

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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DRAWINGS BY REIGNING ARTIST OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
FRANCE EXHIBITED AT NATIONAL GALLERY

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 20, 1973. The first major exhibition of drawings in North American collections by François Boucher, the reigning artist of mid-eighteenth-century France, opens at the National Gallery of Art on Sunday, December 23, 1973. It will remain on view in Washington through March 17, 1974.

To reflect Boucher's enormous influence on eighteenth-century rococo design and pictorial representation, the exhibition includes a complementary selection of paintings and prints by Boucher in addition to porcelains, figurines, rare books, a tapestry, and prints after Boucher.

The drawings were selected by David E. Rust, Curator of French Painting at the National Gallery, and Harold Joachim, Curator of Drawings at The Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. Rust also made the selection of supplementary works. A fully illustrated catalog, with entries on each drawing and an introduction by Regina Slatkin, a well-known Boucher scholar, accompanies the exhibition. The drawings and prints will be shown at The Art Institute of Chicago from April 4 through May 12, 1974.

The artist's entire repertoire is represented in the drawings: nudes, pastorals, mythological and religious subjects, genre scenes, portraits, designs for tapestries, fountains,

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clocks, architectural decorations, and book illustrations.

Exemplifying the rococo tradition, Boucher invested a quality of the make-believe in his drawings, often turning a landscape into an enchanting wonderland where nymphs, gods and goddesses, shepherds and courtiers play amid imaginary marble fountains, bridges, and flower-filled urns.

His brilliantly executed drawings of nudes are keen observations taken from life, which he often transposed into gods and goddesses in allegorical settings, as in the beautiful and seductive Venus and Cupid lent by an anonymous private collector.

The great variety of techniques and media Boucher worked with is also well-represented. Examples of sanguine--his favorite chalk--are exhibited, as well as a pastel and drawings in which he used several different techniques for a richer effect. Also included are fine examples of pen and ink drawings, brush and wash, the classic trois crayons, and the blue, gray, green or buff colored paper which he used with white wash.

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington

FRANÇOIS BOUCHER IN NORTH AMERICAN COLLECTIONS: 100 DRAWINGS

December 23, 1973 through March 17, 1974

(François Boucher, 1703-1770. Pronounce: Fran-swah Boo-shay)

This exhibition is the first major show of drawings in North American collections by François Boucher, the reigning artist of mid-eighteenth-century France. Boucher was the dominant practitioner of the rococo style, a spritely art that used motifs of graceful nudes, frolicking cupids, and Arcadian pastorals to complement the intellectual rigors of the Age of Enlightenment. Deriving its name from ornamental shells or "rocailles," the rococo style employed the sinuous curves and pastel colors of organic objects. The installation at the National Gallery uses furniture, porcelains, and tapestries to enhance the rococo taste for bright, light tones and delicate, asymmetrical shapes which are also evident in Boucher's drawings, prints, and paintings.

Sanguine (a red chalk), charcoal and various colored chalks, or pale ink washes on tinted paper were perfectly suited to rococo taste; even the drawings on white paper have a lightness of tone, often leaving the paper itself for highlights and reflections. As a draftsman, Boucher ranks as one of the greatest bravura technicians in European history. With a single stroke of chalk, he could define the contours of an entire arm from shoulder to wrist; with a slight flick of a pen, he could suggest the plumpness of a knuckle or the softness of a dimple. The quickness of his touch is evident in the works exhibited here, whether studied directly from the model or developed from his fertile imagination.

After training under the best Parisian teachers and studying in Italy for three years, Boucher achieved early acclaim as a painter and as principal scenery designer for the Paris Opera. Madame de Pompadour was a close friend of Boucher; when she became the mistress of Louis XV in 1745, she made the artist her protégé. As First Painter to the King, he executed pictures and interior decorations for the royal palaces; moreover, from 1755 to 1765, he was Chief Inspector for the Royal Manufactory at Gobelins, supplying designs for tapestries and objets d'art. And, in 1765, he was appointed Director of the Royal Academy, the governing body of French artists.

As the virtual dictator of fashionable taste on the continent, this painter-courtier was the exact opposite of the struggling bohemian of artistic cliché. After his death, however, Boucher's reputation suffered for reasons totally unrelated to his artistry. In the nineteenth century, his candid sensuousness was an affront to Victorian morality, and the early twentieth century's obsession with social criticism in the arts found his subject matter too frivolous. In recent decades, his works have received an unbiased, scholarly reassessment. François Boucher has emerged as the most gifted designer of his age as well as one of the most facile virtuosos of all time.