

A Boucher Room

Medium, Time, and Authorship

David Pullins

In early 1916, the American industrialist and art collector Henry Clay Frick paid an extraordinary \$500 000 for eight paintings thought to have been executed around 1753 by François Boucher for Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, at her Château de Crécy.¹ Recently, however, scholars have sowed doubts about their attribution, date, and function. In the absence of new documentation, the ensemble could slip into an uncertain limbo. Within the theme of “sortir du rang”, however, we might take the opportunity to ask how these objects’ resistance to the most basic connoisseurial data highlights broader methodological and historiographic issues in the study of 18th-century visual culture. Is the problem simply archival, or is there something about particular objects that destabilises or even undermines elementary categories of art historical description?

The Frick panels, framed today by early-20th-century boiserie, comprise eight canvases representing the arts and sciences in the guise of *enfants de Boucher*, the genre the artist popularised in the early 1750s under Pompadour’s patronage (figs. 1 & 2).² Their 16 figural vignettes are linked vertically by blue camaïeu landscapes and are further framed by floral garlands, which weave through a light, arabesque architecture, helping to unify the whole and establish a relationship between the vignettes and their monochrome grounds. The panels epitomise many features of decorative painting: symmetrical armatures offer structure (which can easily be expanded or contracted) while the discrete images of single or paired figures representing Alchemy, Architecture, Painting, and

My thanks go to Thomas Kirchner, Sophie Raux, and the fellows of the 2018-2019 “L’art de l’Ancien Régime : sortir du rang” for the invitation to participate.

- 1 Duveen Brothers invoice, 21 June 1916. Henry Clay Frick and Duveen Brothers correspondence, July-August 1916 (Henry Clay Frick Art Collection Files, The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives, New York, NY); Duveen Brothers to Henry Clay Frick, 18 March 1918 (Duveen Archives, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA).
- 2 *Paintings in The Frick Collection: French, Italian and Spanish*, coll. cat., New York, The Frick Collection, New York, 1968, 2 vol., pp. 8-23. On the *enfants de Boucher*, see particularly Edith Standen, “Country Children: Some *Enfants de Boucher* in Gobelins Tapestry”, in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29, 1994, pp. 111-133; Alastair Laing, “Madame de Pompadour et les ‘Enfants de Boucher’”, in *Madame de Pompadour et les arts*, Xavier Salmon (ed.), exh. cat., Paris, 2002, pp. 41-49.



1 Circle of François Boucher, *The Arts and Sciences: Painting and Sculpture*, c. 1760, oil on canvas, 217,5 × 77,5 cm, New York, The Frick Collection

Sculpture have a serial rather than narrative relationship to each other. Like the arabesque architectural details, they can also be increased or reduced in number depending on the amount of space to be filled. Moreover, their staccato rhythm acts singularly in visual terms and is perfectly suited to the decorative demands to which they respond. In this case, the loosely thematic *Arts and Sciences* mirror the publishing endeavour with which Pompadour was eager to associate herself: the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1772). In this work, readers can flip from one entry to another (for example, from “Architecture” to “Tragedy”), and even between volumes, without expecting any causal link but deriving knowledge or pleasure from individual entries. This formal structure also worked effectively in the print market, where a given motif could be extracted and freely circulated, unencumbered by compositional or narrative demands. Claude Duflos’s prints advertised in the *Mercur de France* in 1753, for example, extracted two of the vignettes that appear in the Frick’s Boucher Room in precisely this way and included them in an arbitrarily grouped series of four prints modelled after *enfants de Boucher*, each of which was given a moralising verse.³ Likewise, it is

possible for just one or two motifs—rather than all four—to turn up in wildly different spatial and material contexts, including Gobelín tapestries, Sèvres

3 Pierrette Jean-Richard, *L’Œuvre gravé de François Boucher dans la Collection Edmond de Rothschild*, Paris, 1978, nos. 933–937.

- 2 Circle of François Boucher, *The Arts and Sciences: Architecture and Alchemy*, c. 1760, oil on canvas, 217,5 × 77,5 cm, New York, The Frick Collection

porcelain, and japanned or vernis Martin woodwork.⁴ The peculiar formal features of these paintings alert us to the myriad ways they foil conventional art historical description.

