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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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Tercentenary of Boucher's Birth to Be Marked by an Unprecedented Survey of Drawings at The Frick Collection

THE DRAWINGS OF FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

October 8 through December 14, 2003

To celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the birth of **François Boucher** (1703–1770), an unprecedented international loan exhibition of his drawings opens this fall at The Frick Collection in New York. This is truly the first major survey of the artist's graphic work to bring together a substantial number of loans from both international and national public and private collections. Presenting approximately seventy-five sheets of the highest quality, the exhibition provides a deeper understanding of Boucher's prolific output of works on paper and demonstrates his extraordinary technique and style as a draftsman. The artist's wide variety of subject matter is revealed by a selection that includes depictions of pastoral scenes and landscapes, various conceptions of mythology, religious narratives, historical events, representations of literature and allegory, and contemporary scenes. *The Drawings of François Boucher* makes its debut at the Frick (October 8 through December 14, 2003),



François Boucher (1703–1770)
Recumbent Female Nude, c. 1742–43, Red, white, and black
chalks on cream antique laid paper
12 1/2 x 18 1/4 in.
Collection Jeffrey E. Horvitz, Boston (D-F-800)

and then travels to the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth (January 17 through April 18, 2004). It is curated by Alastair Laing, Advisor on Paintings and Sculpture to the National Trust, London. The exhibition is organized by the **American Federation of Arts** and is made possible, in part, by grants from the Grand Marnier Foundation, Fino Family Foundation, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, and the Pfizer Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Benefactors Circle of the AFA. Presentation of the exhibition in New York, which is coordinated by the Frick's Chief Curator, **Colin B. Bailey**, is made possible through a major

grant from The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation with additional support from Jean A. Bonna and the Fellows of The Frick Collection.

Comments Dr. Bailey, “This is a remarkable selection that includes both the unexpected and the unfamiliar and represents Boucher at his fullest and most comprehensive. The compelling variety of works assembled here bears out Jacques-Louis David’s praise of his first mentor, ‘Not everyone can be a Boucher’ (*‘N’est pas Boucher qui veut.’*)”

A MASTER OF MANY SUBJECTS AND MEDIA

By his own account, Boucher made as many as ten thousand drawings over the course of a career that spanned nearly five decades. Not only did he make preparatory compositional and figure studies for his paintings, but he also used drawings in the process of designing cartoons for Beauvais and Gobelins tapestries and as models for Sèvres porcelain. From early on in his career he provided drawings to be engraved as thesis plates, book illustrations, frontispieces, and allegorical vignettes. As a mature artist he pioneered the concept of the autonomous drawing, creating individual works specifically for collectors. Following innovations in printmaking in the 1740s, Boucher also made drawings to be engraved in facsimile, which could, therefore, reach broader audiences. Furthermore, he explored the graphic medium in all its variety, drawing in sanguine (red chalk); sanguine brûlée (reddish-brown chalk); pen and ink (both black and brown); brush and wash; pastel; in the *trois crayons* technique perfected by Watteau; and in black chalk heightened with white on blue, gray, or fawn paper.

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

The son of a master painter in the Paris Guild (the Académie de Saint-Luc), Boucher spent a brief apprenticeship in the studio of the brilliant, but unstable, history painter François Lemoyne. During the early to middle 1720s, Boucher created etchings of more than one hundred drawings by Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) and was thereafter strongly influenced by the artist’s figural style and use of color. In 1723, Boucher won the Academy’s annual Prix de Rome, the premiere student prize that would enable him to study classical and Renaissance art in Rome at the Académie de France. Surviving drawings from this period (the trip was delayed and he actually traveled to the Eternal City in 1728) suggest that he was most interested in the vigor and grandiloquence of the Italian Baroque. On this sojourn, he also encountered the work of Northern mannerist Abraham Bloemaert (1566–1651), whose rustic protagonists had a considerable influence on the young artist’s own peasant scenes and early pastorals. Back in Paris by the summer of 1731, Boucher quickly ascended the Academy’s hierarchy as a history painter and was made a full professor by 1737. Among the most successful of the extracurricular activities he undertook at the same time for private, sometimes royal, clients was the set of illustrations for a new edition of Molière’s works in 1734-35. Setting the narratives in contemporary Parisian interiors, Boucher approached each episode as a miniature history painting and prepared his compositions accordingly with figure



François Boucher (1703–1770)
Study of La Flèche (Having His Pockets Searched by Harpagon), c. 1732–34
 Two colors of red chalk, with brown ink framing lines, partially excised, 12 1/8 x 7 1/4 in.
 Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

studies of unprecedented verve and spontaneity. Featured in the exhibition is an exemplary study (at left) on loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in which the costume, tricorn, gestures, and expressions of the protesting La Flèche are masterfully delineated, while his pockets are being picked by the suspicious figure of Harpagon.

Despite the caliber of such drawings, it was primarily as a painter of mythological subjects that Boucher made his reputation in the 1730s, one that became unassailable with Madame de Pompadour’s installation as titular mistress in 1745. Indeed, under these circumstances, Boucher quickly gained ascendancy as the foremost painter in her circle. His masterpieces, *The Rising of the Sun* and *The Setting of the Sun* (now in the Wallace Collection, London), from which a single set of Gobelins tapestries was woven, were conceived as a part of mythological decorations for Pompadour’s Château de Bellevue.

A drawing of a male nude, based on the figure of Apollo in *The Rising of the Sun*, is included in the exhibition. Similarly, the hoary *Head of a River God in Profile* (at right) is not a preparatory study, but one made after a figure in a lost tapestry cartoon, *Rinaldo Asleep*. The recycling of motifs to create satisfying individual sheets for the private market is an important aspect of Boucher’s production, one that only recently has been given the attention it deserves.



