



Jean Honoré Fragonard
French, 1732 - 1806

Diana and Endymion

c. 1753/1756

oil on canvas

overall: 94.9 x 136.8 cm (37 3/8 x 53 7/8 in.)

framed: 125.1 x 168.3 cm (49 1/4 x 66 1/4 in.)

Timken Collection 1960.6.2

ENTRY

This early masterpiece by Jean-Honoré Fragonard demonstrates his brilliant command—even at the beginning of his career—of the rococo pictorial idiom that was in its ascendancy in the 1750s and that he had absorbed through his close relationship with François Boucher (French, 1703 - 1770). On an ethereal mountaintop (the Mount Latmos of myth), the youthful shepherd Endymion, seminude, sleeps unaware, along with his dog. Several of his sheep lie beside him; one appears to notice the arrival of a glowing Diana, identified by a hazy crescent moon that surrounds her like a mandorla. Struck by Endymion's great beauty, she leans back, her hand held out in wonder. She is accompanied by a rosy-fleshed Cupid, who mischievously aims an arrow at the object of her delectation. The cool night sky provides a shimmering backdrop for Endymion's mountaintop, with its rocky ground enlivened by flowering shrubs.

With its pendant, *Aurora* (sometimes called *Venus Awakening*) [fig. 1], *Diana and Endymion* clearly was intended as interior decorations, undoubtedly meant to be installed into the paneling of overdoors. [1] Both canvases have been extended from their original curvilinear shapes, which were scalloped at top and bottom, as was often the case with such decorations produced by Fragonard during these

years [fig. 2]. [2] At some later date the canvases were made into rectangles and turned into easel paintings. Yet the low perspectives employed in both compositions work best if they are seen from below. In the National Gallery of Art's painting, for example, the figure of the slumbering Endymion is angled away from the viewer, while Diana appears to float above, as if the expanse of sky reaches out over our heads. The composition of *Aurora* is essentially the mirror opposite of *Diana and Endymion*. The graceful figure of Aurora, or Dawn, identified by the morning star above her head, sails into the composition on a cloudburst as Night draws a heavy blanket over her form. When seen side by side, the two paintings present equally balanced and complementary designs—both organized around the perpendicular placement of the figures to each other—but for all its painterly virtuosity and scintillating color, *Aurora* betrays a more schematic solution than *Diana and Endymion*, in which the protagonists exist in a more integrated spatial relationship. [3]

Besides complementing each other compositionally, Fragonard's two paintings are related in their themes. *Aurora*, ushering in the new day, provides the counterpart to *Diana and Endymion*, which symbolizes night. Entranced by the shepherd's beauty, the goddess Diana visits him one night as he sleeps. She steals a kiss, causing him to fall in love with her; their liaison angers Jupiter, who offers Endymion a choice between instant death and a perpetual slumber that will always preserve his youth. The iconology of the subject is complex, [4] but the arcane references of the story probably would have been less important for Fragonard's purpose. Here the subject serves the needs of the decorative program, providing a thematic juxtaposition with *Aurora*, representing Morning, in what must have been a fairly standard evocation of the Times of Day. As Colin Bailey observed, however, these paintings may have been part of a larger cycle, since the theme of the Times of Day was painted in sets of up to four compositions. [5] Fragonard probably drew his inspiration for *Diana and Endymion* from visual tradition, although his sensitive and appealing rendition of the myth is remarkably similar to the fullest literary account, told by Lucian in the *Dialogues of the Gods*, in which the writer imagines a conversation between Aphrodite and Selene, the moon goddess (who would later be associated with the Roman goddess Diana):

I think he's very good-looking, Aphrodite [says Selene], especially when he sleeps with his cloak under him on the rock, with his javelins just slipping out of his left hand as he holds them, and his right hand bent upwards round his head and framing his face

makes a charming picture, while he's relaxed in sleep and breathing in the sweetest way imaginable. Then I creep down quietly on tip-toe, so as not to waken him and give him a fright, and then—but you can guess; there's no need to tell you what happens next. You must remember I'm dying of love. [6]

The appearance of Cupid in Fragonard's painting alludes to an earlier part of the exchange, when Aphrodite asks why Selene frequently descends from the sky to gaze upon Endymion. She replies, "Ask your own son, Aphrodite; it's his fault." [7] Fragonard's representation of the myth betrays a familiarity with Lucian's ancient text that is less surprising when we remember that an important aspect of the curriculum at the *Ecole des élèves protégés*—the elite school that he attended from 1752 to 1756 after winning the Rome prize in 1752—focused on a thorough immersion in the study of classical literature.