In his contribution to *Madame de Pompadour et les arts* (2002), Alastair Laing was the first resolutely to question the Boucher Room's attribution (based on qualitative judgments vis-à-vis more firmly documented works) and date (and, thereby, provenance).⁵ Laing's evidence that the group could not date from circa 1753 (and therefore could not have been created for Pompadour's Château de Crécy, which was sold to the duc de Penthièvre in 1757) is difficult to refute: he notes that the Frick's *Tragedy* humorously played off the success of Carle Vanloo's *Mademoiselle Clairon as Medea* (1759; Neues Palais, Potsdam), shown at the Salon of 1759.⁶ Furthermore, Boucher's firmly attributed *Architecture* (Musées d'art et d'histoire, Geneva) is clearly dated 1761.⁷ As with several of the Frick group's vignettes, an independent work—consistent in composition and colours, indicating that one was copied directly from the other—muddies the panels' autonomy; in effect, their seriality resulted in a compendium of other, more firmly attributed canvases.



- 4 These are all threads of what I call “the mobile image”—the result of both formal and representational engineering that breaks down divisions between fine and decorative art and tends to destabilize categories of medium and authorship. David Pullins, “Images as objects: the problem of figural ornament in eighteenth-century France” in *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, Gülrü Necipoğlu and Alina Payne (eds.), Princeton/Oxford, 2016, pp. 216–227; David Pullins, *Cut and Paste: the Mobile Image from Watteau to Boucher* (Getty Research Institute: forthcoming).
- 5 Laing, “Madame de Pompadour et les ‘Enfants de Boucher,’” 45–48.
- 6 Or its alternate, vertical format of the same title (c.1760; Neues Palais, Potsdam), engraved by Laurent Cars and Jacques-Firmin Beauvarlet. Marie-Catherine Sahut, *Carle Vanloo. Premier peintre du roi (Nice, 1705 – Paris, 1765)*, exh. cat. (Nice: musée des Beaux-Arts), 81–82 (nos. 166 and 169).
- 7 Renée Loche, *Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève. Catalogue Raisoné des Peintures et Pastels de l'École Française XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Geneva: Éditions Slatkine, 1996), 54–57 (no. 8).

Renaud Serrette has proposed that a series of recently discovered paintings are, in fact, those listed in early Crécy inventories.⁸ However, these works have suffered damage and are not entirely autograph: the vignettes *La petite beurrière* and *Le bol de bouillie*, for example, are wonderfully lively and seem to be Boucher's own, while *Le petit joueur de cornemuse* seems to be a copy of a well-known model, and *La fileuse* is a 19th-century replacement or perhaps extension of the panel. While the surrounding frame is an engaging example of rocaille ornament, it does not approach the refined, complex decorative surrounds Boucher is known to have authored himself.⁹ Based on new archival documentation, Serrette proposes that when Boucher's initial group, consisting of these recently discovered paintings, passed to the ducs de Penthièvre, the family commissioned the decorative painter Alexis Peyrotte to continue the series at Sceaux. According to Serrette, the Frick paintings are thus Peyrotte's expansion. Today, Peyrotte is probably best known for his ornament prints circulated by Gabriel Huquier, but in his day, he was equally known for his royal commissions for painting, most notably his contribution to the Château de Fontainebleau's Salle du conseil.¹⁰ There, he provided a connective floral tissue between Carle Vanloo's and Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre's figures, the architectural surrounds, and ceiling paintings by Boucher.¹¹ Unlike his contemporaries who enjoyed an elevated status because of their work in higher-ranking genres, Peyrotte was the only painter known to have worked on-site—the others had their panels delivered. It was left to Peyrotte to unify them through ornament. The mishaps involved in such procedures are amply documented.¹² Thus,

8 These works were previously known only from a photograph in the Maciet albums, Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris (229/1). Renaud Serrette, "Les enfants de Boucher, du château de Crécy au château de Sceaux", in *l'Objet d'Art*, July–August 2010, pp. 30–37. Preempted by the château de Sceaux from Rouillac/Artigny, *XXX^e vente*, Montbazou, 10–11 June 2018, lot 64.

9 For example, *Pastoral Landscape with Cupid's in Tribute to M^{me} de Tecin* (c.1740; Stair Sainty, London); pendants *La Marchande d'Oiseaux* (c.1742; unknown location) and *La Marchande de Fleurs* (c.1742; private collection); pendant, chinoiserie, *camieau* overdoors (c.1742; Davids Collection, Copenhagen and Earl of Chichester, Little Durnford Manor). See Alexandre Ananoff, *François Boucher*, 2 vol., vol. 1, New York, 1976, p. 381 (no. 266) and *François Boucher*, Alastair Laing (ed.), exh. cat., New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1986, p. 205.

