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Francois Boucher has been called the quintessential 18th -century artist, and he had an incalculable impact on taste in his own lifetime, 1703 to 1770, as well as a lasting appeal to twentieth century collectors like the Huntingtons, Hearst, Getty, and Norton Simon, to name just a few California collectors. Because Boucher is so well represented in The Huntington and other local museums, I want to spend some time today giving you just a cursory overview of his life and work. If you want to understand French 18-century art and its role in our collection, he is the most important artist to know, for he virtually defined the elegant yet playful rococo style.

Although some of our Boucher pieces are now in storage while the HUG is renovated, others remain on display, and since February many of the HUG pieces have been on loan to the Getty, which has produced a *Guide to Francois Boucher in the Decorative Arts* to celebrate this once-in-a-lifetime joining of our two collections. If you haven't already, I encourage you to visit the Getty, where you can see 20 French objects from our collection, by Boucher and other artists, displayed alongside related pieces in the Getty collection.

Boucher is best remembered as a painter; in 1765, he was appointed to the two highest positions in the French arts establishment, first painter to the king and director of the Royal Academy. But his compositions can be found on everything from porcelain vases to tapestries to furniture. You could almost furnish your entire house with Boucher's artworks. He was also a theatrical designer, printmaker, fan painter, and book illustrator. He was remarkably versatile and prolific, finding great success in a wide variety of media, though often by recycling his own images and themes. Furthermore, he was uniquely attuned to the popular taste for sentiment and sensuality in the mid eighteenth century. His pastel-hued

depictions of amorous nymphs and shepherds and his lighthearted, scantily clad interpretations of mythological and dramatic subjects won him legions of fans, including Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour, who took drawing lessons from him. In the eighteenth century, art patrons no longer wanted pretentious Biblical subjects or hunting scenes or battles, but picturesque vignettes scaled for smaller, more intimate interiors.

Critics sometimes derided Boucher's work as frivolous and even decadent, devoid of moral value, realism, or narrative. Diderot famously said of him: "That man is capable of everything except the truth" -undoubtedly thinking of Boucher's penchant for putting shepherdesses in silk gowns. Although immensely successful, Boucher lost his artistic preeminence toward the end of his life; overproduction, repetition, and the emergence of neoclassicism precipitated his fall from favor with the press and the public. But his influence on his fellow artists cannot be overstated.

This is one of Boucher's chalk sketches from LACMA' s prints and drawings collection. Titled *The Artist in His Studio,* it appears to be a stereotypical depiction of a somewhat disheveled painter hard at work in his cluttered atelier, perhaps even a self portrait. But we would be very wrong to mistake this for an autobiographical work.

Just compare it to this pastel portrait of Boucher by his contemporary Gustav Lundberg, now in the Louvre. Boucher is portrayed not as a starving artist or hard working craftsman, but as a rather louche man of the world, resplendent in fashionable powdered wig, velvet coat, and fine lace. Though he came from a humble background, he rose to great wealth and enjoyed spending it. It is the portrait that captures the native Parisian's public persona for he was a genuine celebrity and a confirmed bon vivant.

This secretaire in the Arabella collection is a perfect illustration how Boucher's designs have remained in vogue over three centuries. The secretaire was made by the cabinetmaker Bernard Molitor in about 1812. The large porcelain plaque on the fall front was not added until the 1880's by Alfred de Rothschild, who owned both the secretaire and the porcelain-topped

table in which the plaque was originally set. He simply removed the plaque from the table and had it inserted into the secretaire. The plaque was painted in 1783 by Charles Nicolas Dodin, the great Sevres artist, and it is one of the largest and most important Sevres plaques in existence.

But if you look closely, you will see that the front of the plaque is signed in the lower left *"d'Apres F.* Boucher-after Francois Boucher, who had died 13 years earlier, in 1770. The plaque is actually a copy of Boucher's 1734 painting *Rinaldo and Annida,* now in the Louvre, which was his *morceau de reception* or audition piece for membership in the Royal Academy, the trade organization for professional painters in France. In other words, this was one of Boucher's first major paintings. Sevres artists usually used engravings of paintings as their models, producing a reverse image. Because this image is not reversed, it is thought that the painting itself was taken to Sevres to serve as a model, a very unusual occurrence that testifies to Boucher's lasting appeal and prestige. It depicts the story of Rinaldo and Armida, a literary subject taken from Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberato.* Armida is a sorceress who enchants the Crusader Rinaldo and keeps him prisoner in her magical palace, until he finally abandons her and returns to his duty of liberating Jerusalem. It was a popular subject in art, and Handel composed an opera about it. The combination of classical literature and contemporary eroticism is quintessential Boucher.

Here's another example of a Boucher painting_enjoying a long life in a variety of media. *The Enjoyable Lesson,* on the left, depicts a shepherd giving a pretty shepherdess a flute lesson. It was exhibited with its pendant, titled *The Mysterious Basket,* on the right, at the Salon of 1750; I hope you can make out these very bad digital images from the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia. On the surface, these appear to be harmless, even frivolous, highly idealized of scenes of country life, but as in many Boucher compositions there is a strong undercurrent of sexual symbolism. The two paintings were hugely popular and widely copied in a variety of media, including in the reserves of these Sevres lidded vases in the Huntington

Collection, formerly displayed in the Large Drawing Room and now on loan to the Getty.

