



Jean Honoré Fragonard
French, 1732 - 1806

Young Girl Reading

c. 1769

oil on canvas

overall: 81.1 x 64.8 cm (31 15/16 x 25 1/2 in.)

framed: 104.9 x 89.5 x 2.2 cm (41 5/16 x 35 1/4 x 7/8 in.)

Gift of Mrs. Mellon Bruce in memory of her father, Andrew W. Mellon 1961.16.1

ENTRY

When it was thoroughly cataloged and discussed by Richard Rand in 2009, *Young Girl Reading* by Jean Honoré Fragonard was linked, albeit with important qualifications, with the artist's so-called *figures de fantaisie* (fantasy figures) or *portraits de fantaisie* (fantasy portraits)—half-length representations of men and women shown striking dramatic poses in colorful masquerade dress and rendered in loose, gestural brushstrokes. [1] Among the most beloved works in the artist's oeuvre, these pictures are also among the most mysterious and have therefore prompted the most debate: produced for unknown reasons, perhaps representing real individuals, perhaps not. Subsequent research and recent developments—explored in depth in three recent publications and websites [2]—have shed new light upon *Young Girl Reading* and Fragonard's fantasy figure series in general.

In 2012, a previously unknown drawing appeared on the art market. Covered with eighteen thumbnail-sized sketches that, but for one, were annotated—apparently in the artist's hand—the drawing suggested that the fantasy figures were indeed portraits of identifiable individuals, members of the artist's professional network of clients and models.

The emergence of this drawing, now known as *Sketches of Portraits*, had an

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additional resonance at the National Gallery of Art, for one of the sketches evoked the Gallery's own *Young Girl Reading*. Technical studies (2013–2015) confirmed the presence of an underlying painting in which the model poses as she appears in the *Sketches of Portraits*—face turned outward—and not as she appears in the finished painting that has long hung on the Gallery's walls. This discovery, which firmly linked *Young Girl Reading* to the fantasy figure series, was the impetus for the Gallery's exhibition *Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures* (2017). Uniting several fantasy figures with the drawing, the exhibition focused solely on this aspect of the artist's production, while the catalog that accompanied it explores Fragonard's technique in detail.

Yuriko Jackall

June 29, 2018

NOTES

- [1] For a copy of the 2009 entry on this painting from the systematic catalogue *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*, please see the file available for download on this page under "Archived Version(s)."
- [2] See Yuriko Jackall, *Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures* (exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2017) and Yuriko Jackall, John K. Delaney, and Michael Swicklik, "'Portrait of a woman with a book': a 'newly discovered fantasy figure' by Fragonard at the National Gallery of Art, Washington," *Burlington Magazine* 157, no. 1345 (April 2015), 248–254. For the exhibition website and related online features, see <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2017/fragonard-the-fantasy-figures.html>.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a slightly coarse plain-weave fabric. The painting has been lined, and the tacking margins have been removed. Prominent cusping on all four edges suggests that the painting has not been cut down. The support was prepared with two ground layers: a pale-gray layer covered by a fawn-colored layer. The paint was applied vigorously, with impasto in highlights and thin washes that leave the ground partially visible in the shadows. The gray shadowed lines in the girl's collar and fichu were created by incising into the wet white paint with the butt end of the

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brush to reveal the gray layer beneath. The X-radiograph was originally thought to reveal an earlier painting underneath the current head showing the head of a man wearing a feathered hat. Further analysis (false-color infrared imaging and XRF elemental mapping of both lead white and vermillion) conducted between 2013 and 2015 produced images indicating that the underlying head is actually that of a woman wearing a beaded and feathered headdress, her face turned out to gaze directly at the viewer. Due to an increase in the translucency of the surface paint, the outline, eyes, and feathered headdress of the woman are now slightly visible as pentimenti. Cross-sectional analysis shows that there is no intermediate paint layer between the two heads, nor is there varnish or dirt between them. Additionally, it shows that the original paint layer was not disrupted in any way when painted over, suggesting it was dry before the application of the now-visible paint layer. This suggests that Fragonard did not embark on the repainting immediately, as the lower layer would require at least six months to dry to this degree. [1]

Overall, the painting is in good condition. To the right of the girl's neck is a small complex tear. A larger J-shaped tear extends through the pillow and arm of the chair at the bottom right. The paint is slightly abraded in the thinly painted folds and shadows of the dress and in the darks along the bottom of the painting. In 1985 a discolored varnish was removed, and the two distorted tears were realigned and inpainted. The sitter's head from the previous painting, which had become distractingly visible, was also inpainted at that time. In 1986 a slightly toned varnish was applied. The inpainting of the larger tear has discolored slightly, but the remainder of the inpainting and the varnish have not.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Analysis was performed by the NGA scientific research department, May 9, 1985. The cross-sections also confirmed the presence of the two ground layers. New analysis was performed between December 2012 and January 2015.

