> (accessed 18 May 2017).

<sup>155</sup> 'une tonalité voisine et certaines parties comme le porte-crayon avec ses lumières posées en empâtements [qui] sont d'une facture assez solide pour renvoyer à la main de Poussin. Reconnaissons pourtant que tous les doutes ne se sont pas évanouis', Jacques Thuillier, 'Serisier collectionneur et la *Fuite en Égypte* de Poussin', *Revue de l'Art*, 105:1, 1994, 35 and note 33. The paternity of Poussin's late works is reputed as being easier to establish, since Poussin's trembling hand is noticeable in the touch.

<sup>156</sup> Expression taken from: Olivier Bonfait, 'Poussin au carrefour des années 1960', in Pierre Rosenberg and Louis-Antoine Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, 111.

<sup>157</sup> See on this question: Ebitz, 'Connoisseurship as Practice', 208–209; Carrier, 'In Praise of Connoisseurship', 162–165.

picture, the practised eye of the connoisseur establishes observations that permeate in a lasting way, and which documents and technology may either refute or corroborate or nuance.<sup>158</sup>

### From Les Andelys to London to settle the issue

Before the English wing of the *Nicolas Poussin* retrospective opened at the Royal Academy in London, Jean Gimpel mounted an exhibition at the museum of Nicolas Poussin's birthplace Les Andelys (5 December 1994–16 January 1995), with the aim of digging deeper in researching the picture. The newspapers devoted many column inches to the event: 'Les Andelys. The disputed painting at the Nicolas Poussin museum. The mystery of the twin self-portraits'.<sup>159</sup> Following the exhibition at the Musée Nicolas Poussin, François Duret Robert reported the result of the examinations performed on the painting in the magazine *Connaissance des Arts*, while the London retrospective was on.<sup>160</sup> Not content to raise the issue of the equivocal inscriptions, the author also reported the state of conservation of the Gimpel picture as distorting his perception. At the same date, Jean Gimpel in turn reviewed the circumstances of the comparison. According to him, the meeting did not take place on an equal footing: the examinations carried out on the Berlin picture only came in for a partial report. This is why, by way of conclusion, Jean Gimpel points out the inconsistency of the judgements based on the visual properties of the works of art: 'Finally I would like to remind the art world and the Poussinists that their aesthetic judgement often changes (...) Until the detailed scientific studies of the two paintings are available for comparison the final verdict will never be known'.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, the status of the Gimpel *Self-Portrait* wavered under

<sup>158</sup> Bordes, Elsig, Guichard, Parshall and Sénéchal, 'Le connoisseurship et ses révisions méthodologiques', 354.

<sup>159</sup> S.H., 'Les Andelys. Le tableau de la contestation au musée Nicolas Poussin. Le mystère des autoportraits jumeaux', *L'Impartial*, 8 December 1994, 11, no. 49. Promotional poster of the events: 'Le mystère des autoportraits jumeaux, nouvelles pièces à conviction, exposition en présence de la version londonienne (...) ('The mystery of the twin self-portraits, new evidence, exhibition in the presence of the London version (...)). In addition, Jean Gimpel contacted different specialists, the BBC Television as well as the press. Letter from Jean Gimpel to Yvan Parrault, 14 October 1994. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file.

<sup>160</sup> François Duret Robert, 'I ou Y?', *Connaissance des arts*, 515, March 1995, 144.

<sup>161</sup> Letter from Jean Gimpel to Christopher Wright, 7 March 1995. Self-Portrait Gimpel Fils file. In the second edition of his *catalogue raisonné* (1997), Wright commented the facts related to the Gimpel version. But he did not should attribute an explicit status to it. See Wright. *Poussin paintings: a catalogue raisonné*, London: Harlequin Books, 1997, 197, no. 144 [1985, 206]. Jean Gimpel alludes to the attribution of the two versions of *The Holy Family on the Steps*, which has divided experts (Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1981.18, now viewed as the original; National Gallery of Washington, Poussin's circle, inv. 1952.5.49). He discusses the appraisal process which, in complex cases, remains tied to the state of the documentary and technical knowledge, along with institutional and political issues. See Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin*, 397–399, no. 173; Milovanovic and Szanto, dir., *Poussin et Dieu*, 209–210, no. 18. This case bears similarities with both the Pointel *Self-Portrait* and *The Flight into Egypt*. See Sylvain Laveissière, 'La Fuite en Égypte de Poussin, disparue et retrouvée', in Isabelle

the gazes of Charles Sterling, Walter Friedländer, and then Anthony Blunt. He further notes that, during the side-by-side comparison, assessment of the painting was based more on qualitative judgements (visual evidence) than on technical analyses, although he considers these to be less biased. In search of indisputable facts, he claims the need to carry on with laboratory examinations on both the Berlin picture and the London painting.

