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Editor Robert W. Kiger
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Raoul M. de Longpré fils, elusive painter of lilacs and roses

James J. White

Apparently Raoul M. de Longpré fils had a successful formula—a bouquet of lilacs and/or roses floating in space or surmounting a plinth, rendered in delicate watercolor with an inchoate background darker on the left side. Who was this painter and why has he been confounded with the better-known Paul de Longpré? While all the pertinent facts may never be known, this brief account may clear some confusion and elicit further information.

The first painting by Raoul that I ever saw (about 1969) was of lilacs, in the collection of George J. McDonald of Washington, D.C. Some years later I encountered another in a Middleburg, Virginia gallery, and in 1978 I learned that one had been donated to the Hunt Institute. Yet another, of roses—now on display in The Grand Salon at the Renwick Gallery, Washington, D.C.—was acquired by the National Museum of American Art in 1918 as part of a large bequest by A. R. and Mary Houston Eddy. To published queries (Art & Antiques, January–February 1982; Antiques and the Arts Weekly, 19 March 1982) I received

Figure 1. "Lilacs" signed M. de Longpré fils. Private collection.

responses from owners of similar works in Rhode Island (eight), New York (two), Florida (painting purchased in Massachusetts), Mississippi (painting previously in a Nebraska household) and North Carolina. Still others have been advertised in recent years by galleries.

The only standard source that refers to Raoul M. de Longpré is Mallett’s (1940) Supplement, which lists him as “Fr. ac. 19th Cent. in France” and cites “Auction Art Sale Reports. [For data write Mallett Library, Hackensack, N.J.]” Letters to the Bowker Company and subsequently to Peter Smith Publisher, Inc. yielded no information about the Mallett Library. The Library of the National Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery then informed me that, upon Mallett’s death in 1944, his card catalogue and 498 scrapbooks containing reproductions of art-works were donated by his son to the Library of Congress, and that in 1982 these were transferred to the NMAA/NPG Library. Finally tracked down, this resource proved to contain no mention of Raoul M. de Longpré.

The signature of each artist is most distinctive. In all known cases, Raoul’s delicate signature appears as “Raoul M. de Longpré fils,” “R. M. de Longpré fils,” or merely “M. de Longpré fils.” The signature is on angle at bottom right when the bouquet is floating; it is horizontal at bottom right when the bouquet is on a plinth. Paul’s “Paul de Longpré” (sometimes including city and date) has accentuated serifs and is horizontal at lower left or right. However, once into the search, I was surprised to find references to paintings signed by Raoul but attributed to Paul. In addition, Raoul was believed to be the son of Paul;
however, that would be unlikely with "fils" after the name of the former. A major art dealer in New York City wrote about a painting "which we cataloged as being by Paul De Longpre and which was signed at the lower right: Raoul M de Longpre fils" and another which "again, we catalogued...as Paul De Longpre, but it was signed at the lower right: P M De Longpre fils, although the 'P' could have been an error in cataloging." A second dealer wrote that "the attribution of these watercolors in our archives has been changed at some point to Paul de Longpré." Perhaps this paper will encourage comparative stylistic study of artworks by these two, surely different, de Longpré.

Marlor's history of the Brooklyn Art Association (1970, pp. 170, 260) contains two intriguing references, with perhaps erroneous bracketed information, under Index of Exhibitions:

DE LONGPRE, [Paul] fils, Lyons, Fr. 1855–1911
Los Angeles, Calif. May '75 #232 Wild Roses and Lilacs o-W.H. Gibson
LONGPRE (fils), B. [possibly son of Paul De Longpre] Dec '73 #265 Lilacs, wc, o-Theo. E. Smith; #266 Wild Flowers, wc, o-Theo. E. Smith

Though reportedly Paul was painting flowers on fans at age 12, he was only 20 years old in 1875 and would not come to New York for 15 more years. His first oil was yet to be accepted at the Paris Salon. "Fils" and the subject matter would indicate that these paintings listed by Marlor are instead by Raoul.