10 My thanks go to Yoann Gros Lambert for sharing his opinions on the Peyrottes in relation to the Frick paintings, partially documented in Yoann Gros Lambert, *Recherches sur la vie et l'œuvre d'Alexis Peyrotte (1699–1769) et son fils Augustin-Laurent (1729–?)*, peintres, décorateurs, et ornemenistes sous le règne de Louis XV, PhD dissertation in-progress, Université Blaise-Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand. Recently published work on Peyrotte appears in Yoann Gros Lambert, "Alexis Peyrotte (1699–1769), un peintre décorateur sous Louis XV", in *Décors de peintres: Invention et savoir-faire, XVI^e–XXI^e siècles*, Catherine Cardinal and Laurence Riviale (eds.), Clermont-Ferrand, 2016, pp. 277–93; Xavier Salmon, "Alexis Peyrotte (1699–1769) ou les grâces du rocaille à Fontainebleau", in *Les Dossiers de la Société des Amies et Mécènes du Château de Fontainebleau* 7, 2012, pp. 1–32.

11 For divisions of labour in the space and its textual equivalent in the commission, see David Pullins, "Stubbs, Vernet and Boucher share a canvas: multiple hands, workshop practice and authorship in eighteenth-century Europe", *Journal18* 1, spring 2016, URL: www.journal18.org [accessed: 05.10.2021].

12 Salmon, 2012 (note 10), p. 21.

Peyrotte clearly worked with Boucher and was very adept at the practice of adding to and connecting composite parts to fit out a room. Newly emerging documentation found by Yoann Gros Lambert indicates that as much as Peyrotte and his son, Augustin-Laurent, were accomplished painters, they were equally important as artistic coordinators, who regularly delegated tasks to others.¹³

Serrette's archival documentation of Peyrotte's involvement in the Frick paintings is compelling and has been widely accepted. In visual terms, however, there is little to support the idea that the Frick canvases are wholly by Peyrotte: as per the genre specialisations so typical of Peyrotte's world, he was a skilled flower and ornament painter (and may have been responsible for the surrounds in the Frick decoration); however, it would be a leap to attribute the Frick figures to him.¹⁴ They highlight the importance of taking visual evidence as seriously as archival evidence—the latter being a fascinating piece in the puzzle that does not altogether solve the problems of attribution and chronology. Gros Lambert's emphasis on the role of the Peyrottes as coordinators of works, however, might offer a solution: father and son executed the floral and ornamental components and connected the various elements but found someone else—presumably with access to prime versions of Boucher's motifs—to execute the figures. Given their proximity to Boucher, the Peyrottes may very well have been able to arrange for one of the master's students amply proficient in Boucher's style to make contributions on his behalf.

When the art dealer Joseph Duveen sold the eight canvases to Frick in 1916, he withheld any ambiguities about their status as works of art. It was clearly in Duveen's interest to apply standard art historical criteria to these slippery objects regarding medium, date, and authorship, no matter how awkward the fit. Frick's collection was driven by the pursuit of proper names, even brand names or blue-chip old masters of the most solidly documentable variety. *The Progress of Love* (1771–1772; 1790–1791), purchased by Frick one year before, would have been the most directly relevant to Duveen. Its constellation of proper names connecting artist, *maîtresse-en-titre*, king, and property—Fragonard, Madame du Barry, Louis XV, and the Pavillon de Louveciennes—had effectively provided a rehearsal for Frick's purchase of the Boucher Room.

If, however, we accept rather than shirk from the difficult questions surrounding these paintings' medium, date, and authorship, they reveal some of the ways in which fine art can, in effect, be produced by rhetoric and criteria external to the objects under examination.

¹³ E-mail conversation with Gros Lambert, 19 June 2018.

¹⁴ See, for example, the gouaches illustrated in Salmon, 2012 (note 10).

Medium

Though the Frick paintings are obviously executed in oil on canvas, the nature of their medium is deceptive: despite any notion of the works' original function or even the clearly decorative formal qualities I have described, the privileged status of their medium asks us to treat them in a particular way—as art with a capital A. We thus immediately extract them from a broader fabric of visual culture, and our line of questioning is already determined.

In questioning the 'medium', I am thus suggesting we re-examine the relationship between this group of objects and other media: were these panels in oil on canvas intended to be inserted into boiserie (as they are presented today) or were they initially designed for something else?