The approach taken for the London show (19 January–9 April 1995) was different from the one adopted in Paris. The idea was to celebrate 'the father of the French painting', and accordingly avoid tarnishing his title by presenting 'problematic' works. Also the catalogue notice notes the existence of 'the version in the Gimpel collection in London', without passing judgement or reporting the ongoing debate.<sup>162</sup> However, behind the scenes at the exhibition, the Royal Academy contacted Jean Gimpel on the initiative of the art historian Sir Denis Mahon, a great Poussin connoisseur and a key figure of British connoisseurship.<sup>163</sup> The institution wanted to examine the *Self-Portrait* ahead of the symposium taking place as a fringe event (24 March 1995).

Despite the London confrontation of the two paintings (figure 14), the verdict previously delivered was upheld. While not the original, the Gimpel copy was moreover closely connected to the engraving by Jean Pesne. But actually when the replica was painted and by whom could not be ascertained; the exact circumstances of the painting's execution remained unclear. Neither the direct comparison nor the documentary and scientific resources had penetrated all its secrets.

### A return to sources or the time for questions

The participants in the expert appraisal were asking themselves questions: the 'documentary importance'<sup>164</sup> of the London copy, matching the painting's original format, caught the researchers' attention. Might Pesne have made his engraving from the Gimpel version? Or was it the other way round: did the author of the Gimpel version work in part from the engraving to execute the painting? As early as 1648, Jean Pointel brought together drawings and paintings by Nicolas Poussin in his Paris collection, until it was scattered in 1660.<sup>165</sup> The *post-mortem* inventory drafted by Philippe de Champaigne lists the *Self-Portrait*. Jacques Serizier came into the work during Poussin's own lifetime.<sup>166</sup> Jean Pesne executed the famous

---

Dubois-Brinkmann and Sylvain Laveissière, dir., *Nicolas Poussin: La Fuite en Égypte, 1657*, Paris: Hazan, 2010, 32–61; Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau*, 2015.

<sup>162</sup> 'version de la collection Gimpel à Londres', Richard Verdi, ed., *Nicolas Poussin, 1594–1665*, London: Zwemmer, 1995, 269–270, no. 63 and 271–272, no. 64 as well as 7 (foreword).

<sup>163</sup> Letter from Michelle O'Malley, Head of Education, Royal Academy, to Jean Gimpel, 7 February 1995 and Rees-Jones, 13 February 1995. *Self-Portrait Gimpel* Fils file.

<sup>164</sup> Letters from Schleier to Rémy Gimpel, 4 June 1993 and Schleier to Conrad, 27 and 28 April 1993. *Self-Portrait Gimpel* Fils and *Gemäldegalerie* files.

<sup>165</sup> Szanto, 'Collectionner au Grand Siècle', 82–88.

<sup>166</sup> Thuillier and Mignot, 'Collectionneur et peinture au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Pointel et Poussin', 48, no. 4. Jean Pointel's inventory after death, 20–22 December 1660 (Paris, Archives Nationales, Minutier Central, LXXV, papers 109).

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

engraving, which included a dedication to its new owner: '*Viro egregio D. Cerisier amico suo et fautori benevolentissimo*'. Was it to commemorate the painting's joining the art-lover's collection in 1660, as Cropper and Dempsey and later Mickaël Szanto would suggest?<sup>167</sup> Certainly it establishes a lasting connection linking the patron's name to Poussin's.

The engraving illustrates the two Latin inscriptions that belong to the Gimpel version and were added to the Berlin copy by some third party. This was likely done in Paris shortly after the painting was completed. Was it the wish of Jacques Serizier?<sup>168</sup> These unanswered questions only raise further questions. Despite the many commissions that Poussin was working on at this time, did he personally take on the task of copying the picture? Since the Gimpel painting is uneven in quality and lacks stylistic unity, perhaps Poussin made a partial copy of his portrait, looking after the important sections, which are of superior facture, and leaving an assistant to finish off the rest? Lastly, did Poussin (or one of the painting's owners) call upon a Roman or a Parisian copyist? These are the issues that came up in the course of the debate. According to Poussin's letters, the *Self-Portrait* intended for Jean Pointel remained in his Via Paolina studio (his home since 1632) for a year before being dispatched to Paris.<sup>169</sup> In other words, while he was

<sup>167</sup> The Pesne engraving date has been debated time and again. Even if Pierre-Jean Mariette owned a copy of the engraving on which was written the year 1660 (Wildenstein, *Les graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1957, 19–20, no. 1), the artwork should have been created later, since the auction of Pointel's collections took place from 20 to 22 December 1660. In this respect, Jean Pesne should have completed the engraving from 1661 onwards. See Thuillier and Mignot, 'Collectionneur et peinture au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Pointel et Poussin', 48, no. 4. According to Modestini (cited in the catalogue Pierre Rosenberg, ed., *Poussin, Watteau, Chardin, David...: peintures françaises dans les collections allemandes, XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005, 411, no. 126), the inscriptions would date 'probably from the beginning of the eighteenth century' or from around 1660, according to Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: friendship and the love of painting*, 146. The Gemäldegalerie's restoration records do not specify a date.