When it entered the National Gallery of Art in 1960, *Diana and Endymion* carried an attribution to Boucher, Fragonard's first teacher. Boucher's name had been associated with the painting since at least the late nineteenth century, when it was in the collection of Sir Richard Wallace in Paris. [8] It was only in 1985 that Alan P. Wintermute recognized it as an early work by Fragonard, an attribution agreed to by all subsequent scholars. [9] The mistaken attribution to Boucher is understandable given the close similarities the painting shares with a great number of decorative works by Boucher. In subject and composition, if not in style, it is indebted to Boucher's own rendition of the subject (private collection), a painting that dates to the artist's youthful period in the 1730s. [10] Although the two principal figures are reversed, the general disposition of their forms is the same, and both works include such details as nestling sheep, a sleeping dog, and a mischievous Cupid. Compared to Fragonard's exquisitely asymmetrical composition, however, Boucher's is more static and less lively in its centralized grouping of forms; Diana's glowing crescent moon, which in the Fragonard discreetly shimmers behind her in the upper left of the picture, becomes in the Boucher a distracting and flattened disc in the heart of the composition, while the awkward pose of his Endymion—with his wrenched shoulder and thrown-back head—lacks the poise and elegance of Fragonard's figure. [11] Whether or not Fragonard had access to Boucher's painting (its early history is unknown, and it does not appear to have been engraved), the similarities between them are probably due more to the constraints imposed by the subject matter than by any true relationship or influence. As two *oeuvres de jeunesse*, however, only the Fragonard anticipates the brilliance that its creator

would achieve in full maturity.

Once the true authorship of the Washington painting is recognized and it is reunited with its pendant, *Aurora*, the two paintings fit comfortably with several works Fragonard produced while a student in Paris before his departure for Rome in 1756. For example, the combination of two mythological characters in decorative compositions clearly intended as overdoors and of similar style, color, and elegiac mood had already been employed in a pair of paintings produced around 1755: *Jupiter and Callisto* and *Cephalus and Procris* (Angers, Musée des Beaux-Arts). These two works had also been attributed at one time to Boucher. [12] *Diana and Endymion*, however, is characterized by a greater complexity in the organization of the figures in space, and its composition—like that of the pendant *Aurora*—is marked by strong opposing diagonals that give a coherent structure to the profusion of colors, swirling draperies, billowing clouds, and rampant foliage and flowers. *Diana and Endymion* is better compared to Fragonard's most important painting completed during his tenure at the Ecole des élèves protégés, the resplendent *Psyche Showing Her Sisters the Gifts She Has Received from Cupid*, which was exhibited, along with works by Fragonard's classmates, to Louis XV at Versailles in 1754 [fig. 3]. [13] The composition of this complex painting also centers on a series of opposing diagonals, particularly in the figure of Psyche. Her reclining form, swathed in glowing white robes and mirroring that of Endymion, is set against the excited gestures of the haggard personification of Envy, flying into the scene at the upper left, who has a more beautiful counterpart in the figure of Diana. Moreover, the startling crimson of Endymion's draperies, which sets him apart from the icy blues and steel grays of the Washington painting, was used to similar provocative effect in the sister kneeling at the right of the London painting. *Diana and Endymion* and *Aurora* undoubtedly date from the same period, if not shortly thereafter. [14]

The evolution of Fragonard's early career has been the subject of debate. As Bailey has discussed, Boucher clearly continued to exert an important influence on his former protégé, even during the years Fragonard was attending classes at the Ecole des élèves protégés. [15] The close formal relationship between *Diana and Endymion* and *Psyche Showing Her Sisters the Gifts She Has Received from Cupid* is proof enough that not all of Fragonard's Boucher-inspired decorative pictures can be assigned to the years 1750–1752, as Georges Wildenstein had presumed. [16] Despite the strict regulations to which the students at the Ecole des élèves protégés were held (as well as the indisputable influence the school's director,

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Carle Van Loo (French, 1705 - 1765), had on his students) it seems clear that Fragonard managed to continue working on outside projects, both on his own and in collaboration with Boucher. [17]

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Collection data may have been updated since the publication of the print volume. Additional light adaptations have been made for the presentation of this text online.