As it happens, the Frick paintings engage other media with wild abandon. First, there is a large group of works of individual figural vignettes in oil on canvas, which includes confidently signed and dated paintings by Boucher as well as distant replicas. The operating assumption is that these are the prime versions of those compiled in the Frick canvases. Some have horizontal formats, such as *Sculpture*, a work for which the Frick owns a highly finished but seemingly preparatory drawing.¹⁵ Flexibility regarding framing—crucial to the mobility of motifs in the decorative arts—is key to such translation. These three works posit a chronology of drawing, to easel painting, to decorative panel; however, Boucher's equally frequent practice of drawing figures based on his paintings rather than the other way around upsets this chronology or at least its implied teleology.¹⁶ Drawings based on paintings could, of course, also be preparatory for prints, as in the case of the Frick's drawing depicting Poetry, which was probably not preparatory for a painting but made expressly for Claude Dufflos.¹⁷ Individuated figures—highly functional, staccato elements awaiting application, not unlike prints—relate to cartoons created by Boucher's studio for the Gobelins.¹⁸ From a series dated circa 1751, we find Dance, also included in the Frick paintings. Originally, these paintings were shaped (or *chantourné*) and

15 Sale catalogue, *The Arts of France*, Christie's, 21 October 1997, lot 127. On the Frick drawing, see *The Frick Collection: Drawings, Prints & Later Acquisitions*, coll. cat., New York, The Frick Collection, New York, 2003, IX, pp. 55–64; *The Drawings of François Boucher*, Alastair Laing (ed.), exh. cat., New York, The Frick Collection/Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum, New York, 2003, pp. 142–43 (no. 50). In addition to *Architecture*, discussed above, the other key example is *Song*, of which a vertical version was sold by Sotheby's on 6 July 2017, lot 182, and of which a horizontal, monochrome, possibly studio version is known, sold by Christie's on 4 February 1977, lot 54. A related group tends to caricature the faces, as in *Alchemy*, sold by Christie's on 19 April 2018, lot 179.

16 Beverly Schreiber Jacoby, *François Boucher's Early Development as a Draughtsman*, New York, 1986; Alastair Laing, *Boucher's Drawings: Who and What Were They For?*, New York, 2016.

17 *The Frick Collection: Drawings, Prints & Later Acquisitions*, Joseph Focarino (ed.), vol. 9, New York, 2003, pp. 55–64. Laing, 2003 (note 17), p. 143.

18 Jean Vittet, *Les Gobelins au siècle des Lumières. Un âge d'or de la manufacture royale*, exh. cat., Paris, Galerie des Gobelins, Paris, 2014, p. 332.

later filled out to fit the norms of rectangular easel paintings. Comparisons with seatbacks by the flower painters Peyrotte and Maurice Jacques are helpful in understanding how format and its relationship to both motif and application are related.¹⁹ This example is part of a larger story of transforming decorative painting—for boiserie, cartoons, or other media altogether—into autonomous works of art by giving them rectilinear formats suitable for the art market.²⁰

Apart from *Dance*, the Gobelins did not retain cartoons of the Frick motifs, which is striking given that these figures frequently appeared woven on seatbacks beginning in the early 1750s. The earliest example is probably a group of furniture now held in San Francisco dated circa 1751. Other groups are held in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Rijksmuseum, and the Huntington Library Art Collection and Botanical Gardens (fig. 3), which holds an extensive suite of 12 pieces, including a sofa back into which the Frick's *Hydraulics* has been integrated along with other figures.²¹

Could the Frick paintings be by-products of Boucher's designs for the Gobelins? The figural vignettes and surrounds are all on the same canvas and—as far as technical analysis has revealed thus far—do not seem to be the result of relining. However, their link to seat covers seems reasonable, and the measurements for the Frick paintings are very similar to those of both the Gobelin weavings and Gobelin cartoons.

In this context, we might also understand the format and formal distribution of the full panels as folding screens or cartoons for folding screens;²² cartoons by Jacques, for example, are comparable in format and handling.²³ In the most famous example, Jacques de Lajoüe's six-panel folding screen (circa 1735; Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Petit Palais), commissioned by Huquier, rocaïlle ornaments were used to ease transitions between illusionistic space and flat, monochromatic surfaces. The typical division of such screens into two or three planes was closely related to boiserie (screens being, in effect, temporary, mobile walls) and readied panels like the Frick's for use on walls.²⁴ Moreover,

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 332, 340.

²⁰ David Pullins, "Quelques misérables places à remplir": Locating Shaped Paintings in Eighteenth-Century France", in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 80/4, 2017, pp. 544–571.

²¹ Edith A. Standen, "Madme de Pompadour's Gobelins Tapestries", *Studies in the History of Art, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.*, vol. 42, 1993, pp. 24–30; Vittet, 2014 (note 18), pp. 329–335; *Five Centuries of Tapestry from The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco*, Anna Gray Bennett (ed.), San Francisco, 1992, pp. 286–89 (no. 90); *European Tapestries in the Rijksmuseum*, Ebelte Hartkamp-Jonxis and Hillie Smite (eds.), exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Zwolle, 2004, pp. 399–405 (no. 121); *French Art of the Eighteenth Century at The Huntington*, Shelley M. Bennett and Carolyn Sargentson (eds.), exh. cat., San Marino, The Huntington Library, Art Collection, and Botanical Gardens, Pasadena, 2008, pp: 323–330 (no. 123).