<sup>168</sup> Within the context of the theory of art, Poussin was not considered as a painter of the colour. On the inscription *De lumine et colore*, Blunt wrote in 1967 that he did not find 'satisfactory answer' in order to explain it. See Anthony Blunt, *Nicolas Poussin*, London: Phaidon, 1967, vol.1, 265–266, note 18. On the reception on this inscription during the seventeenth century, see Cropper and Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin: friendship and the love of painting*, 145–174; Thomas Puttfarken, 'Poussin's thoughts on painting', in Katie Scott and Genevieve Warwick, eds., *Commemorating Poussin. Reception and Interpretation of the Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 53–75; Szanto, 'Collectionneur au Grand Siècle', 99. On Jean Pesne and Poussin, see Olivier Bonfait, *Poussin et Louis XIV. Peinture et monarchie dans la France du Grand Siècle*, Paris: Hazan, 2015, 225–232.

<sup>169</sup> The artwork, completed on 20 June 1649, remained there until 19 June 1650. Poussin sent the painting to Chantelou on 19 June 1650 and indicated that, 'within a week's time' ('une huitaine'), Pointel would receive the artwork in Paris. See Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 19 June 1650, 414–416, no. 181–182. Between 1993 and 1995, the art historian Stephen Contrad, then affiliated with Birbeck College, actively participated in the discussions on Pointel's *Self-Portrait* and conducted many research (Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie and Gimpel Fils files). Reconsidering the sources and the chronology, he noticed that Pointel's painting did not arrive one month before Chantelou's painting in Paris

working on the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, he left the Pointel *Self-Portrait* to dry close by. Any visitors calling may well have admired both works side by side. While it is known for certain that the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* was copied,<sup>170</sup> it cannot be ruled out that certain art lovers also wished to have a copy of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*.

In the context of the symposium held in connection with the Paris retrospective, the art historian Hugh Brigstocke proposed going back to the artist's work method in order to understand the existence of copies and variants.<sup>171</sup> The practice of making a copy after the antique work and after the Renaissance masters is attested in the case of Poussin.<sup>172</sup> In those days, however, the original work enjoyed a more elevated status, as evidenced notably in Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690: 'copy: used to describe the imitation made from an original (...) the least originals are valued more highly than the best copies'.<sup>173</sup> Without condemning the practice, Poussin was concerned about how copyists were reproducing his paintings, fearing that they were undermining their quality.<sup>174</sup> Here, although it was to become a crucial 'authorial' sign,<sup>175</sup> the signature counted for less than the composition's quality and uniqueness. When Chantelou wanted to obtain a copy of the *Seven Sacraments* series, Poussin's initial idea was to entrust the work to a copyist, but he then decided to do a second version of it himself that would not be

---

did, as the painter Felibien's historiographer wrote, but one month later. See Stephen Conrad, 'Félibien's Sources for His Life of Poussin', *The Burlington Magazine*, 137:1106, May 1995, 321–322; Félibien des Avaux, *Entretiens sur la vie et les ouvrages de Nicolas Poussin (1666–1668)*, Vézenaz: Cailler, 1947, 87–88. I am thankful to Stephen Conrad for sharing information with me.

<sup>170</sup> The painter confirmed that Chantelou's *Self-Portrait* was copied when he wrote: '(...) [I] implore you to believe that the original is just as much yours, as the copy' ('(...) [je] vous prie de croire que l'original est autant vôtre, comme la copie'), Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 19 June 1650, 416, no. 182.

<sup>171</sup> Hugh Brigstocke, 'Variantes, copies et imitations. Quelques réflexions sur les méthodes de travail de Poussin', in Alain Mérot, ed., *Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665)*, Paris: La Documentation française, 1996, vol.1, 201–228. See also Milovanovic and Lemoine, eds., *Les écrits de Jacques Thuillier. Nicolas Poussin*, 2015, vol.1, 342–343.

<sup>172</sup> See Richard T. Neer, 'Poussin and the Ethics of Imitation', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 51-52, 2006-2007, esp. 297–300.

<sup>173</sup> 'copie: se dit de l'imitation que l'on fait d'un original (...) les moindres originaux sont plus estimés que les meilleures copies', Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, La Haye: A. et R. Leers, 1690, vol.1, 494. The spectrum of values associated to the copy was nevertheless not unequivocal. The collections visited by Bernini in 1665, notably the Chantelou collection, included copies after Poussin's artworks that were collected for their didactic value, since they provided a substitute. See Antoine Schnapper, *Curieux du grand siècle: œuvres d'art*, Paris: Flammarion, 2005 [1994], 229–246; Benhamou and Ginsburgh, 'Copies of artworks', 257 and 261; Bonfait, *Poussin et Louis XIV*, 76–87 and 166–187.

<sup>174</sup> See in particular Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 12 January 1644, 244–245, no. 100.

<sup>175</sup> See Guichard, 'La signature dans le tableau aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles', esp. paragraph 18; see also Nathalie Heinich, 'La signature comme indicateur d'artification', *Sociétés & Représentations*, 1:25, 2008, 97–106, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-societes-et-representations-2008-1-page-97.htm> (accessed 18 May 2017).

