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HIDDEN FACETS OF A LEGEND

Pasteur the aspiring artist eclipsed by own legacy

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Staff writer

Great figures of the past such as Leonardo da Vinci left plenty of evidence to prove how multitalented they were.

But the achievements of many other historical figures have gone largely unnoticed.

Take Louis Pasteur, the French chemist and biologist of the last century who made considerable contributions to modern medical science through his pioneer work in immunology.

How many knew he had artistic talents?

At least 42 works by Pasteur have been discovered or confirmed by Maya Starr, 58, a Philadelphia artist currently visiting Japan.

Among the works of art were portraits of Pasteur's parents, friends and the important officials of Arbois, the small town in northeast France where he grew up. Most were done in pastels. And Pasteur was between age 13 and 19 when he created them, Starr said.

From an artist's point of view, Starr said, the quality of Pasteur's works are extraordinary.

"It is amazing that he had noticed the asymmetry in people's faces when he was only 13. I think he had eyes to observe things closely, which must have helped him succeed in his career as a scientist," she said in a recent interview with The Japan Times.

Pasteur's works also included pencil drawings of copied works of Michelangelo's sculptures and Jacques Louis David's "Napoleon," which were done in his early years in college, she said.

Pasteur may have seriously considered pursuing a career as an artist, Starr speculated, but unfortunately she could not find proof for her hypothesis.

"Pasteur wrote to his par-



Maya Starr

ents and said that he wanted to do more drawing, but had no time because of his studies of science," she said. "But why use the time and energy to do time-consuming sketches if he was really busy? You have to put in a lot of effort to do these works."

Starr hasn't found any drawings by Pasteur in his early 20s but she did find watercolors of his experiments as well as pencil sketches of his wife and daughter in his notebooks.

According to Starr, Pasteur's interest in art was seen once again later in his career, when he took a position at Beaux Arts School of Paris, where he taught geology, physics and chemistry applied to the arts.

Pasteur taught things such as the mechanism of paint drying, what creates cracking, which oils and varnishes were the best and how to use them, she said.



THIS PASTEL portrait of a French child is believed to have been drawn by scientist Louis Pasteur when he was 14.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAYA STARR

"The people at Beaux Arts School were surprised when I went there to find documents about Pasteur's presence at the art school," she said. "Pasteur is such a famous person in France, but not as an artist."

Interestingly, Starr found that Renoir, Monet and Sisley were among the students at the school during the time Pasteur taught there. "I found that his courses were required, so the three may have attended his lectures," she said.

A dual citizen of France and

the United States, Starr said she only considered Pasteur the inventor of the rabies vaccination until she read an article from the magazine *Science* in early 1980 that her husband, a pediatrician, brought home.

Although she cannot recall details of the article, Starr remembered that a small paragraph touched on Pasteur's involvement in art in his youth.

"There was a color reproduction of the portrait of Pasteur's mother that he drew (accompanying the article). I

was very impressed, because it was very good," she said.

Starr, however, did not imagine at that time that she herself would four years later be going to France to trace the artwork of the French hero, known by name for establishing the pasteurization process.

Her trip and research of Pasteur's artistic talents were sponsored in 1984 by the Wistar Institute, a prestigious Philadelphia institute that researches vaccines. The institute wanted to present the research result during a conference the following year to commemorate the centennial of the rabies vaccination.

Although three portraits remained at the Museum of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, hardly any documents on Pasteur's works were carried over, she said.

By going through Pasteur's mementos at the museum, inquiring at City Hall in Arbois, the local notary and wherever else she could think of, Starr managed to find and contact the owners of the portraits, who were mostly descendants of those portrayed.

Starr wrote a report on her findings for the centennial commemoration conference, and since then, has given many speeches and lectures about the issue. She gave two speeches on Pasteur in Mie Prefecture last month. Her own art has also been exhibited in Yokkaichi in the prefecture.

Her art creations keep her very busy, but Starr hopes to write a book on Pasteur's artistic talents after doing more research in the near future.

"Life is exciting, because there is always something to discover about someone or something, even after so much has been discovered. I've learned that from painting."

And perhaps, so did Pasteur.