²² Jean Vittet has noted that they are not, themselves, likely to have been cartoons. E-mail conversation with Jean Vittet, 5 June 2018.

²³ Vittet, 2014 (note 18), pp. 340–45.

²⁴ Katie Scott, "Screen Wise, Screen Play: Jacques de Lajoüe and the Ruses of the Rococo", in *Art History* 367/3, June 2013, p. 586.



- 3 Gobelins Manufactory, after François Boucher (back) and Jean-Baptiste Oudry (seat), under the direction of Jacques Neilson, wool and silk, c. 1779, mounted on twentieth-century frames, The Huntington Library, Art Collection and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

according to this visual logic, individual motifs held at the Gobelins were employed as vignettes in the more multi-media examples of folding screens built out from small Gobelin weavings. One example of this practice is a four-panel screen held at the Detroit Institute of Arts—the textile portions of which are dated around 1760—in which the Frick’s *Song* appears at the far left.²⁵

The Frick paintings’ relationship to the Gobelins puts them in far closer proximity to tapestry than any other medium—arguably even closer than to their compatriots in oil on canvas. Two other media, however, round out the diversity of translation Boucher’s figural motifs prompted.

Fishing enjoyed popularity at Sèvres in the early 1760s, though enamellers there copied a significantly modified, intermediary print, probably pirating Boucher’s

²⁵ *Woven Splendor: Five Centuries of European Tapestry in the Detroit Institute of Arts*, Alan Phipps Darr and Tracey Albainy (eds.), exh. cat., Detroit, Detroit Institut of Arts, Detroit, 1996, pp. 64–65 (no. 17).

motif.²⁶ However, as Susan Wager has recently argued very compellingly, in 18th-century France, this relay through media itself generated value (especially economic value), even if today there is a tendency to consider such practices ‘derivative’.²⁷

Finally, *Fishing* was enamelled onto a gold snuffbox using the most luxurious materials. Judging by its orientation and colours, it was not copied from the pirated print, as in Sèvres, but from the Frick painting or one closely related to it.²⁸ Metalworkers’ marks allow for remarkable precision in the dating of this object: between 1753 and 1754, when Boucher was allegedly painting the Frick panels for Pompadour at Crécy (that is if they were indeed by him and are the panels described in the château’s early inventories and not a series yet to be identified).

This breadth of medial relations has already brought us into the realms of date and author—though, as I want to suggest in the remainder of this contribution, stepping outside the ‘fine arts’ has the effect of undercutting these categories that are so associated with paintings connoisseurship.

Time

While we have no firm date for the Frick paintings, related media date from as early as 1753 to as late as 1779. This stylistic range is wonderfully compressed in Gobelin seat furniture that incorporates motifs from the series: over time, the framing devices, both woven and carved, abandoned the rocaille in favour of increasingly symmetrical, ultimately oval backs.

In the decorative arts, motifs were used and reused well beyond what we would assume to be their expiration date. The longevity of Boucher’s prints is summarised by a secrétaire made by René Dubois in the early 1770s decorated with Boucher’s chinoiserie allegory *Touch* and three images from his *Four Elements*—all prints from the 1740s. They are combined here with prints representing the months by Jean-Baptiste Pillement dated 1759 (fig. 4).²⁹ The inconsistent combination of artists, dates, and subjects suggests that Dubois chose these

26 *French Art of the Eighteenth Century at The Huntington*, Shelley M. Bennet and Carolyn Sargents (eds.), exh. cat., The Huntington Library, Art Collection, and Botanical Gardens, New Haven, 2008, pp. 212–14 (no. 84). The prints are Jean-Richard, 1978 (note 3), pp. 332–33 (nos. 1384–1385).

27 Susan Wager, *Boucher’s Bijoux: Luxury Reproduction in the Age of Enlightenment*, PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2015.

28 My thanks to Catherine Gougeon for her help in accessing documentation. Henry Nocq and Carle Dreyfus, *Tabatières boîtes et étuis: Orfèvreries de Paris XVIII^e siècle et début du XIX^e des Collections du musée du Louvre*, Paris, 1930; *Catalogue des tabatières boîtes et étuis des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles du musée du Louvre*, Serge Grandjean (ed.), exh. cat., Paris, musée du Louvre, Paris, 1981, pp. 92–93 (no. 98).

