Ten years ago, I fell in love with pastel. It was immediate, love at first sight. It began with a visit to a Picasso exhibition in Basel, where I saw his pastel portrait titled *Tête de femme*. It is difficult to know why this specific artwork had such an impact at that particular moment in my life. I had seen that same Picasso pastel a few years before at the Fondation Pierre Gianadda (and many pastels before that), but for some reason I was completely captivated by the drawing that day in Basel. I did not know why, but I knew I wanted to paint a portrait inspired by that drawing. The next day, I went to the art store in Lausanne and bought a box of thirty-six little sticks of pastel and a pad of pastel paper.

I was living in Glasgow at the time but staying with my dad for a month over the summer. I opened the box of pastels in the room of my childhood, surrounded by various nostalgic objects. My first glance at the sticks was like looking into a candy jar. The colors were so rich and vivid. I could not resist touching each one and feeling the fine pigment on my fingertips. Paint, in contrast, typically comes in tubes and jars—so you can only see the color when the paint leaves its container, often in a small amount. The pastel sticks were right in front of me, naked, every color visible at a single glance.

In Glasgow, I was using brushes to apply pigment to different surfaces. Using my fingers to apply the pastel pigment felt new and exciting. The sticks were delicate, and I could break them easily. I found that I had to manipulate each stick gently and apply only the slightest bit of force. The sticks fell to pieces, breaking down into powder as I moved them over the surface of the paper. What was left was a fine layer of pigment, a layer of dust held onto the rough texture.

With the postcard of *Tête de femme* that I bought at the museum on view, I started working on a portrait using the pastel. I rarely painted portraits, but somehow a character emerged naturally on the paper. The face was one I had never seen before; it was a new face that I discovered while painting. I wanted
ROSALBA CARRIERA’S MAN IN PILGRIM’S COSTUME

Xavier F. Salomon

“un souffle de resemblance dans une fleur de couleur”¹
—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, 1867

Celebrated across Europe during her lifetime, Rosalba Carriera was universally known by her first name—Rosalba—in the artistic circles of the eighteenth-century Western world.² At her home in Venice, she was visited daily by aristocrats and collectors from the city and from abroad who were keen to acquire her work. On December 3, 1729, Pier Caterino Zeno—a Somascan father at the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice and brother of the eminent intellectual Apostolo Zeno—described the fifty-six-year-old painter as follows to Anton Francesco Marmi: “this lady is not only most honorable, of excellent and most civil customs, but furthermore most Christian; and she has certainly given proof of this with the visits she receives all day in her house from the most eminent people of this city, and many illustrious foreigners.”³ Zeno further noted that “the first portraits that she worked on were for a number of foreign lords, who, bringing them with them to their countries, in many places, made her worth and her name renowned.”⁴ A few years later, in a letter from Rome of September 4, 1734, to Rosalba herself, Abbot Giuseppe Pollaroli described her as “Signora Rosalba, whose name puts in a state of subjection not only those who paint in Venice, but also in every place where her works have been seen, that is, in the entire world.”⁵ Rosalba’s name and her portraits came to embody eighteenth-century Venice and its society. The
The woman is enveloped in voluminous blue drapery that contrasts with the pale tones of her flesh and dress. Her face is enhanced with makeup and her hair pulled back and powdered. Two large pearls are set in her earrings, while diamond-encrusted jewels are on her proper left shoulder and on the clasps on the front of her dress. Both her hair and dress are further decorated with flowers. In her pose, outfit, jewels, and flowers, the woman depicted is typical of Rosalba's female portraits. Describing one of her works to Stefano Conti in Lucca, on November 21, 1725, Rosalba wrote: “Its dimensions are a painting of three quarters and two and a half circa; and it is painted with pastels and adorned with flowers and jewels the best I could.” Rosalba had a passion for flowers. In July 1714, her sister Angela wrote from Düsseldorf: “They know I like flowers, but only those that do not cost much; for two months my room has been a constant garden, and now that it is the time of small carnations I always have dozens of wonderful ones, and if you had them, you would take advantage in painting them.”

The other portrait in the Gregory bequest portrays a man in a blue coat embroidered with large red and purple flowers (frontispiece). He sports a white cravat and a tricorn hat decorated with a large diamond. His hair is powdered and tied in a ponytail. His small black cape and wooden staff are associated with the attributes of a pilgrim.

These two virtually unpublished portraits were purchased by Alexis Gregory, in 1998, from an undisclosed European private collection. Nothing is known about the sitters or the previous history of the portraits. It is difficult to date Rosalba’s pastels with any precision. The scholar Michael Levey noted that “she made little effort to alter her formula which was to draw a bust-length portrait against a plain background, with only slight variations between a set of stock poses . . . there is really no evolution in Rosalba’s style.” Nonetheless, the Gregory pastels are likely to date to the decade of the 1730s, after Rosalba’s trip to Vienna, as they seem to exhibit a confidence that appears in works from that period. As a result of Rosalba’s international success and prolific production, more than four hundred works are attributed to her. Of the portraits, the identity of many of the subjects is unknown or problematic at best. In the absence of any documentary evidence, the identity of the two sitters and the dates of Rosalba’s Gregory portraits remain to be solved.