Richard Rand
January 1, 2009

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Aurora*, c. 1755–1756, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Museum purchase with funds by exchange by contribution, and by exchange from a Gift of Laurence K. and Lorna J. Marshall. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. www.mfa.org

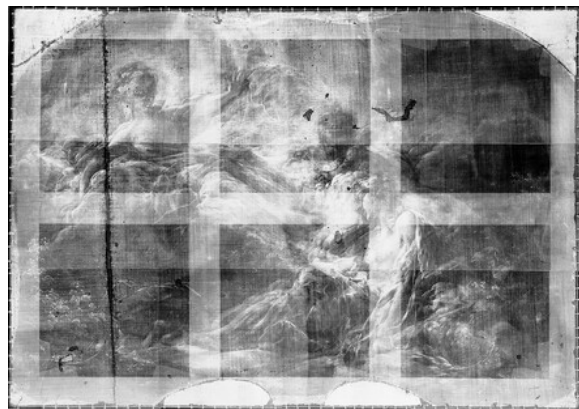


fig. 2 X-radiograph composite, Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Diana and Endymion*, c. 1753/1756, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Timken Collection



fig. 3 Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Psyche Showing Her Sisters the Gifts She Has Received from Cupid*, 1753–1754, oil on canvas, Bought, 1978 (NG6445). National Gallery, London, Great Britain.
www.nationalgallery.org.uk

NOTES

- [1] The two paintings were reunited in the exhibition *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), nos. 59, 60.
- [2] For example, the four *Allegory of the Arts* (Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], nos. 4–7) painted for Bergeret de Grancourt's house in the rue du Temple, and the cycle of the *Four Seasons* (Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], nos. 15–18), painted for the Hôtel Matignon.
- [3] Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), 39, remarks that in *Aurora* Fragonard “arranges the figures in a somewhat scholarly way according to the diagonals of the canvas”; see also Bailey's discussion in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), 482.
- [4] For a full discussion, see Judith Colton, “The Endymion Myth and Poussin's Detroit Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967): 426–431.

- [5] *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), 479.
- [6] M.D. Macleod, trans., *Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1961), 7:331.
- [7] M.D. Macleod, trans., *Lucian* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1961), 7:329.
- [8] John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Pictures*, vol. 3 (London, 1989), 384, no. 16.
- [9] Wintermute in Colin Bailey, et al., *The First Painters of the King* (New York, 1985), 137, called the painting an “early Fragonard?” Jean-Pierre Cuzin, “Fragonard dans les musées français: quelques tableaux reconsidérés ou discutés,” *Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 36, no. 1 (1986): 65–66, noted the similarity between the sheep with its back turned to a similar one in Fragonard’s oil sketch of *Saint John the Baptist* (Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l’oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], no. 25), datable to the same years. The painting was subsequently published as a Fragonard by Rosenberg in Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* (Paris, 1987), 34, fig. 6, and Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l’oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), no. 28. In 1991, Bailey reunited it with its pendant in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), no. 60. Unpublished opinions by Philip Conisbee and Alastair Laing confirming the attribution to Fragonard are in the NGA curatorial files.
- [10] When it appeared in an anonymous sale on March 20, 1773, lot 23, it was described as “Belle composition où on trouve le faire de Lemoine,” a reference to Boucher’s teacher (see Alexandre Ananoff with Daniel Wildenstein, *François Boucher* [Lausanne and Paris, 1976], 1:73, no. 36, who confused the early provenance of Fragonard’s *Diana and Endymion* with that of the Boucher).
- [11] The pose of Boucher’s *Endymion* appears drawn from the figure of the dead Christ in Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, which might argue for a date in the early 1730s, shortly after Boucher’s return from Rome (see Alastair Laing, *François Boucher (1703–1770)* [New York, 1986], 17).
- [12] Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l’oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), nos. 10–11. See also Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), 37–39, figs. 39, 40; *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), nos. 57, 58.
- [13] Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l’oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), no. 26; Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* (Paris, 1987), no. 9; Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), 19–22.
- [14] Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), 37, 38, dates them more precisely to c. 1755–1756, comparing them to Boucher’s *Aminta Returning to Life in the Arms of Sylvia*, painted for

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the Hôtel de Toulouse, Paris, during those years, a dating followed by Bailey, in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), 482, although Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), 74, dates them to “1754?”

[15] *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), 482.