29 Daniëlle O. Kisluk-Grosheide, “A Japanned Secrétaire in the Linksy Collection with Decorations after Boucher and Pillement”, in *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 21, 1986, pp. 139–47.

images because they offered ready-made motifs, not because they were by a specific artist or fit within a thematic programme. In terms of chronology, this object affects a temporal collapse between the 1740s and 1770s that complicates a more familiar story of 18th-century urban life: the quick pace of fashion, perceived and criticised for increasingly minute temporal divisions, rooted in consumer culture.

The expansion or contraction of a range of dates—rather than pinpointing a singular moment of artistic inspiration—can also be found in the fine arts. Antoine Watteau is the poster child of a practice I refer to as ‘cutting and pasting’: motifs are collected as drawings in an album, like a pattern book, and then deployed in widely varying contexts and compositions, sometimes years apart—a system devised not with citation in mind but the practicality of furniture makers such as Dubois. The figure in Antoine Watteau’s drawing *Seated Guitarist* (circa 1716; Musée du Louvre), for example, goes from appearing alone in *Le donneur de serenades* (circa 1716; Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly) to being incorporated in increasingly populated compositions, such as Watteau’s *Fête galante dans un parc* (circa 1717; Gemäldegalerie, Dresden). In another repetition of this figure, *La surprise* (1718–1719; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), Watteau included a couple plucked from Peter Paul Rubens’s *La kermesse* (1635–1638; Musée du Louvre) and a dog from his *The Marriage by Proxy* (1622–1625; Musée du Louvre), thereby involving the timeframe of another artist’s work.³⁰ This process of repeatedly drawing from source images over a prolonged period unmask the false—albeit reassuring—precision of a singular ‘date’. Boucher was also comfortable with employing this mode of production and often pulled from several artist simultaneously, particularly in the context of royal manufactories and according to other artists’ genre specialisation. In 1734, after being hired by the head of the Gobelins, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Boucher promptly began recycling Oudry’s animals in his compositions for new tapestry designs. These included works presumably intended as paintings, such as *The Leopard Hunt* (1736; Musée de Picardie, Amiens) for Louis XV’s *Chasses exotiques*, and paintings that were to be woven, as in cartoons for Boucher’s *Fêtes italiennes*.³¹ For the latter, Oudry’s *Deux chiens se disputant du gibier mort* (1726; Statens Kunstmuseum, Copenhagen) and a related drawing by Oudry helped Boucher

30 Pierre Rosenberg and Antoine Prat, *Antoine Watteau, 1684–1721: Catalogue raisonné des dessins*, 3 vol., vol. 2, Milan, 1996, pp. 762–63 (no. 459). Alan Wintermute, “Le Pèlerinage à Watteau: An Introduction to the Drawings of Watteau and his Circle”, in *Watteau and his World: French Drawings from 1700 to 1750*, id. (ed.), exh. cat., New York, The Frick Collection, London/New York, 1999, pp. 29, 54. For the impact of these relays and, in particular, working procedures on Watteau’s military subjects, see *Watteau’s Soldiers. Scenes of Military Life in Eighteenth-Century France*, Aaron Wile (ed.), exh. cat., New York, The Frick Collection, New York, 2016, 11–74. *Watteau at Work: La Surprise*, Emily A. Beeny, Davide Gasparatto and Richard Rand (ed.), exh. cat., Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2021.

31 Versailles: *les chasses exotiques de Louis XV*, exh. cat., Xavier Salmon (ed.), Amiens, Musée de Picardie/Versailles, musée national des châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, exh. cat., Paris, 1995, pp. 68–71 (no. 18).



- 4 René Dubois, Japanned secretaire, c. 1770–1775, painted and varnished oak, veneered with European lacquer, mahogany, purplewood, gilt-bronze mounts, 152,4 × 67,9 × 34 cm, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Jack and Belle Linsky Collection

fill out his more complicated, large-scale tapestry cartoons.³² This kind of recycling might seem odd given the patron's status, but enamellers at Sèvres regularly used easily procured prints even on objects destined for royal residences.³³ These examples productively foil our notion of originality as it relates to use and reuse, and the decorative arts offer byways for rethinking painting.

