

Saturday, August 13, 2005



In my early twenties I had private lessons in portraiture in Utrecht, in a studio at the foot of the Dom tower. At that time I was very much into watercolour painting, but the teacher was a pastel artist. This dry material with all those colour boxes did not attract me, but I thought "Well, let's try it once". My result was much nicer as expected. And ever since that I got hooked on pastel. Pastel is great medium for portraits.

My friend Marion sent me a postcard from the J. Paul Getty Museum showing a pastel portrait by the Swiss artist Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702 -1789) of *Maria Frederike van Reede-Athlone at Seven*. It belongs to my favourite pastels. The portrait is middle-sized (22,5 x 18,5 inch) and drawn on vellum, a fine parchment. With his training as miniature painter Liotard, had a good eye for details. The drawing is detailed but not in a boring way: they are refined and sensitive.

Unlike many old paintings which depict children like small adults, the expression of the girl is very childish: she looks shy, dreamy and surprised. Liotard knows how to suggest the clear gaze, the small mouth and the roundness of the cheeks so well. The artist liked using pastels especially for portraits of children, because they could be manipulated with greater speed and ease, and had no odor. The pale Dutch complexion of the girl and her dirty blond hair is set against a neutral background of purple brownish grey and contrasts with the deep ultramarine blue of her clothes. With his pastel technique he manages to catch perfectly the texture of the velvet.