ESSAI

Volume 9 Article 43

4-1-2011

Progression of the Portrait: Ingres and Comtesse d'Haussonville

Annie Werly
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: http://dc.cod.edu/essai

Recommended Citation
Werly, Annie (2011) "Progression of the Portrait: Ingres and Comtesse d'Haussonville," *ESSAI*: Vol. 9, Article 43.
Available at: http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol9/iss1/43

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in ESSAI by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

Progression of the Portrait: Ingres and Comtesse d'Haussonville

by Annie Werly

(Art 2213)

Born Louise de Broglie in 1818 into a prominent French family with bourgeoisie blood, at age eighteen, Louise de Broglie became the Comtesse d'Haussonville by marrying the Vicomte d'Haussonville. Louise d'Haussonville was a daughter, wife, mother and sister to members of the Academie Francaise (Russell) thereby demonstrating her high position in society. Aside from the family from which she came, the Comtesse was an exceptionally interesting and intelligent woman. In her memoirs she recalls her behavior as a child as described by her mother: "she had been accused at the age of 9 of having a character that 'had not enough nourishment in it to sustain a dog'" (Russell). The harsh yet intelligent woman went on to publish five books including a two-volume chronicle of the life of Lord Byron and an unpublished autobiography. An interesting insight into the Comtesse's life lies in her autobiography where she wrote about her decision to marry the Vicomte: "I wanted to marry young and have a brilliant position in society. And that, basically, was the only reason I wanted to marry him" (Collins 49). While she certainly was harsh and biting, she was also incredibly quick witted and bright. All of these aspects of her character are captured in Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's portrait: "Comtesse D'Haussonville", over which he labored for three years.

The portrait of the Comtesse was brought to Ingres in a round about way. The original commission of the Comtesse's portrait, in 1838, was to be completed by a favorite painter of the court of Louis-Phillipe and Napoleon III, Franz Xaver Winterhalter, or so the count had hoped. However, he was unavailable (Collins 49). Two years later, the Haussonville met Ingres in Rome where they saw Ingres's recently completed "Anticochus and Stratonice". Upon this encounter, they decided to employ Ingres. Ironically, around the same time he was known to have complained, "'Everyone wants [portraits]. There are six that I am refusing or trying to avoid because I can't bear them. Well, it was not to paint portraits that I returned to Paris'" (Collins 50). While it is unknown if one of the six unbearable portraits that he attempted to avoid or refuse was that of the Comtesse d'Haussonville, what is known is that he did take on the task and completed it, despite it taking three years.

The task was long and arduous, with fault being placed upon both parties. The problems were numerous. Ingres was not interested in painting portraits at all, because he had bigger and more ambitious projects in mind and yet he undertook the commission by the count. A very good insight into Ingres's psyche lies in the comment he once made to a pupil of his, "that nothing in the world was more difficult than to paint a woman's portrait. 'It's can't be done,' he said. 'It's enough to make one weep'" (Russell). Perhaps what Ingres was referring to were the difficulties he experienced while working with the Comtesse d'Haussonville; the fact is she went abroad for months on end and beyond that, there was a long pause while she had a baby and regained her shape. Nonetheless, the fault cannot be placed merely on the Comtesse. It also lies with Ingres who was famous for his perfectionism. Ingres had a meticulous way of executing his paintings which explains why the portrait of the Comtesse took three years to complete. Ingres's artistic process was very involved: "He began with quick pen-and-ink sketches of a general idea and then explored all possible artistic prototypes for the composition. He worked next in a combination of life studies from the model for individual figures and detailed studies of archaeological furnishings from his library of engraved models after antiquity and the Renaissance" (Condon). This extremely time consuming, detail

oriented process explains the length that the painting took to complete as well as his success within the Academy and patrons alike.

The work that Ingres put into the Comtesse's portrait is even more intricate than was typical. Ingres began with the typical quick sketches of the Comtesse but dove into the work with incredible detail. For example, the Comtesse was initially sketched facing the opposite direction: "the pose is reversed, and there is a corresponding difference in the hand supporting the chin. The left hand in the Bonneval sketch rests on the back of a chair, a feature which is dispensed with later" (Ritchie 120). Additionally, "there is a marked difference in costume from one portrait to the other". As demonstrated through the progression of Ingres's sketches and paintings of the Comtesse, he studied and thought out each and every manipulation he made, however small it may seem. This is exemplified in the notes that Ingres made on one of his later sketches. There are twelve notes on just the Comtesse's face alone on how to improve his work. They are as detailed as making the "chin sharper", the "nose narrower", "indent the nostril", "eyeballs smaller" and other similarly detailed dissections (Ritchie). These incredibly detailed notes ultimately shaped the final painting that successfully captured the personality of the Comtesse.

The Comtesse herself admitted her harsh nature that was detectable since her childhood and it is demonstrated in her recollection of the reasons behind her marriage. Nonetheless, she did achieve this sought after high position in society and this, along with her intellect, is demonstrated in Ingres's portrait. She is depicted as gazing thoughtfully, which is only accentuated by the positioning of her finger on her chin, toward the viewer. Her tilted head gives her a pensive quality which only reinforces her renowned intellect. The items on her dresser demonstrate her character. The opera glasses thrown haphazardly about are there not only to include one of her favorite pastimes, but also the nature in which they are placed gives the viewer the indication that she is not nearly as stuffy and controlled as one might think. This is reinforced by the dress she wears: "The countess, in fact, was notorious for her indifference to fashion and is painted wearing a dress already out of fashion" (Collins). This thereby refutes the often accepted conjecture that the message behind the Comtesse's portrait was that of the frivolous nature of the ruling class. By dressing the Comtesse in an already out of style opera gown, Ingres captured another aspect of her multifaceted personality.

The pose that Ingres chose in which to portray the Comtesse was one similar to Pudicitia, a Roman goddess of modesty and chastity who can be seen on certain ancient coins standing in the same position as Ingres used for the Comtesse. Pudicitia is seen "standing with her right arm upraised, her hand alongside her cheek holding a veil, and her left arm held horizontally across her body. […] Looked at in this new light, the somewhat enigmatic restraint of the Comtesse's expression may signify only one thing- modesty, the modesty of a young matron" (Ritchie 125). The use of a Roman goddess as the inspiration for the Comtesse's pose suggests that although Ingres despised portraiture, he did not despise the Comtesse, despite the fact that her biting remarks in her memoir may make her out as a difficult character. However, Ingres found her to be a modest young matron who did not conform to the assumed frivolous nature of the ruling class. The portrait was extremely successful, both in its precise execution of the Comtesse and her personality and with the Haussonville family and ultimately Parisian society as a whole.

Works Cited

Collins, Amy Fine. Rev. of *Ingress and the Comtesse D'Haussonville by Edgar Munhall. Woman's Art Journal* Spring-Summer 8.1 (1987): 48-51. < http://0-www.jstor.org.lrc.cod.edu/stable/1358342>

Condon, Patricia. "Ingres, Jean-Auguste-Dominique." *Grove Art Online*. Oxford Art Online, 2007. Web. 3 Mar. 2011. <http://0www.oxfordartonline.com.lrc.cod.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T041299?q=Ingres+&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit>.

Ritchie, Andrew Carnduff. "The Evolution of Ingres' Portrait of Comtesse d'Haussonville." *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (September 1940): 119-126.

Russell, John. "Art View; Ingres's Portrait of a Lady Is the Mirror of an Age." *New York Times* Late (East Coast) ed, Art View sec. 24 Nov. 1985. Print.