Though the Frick paintings were probably executed within a relatively brief period, they capture a series of motifs not unlike the image storehouses of Watteau's drawing books or manufactory collections at Sèvres or the Gobelins. As we have seen, they have a more than tangential relationship with the Gobelins that spans 20 years. Of course, this is not unique: *tentures* were not only re-woven but even featured in seemingly up-to-date, fashionable rooms. Peppered throughout the woven works created as a complete *décor* for Croome Court in Worchester (1763–1771; The Metropolitan Museum of Art), for example, we find 17th-century animals first produced by Pieter Boel in the 1660s for Louis XIV, which could still be found in the Gobelins collections a century later.³⁴ This example attests to the Frick vignettes' generative potential. Whether their originators could anticipate this kind of longevity is difficult to say, but repetition was crucial to the Gobelins considering its precarious financial situation. Following the same logic as laboriously engraved printers' plates, substantial investments were made in first weavings partly because they could be reused. Pompadour, however, is known to have explicitly removed Boucher's cartoons from the Gobelins' collection, safeguarding her commissions from replication:

Aussitost que vous aurés receu ma lettre, Monsieur, vous aurés agréable de dire à M. Neilson qu'il remette à M. Boucher les tableaux qu'il a fait et d'après lesquels le Sr Neilson a fait les fauteuils de Made la Marquise de Pompadour, et qu'à lavenir, il les luy remette tout de suite et immédiatement après que les fonds ou le dossier du fauteuil sera achevé et oté du dessus le métier.³⁵

Notably, seat covers were often specifically understood as lucrative products for tapestry manufactories.

Painters were also conscious of the question of a motif's longevity; this is apparent in Watteau's case but not unique to him. In one example from 1735,

32 Hal Opperman, *Jean-Baptiste Oudry*, 2 vol., vol. 1, New York, 1977, p. 506 (P 395); vol. 2, p. 833 (D 987); p. 836 (D 995).

33 Tamara Préaud, "Recherches sur les sources iconographique utilisées par les décorateurs de porcelaine de Vincennes (1740–1756)", in *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français*, 1989, pp. 106, 108; Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, "Engravings and etchings in the manufacture Nationale de Sèvres: An Introduction to the Collection formed in the eighteenth century" in *The French Porcelain Society Journal* XIV, 1999, pp. 14–32.

34 Edith Standen, "Croome Court: The Tapestries", in *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 19, November 1959, pp. 96–112.

35 Standen, 1993 (note 21), pp. 25–27.

while trying to sell his *Four Elements*, Oudry noted that “cet ouvrage m’a coûté presqu’une année”.³⁶ In terms of replicas and, more interestingly, variations of individual motifs, however, the series proved fruitful for Oudry and his studio well beyond what his initial time and labour suggested: motifs from Oudry’s first version of *Air* (1719; Nationalmuseum, Stockholm; fig. 5) appear to have been used in at least 10 canvases painted or retouched by the artist until at least 1730.³⁷

Authorship

The third category is authorship, the stability of which has already been questioned in the preceding discussion of dating. First, there is the issue of singular authorship, which, while a fundamental art historical concept today, was not at the turn of the 18th century. Even in the realm of ‘fine art’, the question of authorship was being shaped through a host of debates that would form the foundation of modern art connoisseurship.³⁸ This includes Salon exhibition culture, the language of sales catalogues, and collecting culture (terrain well explored by scholars such as Kristel Smentek, in her research on Pierre-Jean Mariette, and Charlotte Guichard, who has examined artists’ signing practices).³⁹ Comparable to their compositional logic—split into units sutured by garlands—in the Frick panels, distinct hands may be recognised. It seems unlikely that the same hand executed both the figural vignettes and the floral garlands; perhaps even a third hand executed the landscapes. In any case, close examination reveals that the vignettes and landscapes were completed before the addition of the floral frames that unify them. We should recall, of course, the various, far better documented hands that Peyrotte unified at Fontainebleau or that were involved in the paintings for Crécy. This division of labour is entirely familiar in the world of manufactories, be it at Sèvres, where different marks identified the different makers involved in the creation of a given object, or tapestry manufactories, where accounts of payments are clearly divided among individuals based on speciality: flower, animal, figure, or ornament painting. Even in oil sketches for the Gobelins, distinct hands can be made out, including an

36 Paul Seidel, “Beiträge zur Lebensgeschichte Jean Baptiste Oudry’s”, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* XII, 1890, pp. 80–100; Opperman, 1977 (note 36), pp. 79–80, 502 (P385), 525 (P439), 542 (P481 & P482). Hal Opperman in *J.-B. Oudry, 1686–1755*, id. and Pierre Rosenberg (ed.), exh. cat., Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 1982, pp. 79–80.

37 Ibid., pp. 79–80, 502 (P385), 504 (P390), 525–527 (P439, P442, P443), 542 (P481, P482), 544 (P487).

38 Pullins, “The individual’s triumph.”

39 Kristel Smentek, *Mariette and the Science of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Farnham, 2014 (Studies in art historiography 6); Charlotte Guichard, *La griffe du peintre. La valeur de l’art (1730–1820)*, Paris, 2018.