Although these too were painted by the famous Dodin, notice that the images on the vases are reversed from the original compositions, indicating that this time he worked from engravings rather than the paintings themselves. Boucher never painted on porcelain himself, just as he did not weave tapestries himself, but provided the designs from which the specialist artisans worked, both during his life and after his death.

Many of Boucher's two-dimensional compositions were translated into three-dimensional porcelain figure groups by sculptors at the Vincennes and Sevres porcelain manufactories. Here's *The Flute Lesson* again in biscuit porcelain, from the Getty collection.

The theme of the sensual flute lesson resurfaces in the tapestry Boucher designed, *The Flute Player,* which used to hang in the Large Library and again in a comer of *The Fountain of Love* from the same series.

One of the most exciting aspects of our collaboration with the Getty was the opportunity to reunite the *Fountain of Love* tapestry with the fragment of its cartoon, which survives in the Getty collection, for the first time since it was woven in about 1758. Boucher was already well established as a painter, engraver, porcelain designer, and theatrical designer when he turned his prodigious talents to tapestry cartoons in the 1730's. Boucher would design a total of six suites of tapestries for the Beauvais tapestry factory; they were so popular that they remained on the looms for decades. Over a thirtyfive-year span, from 1734 to 1769, Boucher created at least 47 cartoons from which an estimated 440 weavings were produced. *The Fetes ltaliennes* or *Italian Village Scenes* series, begun in 1736, was his first suite and *The Noble Pastorale* was the sixth; at the Huntington, we are very lucky to have a unique opportunity to appreciate Boucher's technical and stylistic progress from his first effort, in the Arabella gallery, to his last, in the Large Library.

As a tapestry designer, Boucher was known for his life like human figures, difficult to achieve in warp and weft. Tapestry designers avoided compositions with horizontal lines because they made the tapestries vulnerable to splits and tears. For the same reason, it was not a good idea to have a lot of solid blocks of color in a tapestry, like a big blue sky; every inch had to be filled by the picture. You can see why Boucher's characteristic buxom peasants, billowing clouds, lush foliage and fluffy sheep were perfectly suited to rendering in tapestry.

Boucher was also known for his genius for color. It's hard to appreciate today because they're so faded, a consequence of exposure to light and dust, but, more importantly, the Beauvais manufactory's experimentation with new dyes, which began to fade even within the first 10 years of the tapestry s life. Usually, only a few key colors have faded, particularly the blues, which are notoriously fugitive, and those colors rendered in fragile silk rather than sturdy wool, but that gives the whole tapestry the appearance of being faded.

We can appreciate how vibrant the *Fountain of Love* once looked by comparing it with what's left of its cartoon; if you go to the Getty, you can stand in front of the cartoon and see the tapestry hanging directly to your left, alongside two other tapestries from our *Noble Pastorale* suite. The Beauvais manufactory hung onto Boucher's cartoons until 1829, when they were sold for altruistic purposes in order to benefit the veterans of the Napoleonic wars. Many have been lost, but the Getty collection has two of them.

As with the vases we saw earlier, the tapestries reverse the cartoons, but for a different reason. In this case, it is not because the weavers worked from engravings, but because the Beauvais manufactory used low-warp looms, like the one in this picture. The cartoon was exactly the same size as the finished tapestry, but it was broken down into panels about three feet wide to fit under the warp threads on the loom. One advantage of this system was that a large composition could be woven only in part, or two or three small scenes could be combined into one large tapestry. The weavers worked from the back of the tapestry, placing the cartoon directly beneath the warps to use as a guide, resulting in a mirror image. The drawback of this

method was that the weavers could not actually see the front of the tapestry they were working on, except by using a small hand mirror.

The other Boucher cartoon in the Getty collection is a portion of *The Bird Catchers,* which is not on display. As you can see, only about half of the panels have survived. The finished tapestry, usually displayed in the Large Library, is much larger. Again, the colors of the tapestry have faded, and the image is reversed.

Unfortunately, none of Boucher’s cartoons for the *Fetes ltaliennes* have survived. But The Getty has a preparatory drawing for the guitar player in the lower right hand comer of the large tapestry, called *The Charlatan* or *The Magic Lantern.* This is a good example of two scenes being combined in one tapestry; you could also buy just *The Charlatan* or *The Magic Lantern* alone, depending on how much money and time you had. Boucher used this sketch in the preparation of his full-sized cartoon. As you can see, the image is reversed in the tapestry.