François Boucher (1703–1770)
Head of a River God in Profile, c. 1750
 Red, black, and white chalks on buff paper
 8 1/4 x 8 5/8 in.
 Private collection, New York; Courtesy W.M. Brady & Co.

The subject of the female nude was a constant in Boucher’s graphic output, from the cat-eyed studies in black or red chalk that date from the mid-1730s to the 1740s, to the more weighty figures that characterize his later production. Close examination of the provocative *Recumbent Female Nude*, illustrated on the first page of this release, suggests that the function of these erotic studies is more complex than is immediately apparent. Part courtesan, part Venus’s handmaiden, the figure adopts a pose that Boucher had studied many times before in the previous decade. While it anticipates the more blatant carnality associated with his Odalisques, the drawing retains an ethereal grace and delicacy more appropriate to Mount Olympus than to the seraglio of a sultan’s harem.

As a painter, Boucher embraced all genres within the Academy’s hierarchy with the exception of still life, and his graphic work was no less compelling and all encompassing—treating religious, mythological, and historical narratives; scenes from everyday life and domesticity; studies of adults and children made from life models;

depictions, real and idealized, of the male and female nude. The exhibition includes outstanding examples of all of the above and even presents one of Boucher's rare portraits in pastel, the genre least congenial to him.



François Boucher (1703–1770)
Landscape with the Aqueduct at Arcueil, c. 1745–55
Black and white chalks, heightened with white, on blue paper
12 1/8 x 17 3/8 in.
Albertina, Vienna (12.194)

Boucher not only operated within the parameters established by the Academy, but he recast and reinvented certain of its categories. Just as his creation of the painted pastoral scene civilized the prevailing Dutch-inspired rustic subject, so did his treatment of landscape renew that genre. The exhibition includes *Landscape with the Aqueduct at Arcueil* (at left), a rendition of the structure created in the seventeenth century for Marie de Médicis. Framed by overgrown trees, the scene evokes the abandoned grounds of a château south of Paris where artists of Boucher's generation flocked to make paintings and drawings *en plein air*.

Although in the 1760s Boucher came under fire from progressive critics for his attachment to a purely fictive universe, he continued to produce monumental mythological and pastoral decorations that display an inventiveness and acuity that would be matched only by his pupil Jean-Honoré Fragonard in the next decade. Still in royal favor, Boucher became *premier peintre* to the aging Louis XV in 1765. However, the artist seems also to have been receptive to the emerging classicism that infiltrated all aspects of French art, decorative arts, and architecture in this decade. An example of this aesthetic shift can be found in the exhibition, which features the dignified and magisterial *Study of a Despondent Woman in Drapery* (at right). While the work cannot be connected to any surviving composition, it may have been intended to assist his son-in-law, the history painter Jean-Baptiste Deshayes, with a figure for a tapestry cartoon of *The Anger of Achilles*. Boucher remained a master of the heroic narrative, which is exemplified in the wash drawing *The Continnence of Scipio*, a fully worked-up compositional study made in preparation for an aborted commission from King Stanislas Poniatowski of Poland.



François Boucher (1703–1770)
Study of a Despondent Woman in Drapery, Supporting Herself on a Plinth, 1761
Black chalk, with some stumping, heightened with white, on buff paper
20 5/8 x 15 1/2 in.
Private collection, Switzerland

ILLUSTRATED PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue, published by the AFA in association with Scala Publishers Ltd., accompanies the exhibition and features entries that reassess the dating of many of Boucher's drawings, trace their history of ownership, discuss the relationship between drawings and specific paintings, and reveal other new research. Included is an essay by Alastair Laing that explores Boucher's development as a draftsman through his range of

subjects, his contemporary appeal, and his innovations in the medium. A foreword by Pierre Rosenberg, former director of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, addresses Boucher's place among the great French draftsmen of his time. The catalogue (264 pages, more than 100 color illustrations) will be available in English and French hardcover editions (\$55) and in an English softcover version (\$37.50) through the Museum Shop of The Frick Collection, the institution's website (www.frick.org), or by calling (212) 288-0700.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURES

Date: Wednesday, October 8, 2003, 6:00pm
Speaker: Alastair Laing, Advisor on Paintings and Sculpture to the National Trust, London
Title: *To the Manner Born? Boucher as a Draftsman*

It has taken until the tercentenary of his birth for an international exhibition of François Boucher's drawings to be mounted. This lecture explores what makes him a great draftsman, the prejudices against him, and the difficulties of encompassing the enormous variety of his drawings in one exhibition. *There is no charge for this lecture, and seating is limited.*

Date: Wednesday, December 10, 2003, 6:00pm
Speaker: Katie Scott, The Courtauld Institute of Art
Title: *Homo Orientalis: François Boucher and China*

Throughout his career, Boucher was an avid collector of lacquer, Chinese ceramics, and prints. Prompted perhaps by the task of etching Watteau's designs of a Chinese cabinet for the royal chateau of La Muette, Boucher went on to create prints and tapestries that reflected his own distinct vision of China. This lecture will explore the nature of that vision along with its relationship to the celebration of luxury and trade. *There is no charge for this lecture, and seating is limited.*

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week, with recently expanded hours: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Thursdays and on Saturdays; 10am to 9pm on Fridays; and 1pm to 6pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and December 25. Limited hours (1 to 6pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$12 for the general public; \$8 for seniors, and \$5 for students

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection, and those under sixteen must be accompanied by an adult.

Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide INFORM® Audio Tour of the permanent collection, provided by Acoustiguide. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Visits: Please call (212) 288-0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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