[16] Georges Wildenstein, *The Paintings of Fragonard: Complete Edition* (New York, 1960), 1–5. Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), has questioned whether many of these pictures could not have been produced during the years Fragonard was at the Ecole des élèves protégés.

[17] See the relevant discussion by Bailey in *The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David* (New York and Fort Worth, 1992), 474–475, 482, where he compares *Diana and Endymion* and its pendant to Boucher’s grand paintings for Pompadour, *The Rising of the Sun* and *The Setting of the Sun*.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a fine-weight, plain-weave fabric. The tacking margins have been removed, and the painting has been double-lined. There is a vertical seam in the original fabric approximately 24 cm from the left edge. The painting’s original shape was changed radically during an early conservation treatment. The X-radiographs indicate that four fabric inserts were added to the painting to change it from a curvilinear, scalloped shape to a rectangular format. There is almost no sign of cusping along the edges of the original fabric, indicating that the painting may have been larger at one time.

The ground consists of a smooth, white layer that partially conceals the fabric texture. The artist used a wet-into-wet technique to apply the paint as a generally thin, fluid paste with no impasto. There are no obvious pentimenti, but the X-radiographs reveal that the position of Diana’s head was changed and that Endymion’s staff originally was longer. The X-radiographs also indicate that slight adjustments were made to the position of Endymion’s legs and to the right horn of the moon.

The painting is in good condition. The joins and seams between all the fabric pieces are slightly raised, and weave interference from the lining fabric is visible on

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the surface. There is a large U-shaped tear in the sky in the upper left quadrant and a smaller tear in the lower left corner. Both tears have been mended.

Numerous small losses to the ground and paint are scattered throughout the painting. It was treated in 1982 to remove discolored varnish, and the varnish and inpainting applied at that time have not discolored.

PROVENANCE

Sir Richard Wallace, 1st bt. [1818-1890], London and Paris, by 1883;^[1] by inheritance to his wife, Julie-Amélie-Charlotte Castelnau, Lady Wallace [1819-1897], Paris and London; by inheritance to her adviser and secretary, Sir John Murray Scott [1847-1912], London and Paris; by inheritance to his friend, Josephine Victoria Sackville-West, Lady Sackville [1864-1936], Sevenoaks, Kent [painting remained in Paris during this time]; sold 1913 to (Jacques Seligmann and Co., Inc., Paris and New York, no. 579 of Seligmann inventory); sold 1914 to (M. Knoedler & Co., London, New York, and Paris); sold March 1922 to John McCormack [1884-1945], New York; (M. Knoedler & Co., London, New York, and Paris); sold 1924 to William R. Timken [1866-1949], New York;^[2] by inheritance to his widow, Lillian Guyer Timken [1881-1959] New York; bequest 1960 to NGA.

[1] Alexandre Ananoff, with Daniel Wildenstein, *François Boucher*, 2 vols., Lausanne and Paris, 1976: 1:173, no. 36, confused the early provenance of NGA's *Diana and Endymion* by Fragonard with that of the Boucher painting of the same title. It was the Boucher painting that appeared in sales in Paris in 1773, 1779, and 1830.

[2] Provenance information beginning with Knoedler's 1914 purchase from Seligmann's through their 1924 sale to Timken is from David Rust's notes of a telephone conversation on 15 July 1981 with Nancy Little, Knoedler librarian (in NGA curatorial files).

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1883 L'Art du XVIIIe siècle, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 1883-1884, no. 7, as by Boucher.

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1920 Loan Exhibition of Paintings by Old Masters, Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, 1920, no. 90, repro., as by Boucher.


1966 Loan for display with permanent collection, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1966-1981, as by Boucher.

1991 The Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1991-1992, no. 60, repro.

2015 Fragonard amoureux: galant et libertin, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, 2015-2016, no. 6, repro.

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- 1989 Rosenberg, Pierre. *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard*. Paris, 1989:28
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ler. A Centennial Celebration of Wildenstein's Presence in New York.
Exh. cat. Wildenstein & Co., Inc., New York, 2005: 214, fig. 80a (not in the exhibition).

- 2009 Conisbee, Philip, et al. *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, D.C., 2009: no. 29, 151-156, color repro.
- 2015 Goulemot, Jean M. *Le petit dictionnaire: Fragonard, en 16 plaisirs*. Paris, 2015: 76-77, color repro.
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