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

a copy.<sup>176</sup> He took a similar decision in the case of his self-portrait. Indeed, we have to consider the different handling that he reserves for each of his self-portraits. Produced in an atmosphere of rivalry between his two patrons, the two pictures follow a certain 'scheme of variation'<sup>177</sup> to which the painter subscribed. By setting out his identity in two distinct manners, Poussin negotiates these 'horizons of expectation'<sup>178</sup> by offering his benefactors different facets of himself. The outcome is two unique interpretations, two autonomous and 'autograph variants'<sup>179</sup> designed almost simultaneously. Even though the painter felt the Chantelou *Self-Portrait* to be a 'better likeness', the Pointel *Self-Portrait* nonetheless remains a fully-fledged work in itself, not a replica, as was supposed for a long time.<sup>180</sup> Most of all, the variation on a single theme offers a guarantee of authenticity and originality, if the painter's famous own thoughts are to be believed: 'Novelty in painting consists mainly not in a subject never treated before, but in good and new groupings and expressions. By

<sup>176</sup> From 1644 to 1648, Poussin worked on the *Seven Sacraments* series for Cassiano dal Pozzo (Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 240–249, no. 63–69 and 312–321, no. 107–113). In a letter from 24 March 1647, he wrote the following famous words to Chantelou: '(...) I am not like those people who, even though they are singing, always have the same tone, I know how to change when I want to' ('(...) je ne suis pas de ceux qui en chantant prennent toujours le même ton, et que je sais varier quand je veux'), Poussin, *Correspondance*, 24 March 1647, 352, no. 146. At the origin of this rivalry between Pointel and Chantelou, a well-known precedent: on 19 August 1647, Poussin completed *The Ordination* (Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 318, no. 111). When Chantelou discovered the painting, he expressed his disappointment and preferred the *Moses saved from the Waters* canvas (Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 372–374, no. 159), a subject that Poussin was revisiting at this time for Pointel. In order to avoid conflict, Poussin clarify his painting approach. The difference between the two representations is related to a principle: the music theory of the *modi* which came from the Greek. Poussin would use different methods when dealing with the same subject in order to create diverse effects on the spectator. He did not execute *The Ordination* with more or less 'love or diligence' but 'in a different way'. See on this theory and his reception Sheila McTighe, 'The modes of music and Poussin's Self-Portraits of 1649 and 1650', in Sheila McTighe, *Nicolas Poussin's Landscape Allegories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 140–163; Matthias Winner, 'L'amore di essa pittura in Poussins Selbstbildnis von 1650', in Hannah Baader, Ulrike Müller Hofstede, Kristine Patz and Nicola Suthor, eds., *Ars et Scriptura. Festschrift für Rudolf Preimesberger zum 65. Geburtstag*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2001, 181–197; Alain Mérot, 'Manières et modes chez André Félibien. Les premières analyses du style de Poussin', in Marianne Cojannot-Le Blanc, Claude Pouzadoux and Évelyne Prioux, dir., *L'Héroïque et le Champêtre. Les catégories stylistiques dans le discours critique sur les arts*, Nanterre: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2014, vol.1, 187–204.

<sup>177</sup> 'schème de variation', Marin, 'Variations sur un portrait absent', 90.

<sup>178</sup> 'horizons d'attente', Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1991[1978], esp. 49 and 81–122.

<sup>179</sup> 'variantes autographes', Brigstocke, 'Variantes, copies et imitations', 214.

<sup>180</sup> David Carrier, 'Poussin's Self-Portraits', *Word & Image. A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 7:2, 1991, 127–148; Ingo Herklotz, 'Zwei Selbstbildnisse von Nicolas Poussin und die Funktionen der Porträtmalerei', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 27, 2000, 243–268.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

these means a subject that is common and old can become singular and new'.<sup>181</sup> Variation is a sign of inventiveness and the founding idea of authenticity: 'I found the thought for it, I mean the conception of the idea, and the work of the mind is done', he wrote in 1647 about a painting at the planning stage.<sup>182</sup>

This being so, despite the presence of an underlying form evidencing a little hesitancy over the composition of the face in the Gimpel *Self-Portrait*, the 'autograph replica'<sup>183</sup> hypothesis is not adopted. The way Poussin was seen is based upon the image of the artist as a scholarly intellectual ('peintre-philosophe'), not in the habit of copying himself.<sup>184</sup> And unlike other seventeenth-century artists, such as Rembrandt, Poussin did not run a studio employing numerous assistants working in his *maniera*. Except for his brother-in-law, Gaspard Dughet, he probably never had a regular pupil. On the other hand, his work inspired a host of imitators and French and Italian artists who might have made a copy of the *Self-Portrait* during the seventeenth century.<sup>185</sup> As demonstrated by Antoine Schnapper, the prices Poussin's paintings were commanding in around 1660 indicated a marked upturn that steepened after the painter's death.<sup>186</sup> One sign that his works were in great demand was the faster rate at which they were circulating between Paris and Rome. There is a dialectical relationship between high demand and copies in increasing numbers. The *post-mortem* Poussin 'cult'<sup>187</sup> did not wane; his fame remained almost intact.