The demand for Boucher tapestries bas remained fairly constant from the 1730s to the present, even as the artist himself has gone in and out of fashion. The breadth and range of this collecting activity is significant, for Boucher tapestries routinely equaled or exceeded the price of his canvases, during and after his lifetime. Valued for the beauty of their composition and harmony of color as well as for their virtuoso execution, these tapestries were prominently displayed in formal rooms, usually set within wooden paneling or gilded frames. This is the interior of the Palazzo San Donato, near Florence, in 1867, decorated with Boucher's tapestry series *The Loves of the Gods.*

Henry Huntington’s first major art purchase- the foundation of the Huntington collection- was his 1909 acquisition of *The Noble Pastorale,* for which he paid the equivalent of 8.5 million dollars in today's money. The layout of the Large Library was altered so that four of the five tapestries could be displayed in one room. The purchase gave Henry particular satisfaction and he wrote to a friend at the time, "I don't want you to miss seeing five tapestries I have at my new home. I have never seen anything that I like quite so well." Eleven years later,

the Huntington acquired the four small *Fetes Italiennes* tapestries for the upstairs hall of the HUG; Henry purchased the fifth tapestry in the series, *The Charlatan and the Magic Lantern,* in 1927, when the tapestries were moved to the Arabella Gallery.

Boucher tapestries were so popular with American collectors during the Gilded Age that there are very few left in France today. There are currently more Boucher tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art than in all of Paris. Of the approximate one hundred Boucher hangings surviving in public museums worldwide, 60 are in the United States, and 21 of these are in southern Californian museums, with the 10 best-preserved examples in the Huntington collection.

I'm sure you all know that the term "tapestry" refers not to a wall hanging but to a specific weaving technique, which could be applied to wall hangings as well as furniture, such as the suite of 10 tapestry-covered armchairs and 2 settees in the Large Library. These, too, are Boucher designs, this time for the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, which worked exclusively for the royal family. Boucher was appointed head of the Gobelins in 1755. The chair frames are nineteenth-century replacements and somewhat more elaborately carved than the originals would have been.

The tapestry covers on the backs of the chairs have allegories of the arts and sciences, enacted by children or putti- a favorite Boucher theme, or more accurately a favorite eighteenth-century theme. The seats are after designs by another artist, Jean Baptiste Oudry, who specialized in animal paintings; they show animal scenes from the fables of La Fontaine. It was considered inappropriate to sit on human figures, but animals were acceptable. This chair shows *Sculpture Personified as a Child* and *A Hound Attacking a Boar.* Four of the chairs are currently on display at the Getty, in the same room as *The Noble Pastorale.* Likewise, the two settees have Cupids on the backs and hunting scenes on the seats. This one shows *Five Cupids Shooting Arrows* and *Three Hounds Attacking a* Hyena.

The source painting for *Architecture Personified as a Child* survives in the

Museum of Art and History of Geneva. Notice that the tapestry is not in reverse-the tapestry must have been made from a cartoon based on the engraving, as both engraving and tapestry weaving produce a reverse image.

Arabella's passion for eighteenth-century French weavings after Boucher was such that she chose to be portrayed sitting on one of the chairs in her 1924 portrait painted by Oswald Birley. Of course, we discourage people from sitting on them today, particularly as we have just spent the past five years having the whole suite beautifully conserved thanks to a major grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. As part of the conservation process, the tapestry panels were removed and the chairs re-stuffed with Ethafoam, giving us a rare glimpse of the back sides of the tapestries; this is *Music Personified as a Child.*

Another Boucher tapestry in the Huntington collection is *Cupid, the Vintager,* on the left which is based on one of a series of allegories of the four seasons that Boucher painted in the early 1730's; this one represents autumn and the grape harvest. The original painting, on the right, is in a private collection. The Beauvais manufactory adapted Boucher's paintings into four woven panels to be used as overdoors. As the name suggests, overdoors are decorative panels in canvas, wood, or tapestry mounted over interior doors, like the grisaille panels in the Large Drawing Room. Almost all of the overdoors produced by the Beauvais manufactory were destined for diplomatic purposes, either in ministry interiors or as gifts to foreign governments. They were usually produced in sets of three or four, the standard number of doors in public rooms of the eighteenth century.

Ten versions of this composition were produced, of which six are still extant. But this is the only one to have been converted into a firescreen, an alteration that occurred before Henry Huntington acquired it. The tapestry panel is mounted on an inner wooden frame that can slide in and out of the decorative frame. That's not the only unfortunate alteration-at some point in its history, someone touched up the fading colors with paint.

I want to end with one of Boucher's last paintings, now hanging in the Erburu Gallery. The painting is signed and dated in 1769, the year before the artist's death. In many ways, the work is a strictly conventional treatment of one of Boucher' s favorite subjects, Venus, the goddess of love, with the infant Cupid. Several other images of Venus by Boucher can be found in local collections, including but not limited to this painted overdoor *Venus and Mercury Instructing Cupid* in the Los Angeles County Museum and, in the Getty collection, the wall panel *Venus on the Wave,* on the left, and the large scale gouache drawing of *The Birth and Triumph of Venus,* on the right.

In the Huntington painting, Venus is shown with her traditional attributes, doves and roses. By this time, Boucher's eyesight was failing, and he may have returned to familiar motifs and figures as a way of compensating for his physical deterioration, working from memory rather than from models.