5 Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Air*, 1719, oil on canvas, 144 × 118 cm, Stockholm Nationalmuseum

example in which the reserves are attributed to Boucher and the remainder to Jacques.⁴⁰

The participation of multiple hands in works of ‘fine art’ went from a relatively common, openly acknowledged practice to one that lost acceptance—particularly in academic circles. However, abandoning the multiple for the singular was a process rather than an instantaneous event, and key 18th-century painters—among them, Watteau, Oudry, Boucher, and Hubert Robert—were entirely adept at supplying elements in their genre of specialisation (figure, landscape, animal) or actively collaborating on compositions with other artists.⁴¹

Open acknowledgement of this division of labour according to genre persisted longest in portrait painting—perhaps because, like decoration, it was less ideologically elevated than historical or other subjects that appealed to liberal education. Portraitists’ account books (notably those of Hyacinthe Rigaud) are replete with references to multi-authored canvases incorporating recycled limbs and other props.⁴² Allegedly, it was in Nicolas de Largillière’s workshop that Oudry, while painting a dog, received a backhanded compliment on his skill in rendering animals—his future genre specialisation was thus identified.⁴³

In terms of what ‘attribution’ means for such paintings, our knowledge of 18th-century workshop production remains shockingly limited—in some cases, I would even say we are in denial. Our ideas of singular authorship—inherited from what, in the 18th century, were still nascent concepts emerging in exhibition culture, the art market, and connoisseurship—misleadingly ties oeuvres created by several hands to the ‘brand name’ with which they are most associated. Boucher was celebrated—and at times decried—for the enormous cohort of students in his keep, at least 22 of whom can be identified by name.⁴⁴ Their work was compared to the master’s, provoking either disbelief or despair at a potentially corruptive proximity. Instilling this kind of ‘house style’ was precisely the job of a master painter. In the 18th century, commentary on a major painter retouching studio work (unlike Rubens or Largillière) was a rarity. However, several instances involving Boucher are known, the most famous of which is a commentary by his German student Johann Christian von Mannlich, who recalled, “Le matin en prenant son chocolat dans son cabinet, il [Boucher] s’amusoit à fair ou à rétoucher un dessein. Il n’en pouvoit faire assez tant pour

40 Vittet, 2014 (note 18).

41 Pullins, 2016 (note 11).

42 Joseph Roman, *Le livre de raison du peintre Hyacinthe Rigaud*, Paris, 1919.

43 “Mémoire pour Servir à l’Eloge de Mr. Oudry” transcribed in Opperman, 1977 (note 36), p. 169. The discovery of an artist’s genre through backhanded compliments is a trope in artists’ biographies, including Chardin’s. See Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *The Painter’s Touch. Boucher, Chardin, Fragonard*, Princeton, NJ, 2018, p. 123.

44 This number combines those found in period art criticism, “vies”, and obituaries in Laing, *François Boucher*, p. 4 and Patrice Marandel, “Boucher et l’Europe” in *ibid.*, pp. 78–92.

les amateurs que pour les Brocanteurs, qui les lui payoient deux louis piece”.⁴⁵ There is documentation of the same division of labour in painting as well, notably in the painting of cartoons for the Gobelins. In a “Distribution d’ouvrage” dated 1748, we find “À M. Boucher deux tableaux de chevalet, sujets tirez des Opéra; et leurs copies en grand retouchées de sa main, sur lesquelles seront exécuté deux pieces de tapisserie pour la Muette”.⁴⁶ This kind of shared authorship has proven difficult for scholars to accept for 18th-century French painting. But could it be more conceivable if, instead of small cabinet pictures intended for the 18th century’s newly emergent connoisseur class, we considered designs such as those at the Frick?

* * *

As provocative as I hope such broad explanations of the Frick paintings are in light of method and historiography, are they fully satisfying? Probably not. Fixity still holds its power in this domain. Questions of when and by and for whom the Frick’s paintings were executed will continue to govern how they are read, especially in any shorthand account of them, the “tombstone” museum label. In the context of “sortir du rang”, however, it seems worth resisting the criteria by which such works are absorbed into the history of art as it has taken shape in the centuries since their creation.

45 *Histoire de ma vie: mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich, 1741-1822*, Karl-Heinz Bender and Hermann Kleber (eds.), 2 vol., vol. 1, Trier, 1989-1993, p. 157.

46 “Distribution d’ouvrage en 1748” (AN/O1/1932), cited in Fenaille Maurice, *État général des tapisseries de la Manufacture des Gobelins depuis son origine, jusqu’à nos jours*, 5 vol. (1903-1923), vol. 5 (1907), p. 174.