### The pedigree of the Pointel *Self-Portraits*: from the market to the museum

The notice published in the catalogue of the Paris retrospective indicated in 1994 that the Gimpel version and the Berlin copy 'definitely become mixed up'.<sup>188</sup> Above

<sup>181</sup> 'La nouveauté dans la Peinture ne consiste surtout pas dans un sujet encore non vu, mais dans la bonne et nouvelle disposition des expressions, et de commun et vieux le sujet devient original et neuf', Poussin, *Correspondance*, 'De la nouveauté', 496.

<sup>182</sup> 'Je lui ai trouvé la pensée, je veux dire la conception de l'idée, et l'ouvrage de l'esprit est conclu', Poussin, *Correspondance*, letter from Poussin to Chantelou, 22 December 1647, 376, no. 157.

<sup>183</sup> On the value of authenticity and the 'multiple originals', see in particular Charlotte Guichard, 'La main et le geste. Signature et autographie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', in Charlotte Guichard, ed., *De l'authenticité: une histoire des valeurs de l'art (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2014, 63–77.

<sup>184</sup> Jacques Thuillier, *Nicolas Poussin*, Paris: Fayard, 1988, 237–247; Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 312 (regarding the *Seven Sacraments*, no. 107–113).

<sup>185</sup> With regard to artworks produced in a workshop and to the notion of authenticity, less efficient within a collective context: Anna Tummers, 'By his Hand': The Paradox of the Seventeenth Century Connoisseurship', in Anna Tummers, ed., *Art Market and Connoisseurship: A Closer Look at Paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens and Their Contemporaries*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008, 31–68.

<sup>186</sup> Antoine Schnapper, *Curieux du grand siècle: œuvres d'art*, 55–81 ('Prix de Poussin', 76–79); Antoine Schnapper, 'Inventaires après décès et amateurs de Poussin à Paris au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle', in Pierre Rosenberg and Louis-Antoine Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1994, 72.

<sup>187</sup> Szanto, 'Collectionner au Grand Siècle', 99.

<sup>188</sup> 'se confondent à coup sûr', Rosenberg and Prat, eds., *Nicolas Poussin: 1594–1665*, 425, no. 189.



Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

and beyond their similar composition, the two paintings' path through history does indeed coincide. Unlike the precisely documented Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, there are still gaps in the provenance of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*.<sup>189</sup> The picture has moreover seldom elicited a unanimous response. Its originality has been called into question time and time again: over the centuries it has been rejected for purchase or sold cheaply. Between 1947 and 1957, Anthony Blunt and Georges Wildenstein looked into the picture's provenance, identifying respectively seven and eight copies made from it and an equally large number of creations with regard to the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*.<sup>190</sup> This figure grows over time and as research is done into these paintings.<sup>191</sup> Sales catalogues mix up original works, copies either after the Pointel *Self-Portrait* or after the Chantelou *Self-Portrait*, total or partial replicas, be they painted, engraved or drawn.

In 1665, the Serizier exhibition room in Paris received a visit from Bernini accompanied by Paul Fréart de Chantelou. The Italian sculptor gazed admiringly for a long while at the *Self-Portrait* from the Pointel collection.<sup>192</sup> Serizier emptied the contents of his exhibition room during the 1680s, without any inventory being made to document where it all went.<sup>193</sup> Pierre Rosenberg reports the re-appearance of the Pointel *Self-Portrait* in Florence in 1681; in vain did the scholar and art historian Filippo Baldinucci propose that Leopoldo de' Medici acquire it for the Uffizi Gallery.<sup>194</sup> Once more, the painting disappeared until the end of the eighteenth century. A string of auctions were held which respectively included a *Self-Portrait* similar to the one done for Pointel. The language and content of these auction catalogues being uneven, not to say minimalist, the original copy painted by Poussin becomes hard to nail down.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>189</sup> As noted, the artwork remained among Chantelou's inheritors and entered the national collections in 1797: Rosenberg, *Nicolas Poussin: les tableaux du Louvre*, 248–250, no. 28.

<sup>190</sup> Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 219–226; Wildenstein, *Les graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 19–20, no. 1; Davies and Blunt, 'Some corrections and additions to M. Wildenstein "Graveurs de Poussin au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle"', 207.

<sup>191</sup> In 2015, Pierre Rosenberg catalogued about twenty derivative artworks: *Nicolas Poussin: les tableaux du Louvre*, 248–255, no. 28 (Chantelou *Self-Portrait*). Gemäldegalerie's recent catalogues did not publish an exhaustive list of artworks in relation to the Pointel *Self-Portrait*. However, the museum's records (no. 1488) identified a series of copies or similiaire works. For example, Daniel Seghers' floral composition executed in the seventeenth century after the Pesne engraving (Warsaw, National Museum, Poland, inv. 127146).