Nor is it known whether or not the two portraits represent a couple and were created as pendants. Throughout her career, Rosalba produced sets of...
the Frick portraits as the lost pastels by Rosalba of Lord and Lady Holderness. However, such apparent resemblances do not provide firm evidence.83

For the most part, Rosalba’s portraits were envisioned as single images of men and women. In format, her pastels followed standard sizes, and the dimensions of the Gregory pastels are fairly typical in her oeuvre.84 It is, therefore, likely that the two pastels now at the Frick are unrelated and only later were set in identical frames.85

Fig. 18
Jean-Étienne Liotard
Mary, Countess Holderness, née Doublet van Groenestein, 1740–50
Pastel on parchment
16 x 12 in. (40.6 x 30.5 cm)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin
of elegantly dressed couples inhabiting a pastoral landscape seems to be led by a swarm of cupids toward a barge that will bring them either to or back from Cythera, the Greek island near which Aphrodite was said to have been born and traditionally described as the Isle of Love. As Jed Perl observed, the subject is ambiguous: “for the question is whether the three couples who are at the core of the composition, the men perhaps importuning, the women perhaps reluctant, are in the process of falling in love, or are looking forward to actually making love, or are seen in the aftermath of love, reflecting on the experience.”

The figures are dressed in contemporaneous clothes but wear pilgrims’ capes and carry staffs, indicating that theirs is a pilgrimage to love. Watteau had focused on this subject in another painting and in drawings (fig. 23) in the early 1710s, recording a number of male and female figures wearing capes and holding staffs (in one case with the shells indicating the pilgrimage to Santiago). Which of Watteau’s fêtes galantes Rosalba knew is unclear, but as a member of the Académie she is likely to have seen the Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera in Paris, and there is a strong connection between it and her Man in Pilgrim’s Costume. Could the sitter in the Frick portrait be a Frenchman who knew about Watteau’s work and wished to be shown as a pilgrim of love? Or did Rosalba portray him as such under the influence of Watteau’s work? The costume of the man in the Frick pastel is, in fact, not unique in Rosalba’s work. Another pastel by her (fig. 24) portrays a young man, with a similar hairstyle, his shirt open at the front and also wearing a black pilgrim’s cape and holding a staff and a tricorn hat. The pastel seems near in date to the Frick one and seems to be related to the same iconography.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, representing sitters in pilgrims’ costumes appears to have been fashionable in France. Two small portraits of King Louis XV dressed as a pilgrim survive from that period—one by Nicolas Lancret, the other attributed to Charles-André van Loo (fig. 25). French sitters may have asked Rosalba to portray them according to the fashion launched by Watteau in the 1710s.

Carnevale in Venice

Another explanation for the pilgrim’s costume is that it may be related to the annual festival held in Rosalba’s city. In a letter from Düsseldorf, of January 13, 1714, Antonio Pellegrini wrote to Rosalba: “In the next Carnevale, even
There are other examples of Rosalba portraits showing men in costume. Fair in both skin and hair, the subject of the portrait of the so-called Turkish man (fig. 28) wears a highly decorated kaftan and a turban with a diamond aigrette but is clearly European, likely English or German. In his right hand, he holds a small white porcelain cup, trimmed in gold. It is similar in design to early eighteenth-century vessels produced at Meissen, in Saxony, which were meant to hold exotic beverages such as coffee, chocolate, and tea, for which we know Rosalba had a particular passion. His costume could be linked to a trip he made to Turkey or could simply be a Carnevale costume. It is, therefore, entirely possible that the Frick's *Man in Pilgrim’s Costume* and the other portrait by Rosalba of a man in a similar outfit may simply depict men wearing Carnevale costumes. One clue pointing in this direction is that the man in the Frick’s portrait wears his tricorn hat at a rakish angle, like lords Sackville and Boyne, therefore making the portrait an informal image, with an overt display of casualness and mischief. The tricorn hat the Frick man is wearing is, in fact, the same hat worn by Lord Sackville: not so much a personal item of clothing as a studio prop, a Carnevale hat probably taken from a trunk in Rosalba’s house at San Vio.

**The Fragility of Pastels and the Three Kings**

Whether a portrait of an aristocrat visiting Venice during Carnevale or an homage to Watteau—or both—the visual elements of the portrait suggest that the sitter of the *Man in Pilgrim’s Costume* was not from Venice but rather a foreigner. A further element supports this.

Painted with pastel sticks on blue paper, glued on a thin canvas nailed on a wooden strainer, the surfaces of pastel paintings (no fixatives existed in Rosalba’s times), as well as their physical structure as objects, are inherently delicate. Rosalba constantly worried about the fragility of her work, particularly when it was sent outside Venice. Much of her correspondence relates to its shipping. Rosalba would write to her patrons, asking them for news on the condition of the painting on arrival; she worried about the long journeys and the accidents that could damage the works en route. They typically wrote to assure her of the safe arrival of the pastels. On July 18, 1727, Antonio Pellegrini wrote to Rosalba from Vienna about a pastel that “arrived intact as if it had never left your room.” Giorgio Maria Rapparini, the secretary of the Elector Palatine, informed Rosalba, in an entertaining