PROVENANCE

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Verrier;^[1] (his sale, Paillet at Hôtel d'Aligre, Paris, 11 March 1776 and days following, no. 80); purchased by Mailly or Neully [*sic*]. (sale, Paillet at Hôtel d'Aligre, Paris, 7 February 1777, no. 15). Jean François Leroy de Sennéville [1715-1784], Paris; (his sale, Chariot and Paillet at Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, 5-11 April 1780, no. 59); purchased by Duquesnoy, Paris; (his sale, at his residence by Regnault, Paris, 1-3 March 1803, no. 19). (sale, Alliance des Arts, Paris, 26 April 1844, no. 14). Casimir Perrin, marquis de Cypierre [1783-1844], Paris; (his estate sale, at his residence by Thoré, Paris, 10 March 1845 and days following, no. 55). Comte Pierre de Kergorlay [1847-1919], by 1889.^[2] (E. Gimpel and Wildenstein, Paris); sold 1899 to Ernest Cronier [1840-1905], Paris; (his estate sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 4-5 December 1905, 1st day, no. 8); purchased by Ducrey. Dr. Théodore Tuffier [1859-1929], Paris, by 1910 [or possibly purchased 1905 at Cronier sale through Ducrey], until at least 1928. (Wildenstein & Co., Inc., Paris, New York, and London); Alfred W. Erickson [1876-1936], New York, by 1930;^[3] by inheritance to his wife, Anna Edith McCann Erickson [d. 1961], New York; (her sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 15 November 1961, no. 16); purchased by NGA with funds provided by Ailsa Mellon Bruce [1901-1969], New York.

[1] The first name in the provenance was published in the 2009 NGA Systematic Catalogue (entry on the painting by Richard Rand, in Philip Conisbee, 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. 31, 160-166) as "Possibly comte du Barry, Paris," based on the provenance for the painting according to Georges Wildenstein, *The Paintings of Fragonard, complete edition*, New York, 1960: no. 391, and this was repeated throughout the literature. In the description of Sale Catalog F-A406, the Getty Provenance Index Database of sale catalogues corrects Wildenstein's inaccurate identification of the seller, but provides only the surname Verrier. Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey suggests that the seller might be Robert Charles Verrier, who died 11 May 1776 (see her article, "Fragonard's 'fantasy figures': prelude to a new understanding," *The Burlington Magazine* 157, no. 1345 [April 2015]: 242-243). However, this is more likely to have been another individual by the same name, a Parisian expert who remained active on the art market through the latter part of the eighteenth century and who counted among the dealers of some importance. See Yuriko Jackall, *Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2017: 52.

[2] Jacques Dumont de Montroy, *Les Kergorlay dans l'Oise et en Normandie*, Beauvais, 2006: 167-170; Roger Portalis, *Honoré Fragonard: sa vie et son oeuvre*, 2 vols., Paris, 1889: 282. Comte Denis de Kergorlay kindly provided a copy of the 2006 book about his family, enabling the identification of the "Comte de Kergorlay" named as the painting's owner in 1889. Pierre de Kergorlay's second wife, Marie de Caulaincourt de Vicence (1859-1902), was through her mother a granddaughter of Casimir Perrin, marquis de Cypierre, who owned the painting in 1844, the year of his death. Although the painting appears to have sold at the marquis' 1845 estate sale, it possibly remained in the family and came to Pierre de Kergorlay through his second marriage in 1880.

[3] An annotated copy of the 1905 sales catalogue in the NGA Library provides Ducrey's name, who was possibly buying for Tuffier. Correspondence between the Paris and New York offices of Duveen Brothers, Inc., in 1927 and 1928 discusses the painting and the possibility of purchasing it from Tuffier; Wildenstein is also mentioned as a possible buyer (Duveen Brothers Records, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles, accession no. 960015, reel 97, box 242, folder 16; copies in NGA curatorial files). René Gimpel (*Diary of an Art Dealer*, translated by John Rosenberg, New York, 1966: 398), in a diary entry of 16 February 1930, writes of seeing the painting two days before at the Erickson residence, and describes it as "from the old Crosnier[sic] Collection, bought at his sale by Professor Tuffier..."

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1909 Cent portraits de femme, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1909, no. 64, repro.

1910 Ausstellung von Weken Französischer Kunst des XVIII. Jarhunderts, Königliche Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1910, no. 138 (no. 51 in French edition of catalogue).

1921 Exposition d'oeuvres de J.-H. Fragonard, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Pavillon de Marsan, Paris, 1921, no. 56.

1933 Three French Reigns (Louis XIV, XV & XVI), Sir Philip Sassoon's Residence, London, 1933, no. 517.

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1935 French Painting and Sculpture of the XVII Century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935-1936, no. 45, repro.

1951 Wildenstein Jubilee Loan Exhibition, 1901-1951: Masterpieces from Museums and Private Collections, Wildenstein & Co., New York, 1951, no. 29, repro.

1969 In Memoriam, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1969, unnumbered checklist.

1980 Fragonard, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo; Kyoto Municipal Museum, 1980, no. 61, repro.

1987 Fragonard, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987-1988, no. 136, repro.

2002 Painting Women: Fragonard to Bouguereau, San Diego Museum of Art, 2002-2003, no cat.

2003 The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Altes Museum, Berlin, 2003-2004, no. 81, repro.

2007 Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and the Art of the Past, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Denver Art Museum; Seattle Art Museum, 2007-2008, no. 38, repro.

2017 Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2017, no. 16, repro.

2017 Loan for display with permanent collection, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, 2017.

2018 Loan for display with permanent collection, The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, 2018.

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Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst 21 (March 1910):133, repro.
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