<sup>192</sup> Paul Fréart de Chantelou, *Journal du voyage du cavalier Bernin en France* [edited by Ludovic Lalanne], Paris: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 1885, 90.

<sup>193</sup> Szanto, 'Collectionner au Grand Siècle', 99–100.

<sup>194</sup> Wolfgang Prinz, *Die Sammlung des Selbstbildnisses in den Uffizien*, Berlin: Mann, 1971, vol.1, 181–182, no. 59, letter from Filippo Baldinucci to Antonio Bassetti, Florence, 20 March 1681.

<sup>195</sup> See the following catalogues Pierre Rémy, *Catalogue de tableaux, figures de bronze et de marbre [du cabinet de M. de Vigny]*, Paris: Chariot, 1773, 34, no. 89; Langford, *Catalogue of the distinguished and valuable collection of pictures of Charles Jennens*, London: Langford, 1774, 3, no. 52; James Christie, *Catalogue of the noble, capital and well-known collection of pictures to Lord Montfort*, London: Christie, 1776, 3, no. 8; James Christie and James Ansell, *Catalogue of the very capital collection of pictures, bronzes, marbles, statues of the late Mr. Gerard Vandergucht*, London: Christie and Ansell, 1776, 4, no. 33. Blunt noted that the Gimpel copy came from

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

Many copies were in circulation on the French and English markets during the period 1770-1800.<sup>196</sup> In 1781, the sale of the senior civil servant César de Selle de la Garejade included a *Self-Portrait* the description and dimensions of which fit the Gimpel version.<sup>197</sup> Meanwhile, in Hamburg, a *Self-Portrait* sold in 1794 reputedly matches the copy in the Edward Solly collection.<sup>198</sup> The said painting entered the German national collections as a permanent addition in 1821, whereas the Gimpel version carried on doing the rounds of the auction rooms. In the nineteenth century, the number of auctions including self-portraits attributed to Poussin did not drop, just the opposite in fact.<sup>199</sup> On the London market, three sales presented a *Self-Portrait* with a description possibly fitting the copy acquired by René Gimpel in 1936: the first copy appeared in 1943 at the English diplomat William Berwick's auction;<sup>200</sup> the second was scattered by the art dealer Matthew Anderson in 1861;<sup>201</sup> finally the third appeared in 1934 at the auction of the Richard Leighton collections, a painting that had probably been purchased by his grandfather Sir Baldwin Leighton.<sup>202</sup> The information contained in catalogues with no annotations was

---

the Montfort sale. But the dimensions did not coincide and the information provided by the catalogue lacks substance. See Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 222.

<sup>196</sup> See James Christie and James Ansell, *Catalogue of a capital collection of pictures in fine preservation of the property of a nobleman*, London: Christie and Ansell, 1782, 4, no. 57; Le Brun, ed., *Catalogue d'objets rares et curieux du plus beaux choix, provenant du Cabinet de M. Le Brun*, Paris: Le Brun, 1791, 86, no. 159; *Catalogue of several first-rate pictures of an emigrant nobleman*, London: Sampson Low, 1794, 18, no. 318; James Christie, *Catalogue of the extensive collection of pictures of Mr. Robert Grave*, London: Christies, 1803, 73, no. 100.

<sup>197</sup> *Catalogue des livres, tableaux, dessins, estampes qui composent le cabinet de feu Monsieur de Selle [de la Garejade]*, Paris: Bleuët, 1781, 59, no. 38, c. 92 x 62 cm.

<sup>198</sup> Hermann Goverts and Peter Packischefsky, *Catalogus einer vortreflichen Sammlung von Gallery Gemälden, die im südlichen Theil Europa schon im sechszehnhundertem Seculi meistens zusammengebracht worden*, Hamburg: Goverts & Packischefsky, 1794, 144, no. 246 ('Hoch 33 Zoll, breit 27 Zoll'). See also Thomas Ketelsen and Tilmann von Stockhausen, eds., *Verzeichnis der verkauften Gemälde im deutschsprachigen Raum vor 1800*, Munich: Saur, 2002, vol.2, 1265 and correspondence notably between Schleier and Thomas Ketelsen (August and September 1994). Self-Portrait Gemäldegalerie file. The inventory of the Solly collection (1819) does not indicate the origin of the painting. However, it remains unlikely that Solly acquired the painting directly at this sale.

<sup>199</sup> See for example George, ed., *Galerie de feu S.E. le cardinal Fesch ou catalogue raisonné des tableaux*, Rome: Palais Falconieri, 1844, 66, no. 399 (c. 38 x 28 cm).

<sup>200</sup> Harry Phillips, ed., *A catalogue of valuable Italian pictures the property of William Lord Berwick*, London: Harry Phillips, 1843, 8, no. 82. Although partially incorrect, the notice refers to the Pointel *Self-Portrait*.