Considering the apparent general confusion
over the identities and works of the two de Longprés, I decided to pursue Paul, hoping for traces of the more enigmatic Raoul. Both seemed to have been turn-of-the-century émigré painters from France with special fondness for the rose. Paul (formally Marquis Paul Maucherat de Longpré) was born in Lyons in 1855, the son of Victor and Theresia (Pinchaud) de Longpré. His father, two brothers (Paul was one of ten children), an uncle (was this Raoul, who may have encouraged Paul’s journey to America?) and other members of the family were also painters. Paul married Josephine Estievenard and had two daughters, Blanche and Pauline (see Moure, 1975 for the only reference that mentions a son also). He came to New York in 1890, where he exhibited flower paintings in 1896. After moving to Los Angeles about 1899, he built—on a prominent corner lot along Hollywood Boulevard—a Moorish house and garden, which Avery (1948) described as “a source of unending wonder and delight to tourists from far and near,” to which a “tally-ho service brought thousands of visitors to the now famous artist and his floral haven.” Paul died in Hollywood in 1911 and, unfortunately, seems to have left no clues about any relative named Raoul. (White & Co., 1967; Earle, 1975; NMAA/NPG Library file on California artists, compiled by Ferdinand Perret)

Such a competent painter as Raoul must have left more than just a dozen paintings. And surely somewhere there are tracks in im-
migration records, city directories and exhibition notices that await the persistent sleuth.

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Figure 8. “Poppies and Bees” signed Paul de Longpré. Los Angeles, 1906. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art: Charles H. Quinn Bequest.

Jean Madigan, Charles L. Magriel, Paul Magriel, Clark S. Marlor, George J. McDonald, Susan E. Menconi, Barbara J. Mitnick, Elizabeth Moore, Nancy D. W. Moure, Mrs. Anthony Olivo, Alexandra West Rollins, Robert D. Schwarz, A. S. Singer, Peter Smith, Frank H. Sommer, Doreen Squilla, Barbara C. Terry, Mildred G. Thaler, Jean-Michel Tuchscherer and Helen Wurdemann.

References

American Art Galleries (New York). [Catalogue], 8 March 1917. [Not seen but reported to include a description of “Flowers” (ilacs) by M. de Longpré fils, a “contemporary American.”]

Antiques and the Arts Weekly. 7 May 1982. [Advertisement by New Windsor (N.Y.) Auction Gallery]. P. 111. [Announces 15 May auction of the estate of the late Evelyn Stanley of Sugar Loaf, N.Y., with repro-
ducation of painting obviously by Raoul de Longpré but credited to Paul de Longpré.


Butterfield & Butterfield (San Francisco). [Catalogue], 17 March 1982. [Items 214 and 218 describe watercolors titled "Roses and Lilacs" and "Lilacs and Roses" by Raoul M. de Longpré. Item 216 describes "Rose Bouquet" signed Paul de Longpré, Los Angeles, 1900.]

——. Important American and European paintings, 21 June 1984. [Items 2180-2182 describe gouache paintings of "Yellow Roses and Lilacs," "Lilacs" and "Wildflowers" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

Butterfield's Auctioneers & Appraisers (San Francisco). American and European paintings, 24 March 1983. [Item 2656 describes "Still-life of Pink and White Roses" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

——. American and European paintings, 15 March 1984. [Item 1178 describes "Red Roses and White Lilacs" by Raoul de Longpré.]

Christie, Manson & Woods International, Inc. (New York). [Catalogue], 28 May 1982. [Not seen but reported to contain description of "Lilacs on Ledge" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]


Parke-Bernet [now Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc.] (New York). [Catalogue], 24-26 October 1946. [Not seen but lot 282 in sale 798 reported to describe "Field Flowers: Pair watercolor paintings. Raoul M. de Longpré, French XIX century. Nosegay of daisies, corn flowers, Queen Anne's lace and other wild flowers before a shaded gray background. Both signed (N.Y. Private Collector)."]

Renwick Gallery, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. 1982. Paintings and sculpture in the Grand Salon and Octagon Room. [Number 41 is "Roses" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

Royal York Auction Gallery (Pittsburgh). [Catalogue], 15 December 1984. [Item 296 describes "Still Life of Lilacs & Roses" signed Raoul M. de Longpré, although their flyer (titled "Estate Auction") lists the artist as Paul de Longpré.]

Frank S. Schwaz & Son (Philadelphia). Flower, fruit, and other still life paintings, June 1984. [Item 4 describes "Floral Still Life" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

Robert W. Skinner, Inc. (Bolton, Mass.). An auction of fine paintings (Catalogue 989), 12 May 1983. [Item 2 describes "Roses and White Lilacs" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

Adam A. Weschler & Son (Washington, D.C.). Important four-day estate catalogue sale by auction, May 1974. [Items 505 (p. 42) and 1186 (p. 102) describe "Floral Still Life" and "Flowering Dogwood and Lilacs" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]

White, James J. and George J. McDonald. 1984. Still-lifes and nature studies from the George J. McDonald collection. Pittsburgh. [Number 22 is "Lilacs" by Raoul M. de Longpré.]


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Department of Art
Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation
Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213