<sup>201</sup> Christie Manson & Woods, *Catalogue of a portion of the very extensive and valuable pictures of the Italian, Flemish, Dutch & English Schools, Matthew Anderson, Newcastle-on-Tyne, many of which are mentioned in Dr. Waagen's Work on the Art-Treasures of Great Britain [...]*, London: Christie Manson & Woods, 1861, 22, no. 141: 'N. Poussin. His own Portrait, holding a crayon in one hand, whilst the other rests on a book – date 1649'.

<sup>202</sup> The painting dimensions and the buyer name also remain anonymous while the sale price – 5 guineas – is derisory. Despite the gaps, Max Rothschild, René Gimpel and Anthony Blunt considered that the copy came from this sale. In addition, Blunt mentioned that, at the back of this painting, was a chalk mark indicating '7/61' affixed by Christie's in 1861. See Blunt, 'Poussin Studies-I: Self-Portraits', 222, note 41. Hardly visible in 1946 when Blunt

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

however insufficient to establish any connection between the three sales.<sup>203</sup> The Sackville Gallery, which acquired the painting in the wake of the Leighton auction, subsequently passed it on to René Gimpel.

Despite the gaps that characterize the provenance of both copies, the career of the Gemäldegalerie painting involves unknowns of lesser magnitude. As Inge Reist and Gail Feigenbaum point out, a work of art's authenticity value is enhanced by a 'manifest' provenance.<sup>204</sup> The Gemäldegalerie Berlin painting is immediately less controversial than the Gimpel picture coming from the art market.<sup>205</sup> The museum, which conserves works of art and performs a public mission, offers indeed a more neutral setting than does the market, with all the financial stakes it involves.

**'A break in the link'<sup>206</sup> between Nicolas Poussin and the Gimpel *Self-Portrait***

During the twentieth century, the *Self-Portrait* executed by Nicolas Poussin, after requests from Jean Pointel, came in for both documentary and technical research, which led to a fresh interpretation of the picture. These various investigations at once clarified the context of the painting's creation and the history of its reception. For it gave rise to many a discordant interpretation owing not just to the complexity of its coming into being, but first and foremost to its career through history being heavily mixed up with the numerous copies, replicas and variants in existence.

While critical studies devoted to the artist saw a major upturn at the dawn of the twentieth century, the discovery in the 1930s of a self-portrait of Nicolas Poussin was a landmark event. Wishing to promote the production of an artist enjoying a revival of interest, in 1936, René Gimpel *believed* he had purchased an emblematic work attributed to Nicolas Poussin that had recently reappeared on the art market in England. Before the version languishing in the Berlin collections was identified,

---

examined the painting, the inscription has become rather blurred over the years. Different inscriptions in white chalk are currently discernible on the frame and on the chassis of the painting; the name 'Gimpel' is repeated in several places.

<sup>203</sup> Christie Manson & Woods, *Catalogue of pictures by old masters from the collection of Sir Richard Leighton*, 1934, 5, no. 144, without annotations ('34 x 26 in, from the Collection of Matthew Anderson, Esq., 1861').

<sup>204</sup> Gail Feigenbaum, 'Manifest provenance', in Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds., *Provenance: an alternate history of art*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012, 6–28; on the commodization of the pedigree: Elizabeth A. Pergam, 'Provenance as Pedigree: The Marketing of British Portraits in Gilded Age America', in Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist, eds., *Provenance: an alternate history of art*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2012, 104–122; see also Christian Huemer, 'Mascarades de désintéressement: le Connoisseurship et les instruments de la salle des ventes', in Patrick Michel, ed., *Connoisseurship. L'œil, la raison et l'instrument*, Paris: École du Louvre, 2014, 103–115.

<sup>205</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, 'Introduction. L'art entre le marché et le musée', in Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, ed., *Le commerce de l'art: de la Renaissance à nos jours*, Besançon: Éd. La Manufacture, 1992, 9–34; Mary M. Brooks, 'Indisputable authenticity': engaging with the real in the museum', in Rebecca Gordon, Erma Hermens and Frances Lennard, eds., *Authenticity and replication: the 'real thing' in art and conservation*, London: Archetype Publications, 2014, 3–10.

<sup>206</sup> Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau*, 297.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

the art dealer then only had the engraving by Jean Pesne with which to make a reliable comparison. Doubly limited by the documentary sources and by his misguided interpretation of them, the dealer's judgement was at fault. In addition, authorship of the *Self-Portrait* was ascribed to the Norman master by an authority figure, Walter Friedländer, who discerned in the painting features characteristic of the output of Poussin operating in the 1650s. Hence René Gimpel was mistakenly relying on certifications from the art historian. The issue here would appear to be a belief system pervading the entire practice of expert appraisal. The mere fact of linking a work of art to an author, of distinguishing between a genuine creation and a copy, indeed amounts to postulating a hypothesis about an object, a hypothesis that is backed up by external arguments based on documentary resources, the painting's material condition, or its provenance. If he is convinced of his verdict, it is also incumbent upon the connoisseur to gather collective approval to endorse his opinion. Constructed in layers and over time, the attribution calls upon many players, whose theoretical stances, expertise and methods will sometimes differ, and sometimes converge.<sup>207</sup> Authority, the establishing of proof and a relationship of trust interfere in the expert appraisal of the Pointel *Self-Portrait*.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, rhetoric and beliefs become crystallized around the work and condition its assessment. Such mechanisms rely upon 'bases of beliefs',<sup>209</sup> as defined by Bernard Lahire, which implicitly give rhythm to the process of attribution of a work of art to an artist.

As soon as it reappeared in 1952–1953, the Berlin *Self-Portrait* rose to the rank of favourite. Presenting a better state of conservation and deemed superior in quality, it soon garnered a majority of votes, thereby casting doubt as to the originality of the Gimpel *Self-Portrait*. Its status then varied as exhibitions, publications and technical investigations followed, providing fresh keys to interpretation. The double catalogue of the retrospective of 1994–1995 definitively validated the attribution of the Berlin version to Poussin, with permanent demotion of the London painting. Meanwhile, the direct comparison of the two *Self-Portraits* marked the end of the debate. While the laboratory analysis revealed the material damage to each painting down their history, they also raised questions as to the addition of the inscriptions, the dating of the replica and the artist, questions that remain unanswered.

The changing status of the *Self-Portrait* acquired by René Gimpel affected both its biography and its identity. From its discovery to its de-attribution, the

<sup>207</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Les mondes de l'art*, Paris: Flammarion, 2006 [1982], 27–28 and 58–63; Becker, *La bonne focale*, 121–122.

<sup>208</sup> See Christian Bessy and Francis Chateauraynaud, 'Querelles d'attributions', in Christian Bessy and Francis Chateauraynaud, *Experts et faussaires: pour une sociologie de la perception*, Paris: Métailié, 1995, 137–168. The authors recall that: 'When expertises accumulate, they produce a mechanism of self-reinforcement, an almost-irreversible verdict' (139) ('Quand les expertises se cumulent, elles produisent par un mécanisme d'auto-renforcement, un verdict quasi-irréversible').

<sup>209</sup> Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau*, esp. 7–8, 25 and 359–361. The author deconstructs the 'accomplished facts' ('états de faits') and the 'virtually invisible bases of beliefs' ('socles de croyances quasi invisibles') in the regression analysis he carries out with regard to *The Flight into Egypt*.

Pamella Guerdat René Gimpel (1881–1945) and Nicolas Poussin's *Self-Portrait*, from rediscovery to de-attribution

painting had taken on and then shed 'layers of meaning'<sup>210</sup> affecting both its biography and its identity. De-attribution of the London version leads not only to a drop in value, but also relegates it to the status of historical document. An anonymous picture without a name, without an author. The originality of a work is traditionally defined by the fact that it still 'bears the hallmark of the artist's personality',<sup>211</sup> so the London copy will have trouble gaining legitimacy as a 'work of art'.<sup>212</sup> But 'everybody has a name',<sup>213</sup> as René Gimpel himself wrote in 1930 to the prominent art amateur Andrew Mellon with reference to paintings. A sign that the link between an artefact and its creator is highly important within art circles.

The Berlin *Self-Portrait* was now distinguishable from the Gimpel *Self-Portrait* by the fact that it no longer carried on the spine of the book the inscription *De lumine et colore*, painted over in New York in 1993–1994. This detail is the basis for a significant discrepancy in terms of attribution and categorization.

After having been a Teaching Assistant until 2016 at the Institute of Art History and Museology, University of Neuchâtel, **Pamella Guerdat** is currently a fellow holder of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the Institut national d'histoire de l'art in Paris. She is pursuing her Ph.D. thesis on René Gimpel under the supervision of Prof. Pascal Griener. Her fields of study focus on the history of collecting, museum studies and art market (19th–20th centuries).

pamella.guerdat@unine.ch



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

<sup>210</sup> Expression taken from: Olivier Schinz, 'Objets vodous, couche de sens', in Jacques Hainard, Philippe Mathez and Olivier Schinz, eds., *Vodou*, Genève: Musée d'ethnographie, 2007, 365–385. See also Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process', in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 64–94; Thierry Bonnot, *L'Attachement aux choses*, Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 2014, 97–147.

<sup>211</sup> 'empreint[e] de la personnalité de l'artiste', Nadia Walravens-Madarescu, 'L'originalité', in Nathalie Heinich, ed., *Par-delà le beau et le laid: enquêtes sur les valeurs de l'art*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2014, 73; Benhamou and Ginsburgh, 'Copies of artworks', 278–279.

<sup>212</sup> Charlotte Guichard, 'Du 'nouveau connoisseurship' à l'histoire de l'art. Original et autographie en peinture', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 65:6, November–December 2010, 1398.

<sup>213</sup> Letter from René Gimpel to Andrew Mellon, 31 October 1930. Archives Gimpel Fils, London, unpublished.