

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



François BOUCHER (Paris 1703 - Paris 1770)

Aurora and Cephalus

Black chalk, with stumping, and white chalk on blue paper faded to buff, with framing lines in brown ink.

Oval.

Laid down on an 18th century French mount, with the blind stamp of the mountmaker Jean-Baptiste Glomy (Lugt 1085, showing his full surname) applied twice, once below the bottom of the oval composition and again near the lower right corner of the mount.

Inscribed F. Boucher in brown ink near the lower right corner of the mount.

279 x 375 mm. (11 x 14 3/4 in.)

Exhibitions

The story of Aurora and Cephalus occurs in Book VII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The young and beautiful hunter Cephalus had recently been married to Procris, daughter of the King of Athens, but was abducted by Aurora, goddess of the dawn, who had fallen in love with him. The goddess soon tired of him, however, since he could only speak of his beloved Procris, and eventually released him, but not before planting a seed of doubt in his mind about the faithfulness of Procris which would eventually lead to her accidental death.

As has been recently noted, 'Mythological subjects were Boucher's forte from very early in his career, and over the course of four decades he produced a host of richly pictorial works that center on the stories, loves, foibles, and attributes of the Olympian gods.' Boucher must have found the subject of Aurora and Cephalus quite appealing, since he treated the theme several times during his long career, notably in one of his finest early paintings, a large canvas of 1733 today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nancy. The same subject is also found in a painting of 1736-1739, commissioned by the Prince de Rohan as an overdoor for a bedroom in the Hôtel de Soubise and today in the Archives Nationales in Paris, and in a late vertical painting of Aurora and Cephalus, signed and dated 1769, in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Other paintings of Aurora and Cephalus by Boucher include a large canvas of c.1745 in a New York private collection and an upright oval painting, signed and dated 1764, in the Louvre, which was the model for one of the Tentures de Boucher tapestries.

Unlike the previous drawing of Neptune and Amymone, the present sheet cannot be definitively related to Boucher's paintings of 1763-1764 for the Tentures de Boucher tapestries. While the subject of Aurora and Cephalus does appear in the Tentures de Boucher tapestries, it is as an oval composition of upright, vertical format. Alastair Laing has suggested that 'at some point, [Jacques] Neilson – or a client – must have wanted a transverse oval version of the Aurora & Cephalus', but no such horizontal composition seems to have ever been woven, at the Gobelins or elsewhere.

The present pair of oval drawings by Boucher once belonged to one of the most significant figures in the Parisian art world in the 18th century. Abel-François Poisson, Marquis de Marigny (1727-1781), was the brother and heir of the Marquise de Pompadour, King Louis XV's official mistress between 1745 and her death in 1764. Marigny served as directeur general des bâtiments, jardins, arts, académies, et manufactures de roi between 1751 and 1773, and amassed a significant collection of paintings and works of art that, as one modern scholar has written, 'was broad in scope, progressive in taste, exceptional in quality, and extraordinary in provenance.'

Both this and the previous drawing have been dated by Alastair Laing to the 1760s. However, as he has noted, 'It seems most likely that that of Neptune & Amymone was done in 1764, but that that of Aurora and Cephalus was done at a slightly different time – whenever it was that a transverse oval version of the upright oval version of it was painted by Boucher or contemplated...there are differences between the two in the colour both of the papers and of the chalks used on them. This would further suggest that they were genuinely designs for the paintings that served as models for the tapestries, and that they were submitted at different times...to the marquis de Marigny for his approval, who then held onto them. This is particularly likely to have been so, since – unlike in the case of some other designs for tapestries by Boucher - there is no evidence of there ever having been any oil sketches for them or for any of the other compositions used in the Tentures de Boucher...Were they to have been drawn from the paintings, just as gifts for Marigny, in gratitude for the commission, one would have expected the two to have been treated in exactly the same way.'

Both this and the pendant of Neptune Rescuing Amymone on their original 18th century mounts, each twice stamped by the eminent Parisian dealer, expert and mountmaker Jean-Baptiste Glomy (c.1720-1786). From the middle of the 1740s onwards, Glomy established a successful business as a mounter and framer of drawings and prints. He counted among his clients both artists and collectors, the latter including Madame de Pompadour and her brother, the Marquis de Marigny, as well as such prominent figures as Pierre-Jacques-Onésyme Bergeret de Grancourt, the Chevalier de Damery, Laurent Grimod de la Reynière, Gilbert Paignon-Dijonval, Pierre Paul Louis Randon de Boisset, the Abbé de Saint-Non and the Duc de Tallard. Among artists, Glomy's best client was arguably François Boucher, many of whose finest drawings he was given to mount. According to Glomy's account book, Boucher was charged a special rate of one and a half livres per drawing, which was half the price paid by private collectors.

An autograph variant of this composition, of similar size but drawn in black chalk alone and somewhat simpler and less finished, was formerly in a private collection in Florence, and was recently offered for sale at auction in London. Alastair Laing has suggested that the drawing may have been a preparatory sketch for the present sheet. He further notes that it is on a Glomy mount identical to those on the present pair of drawings, and has plausibly suggested that all three drawings (as well as, presumably, a now-lost sketch for the related oval composition of Neptune and Amymone), may have been given by Boucher to Glomy to mount, with the more highly finished pair of drawings on blue paper, here exhibited, then presented to Marigny, the surintendant des bâtiments.

Literature:

L. Soullié and Ch. Masson, 'Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint et dessiné de François Boucher', in André Michel, François Boucher, Paris, 1906, p.27, no.454; Alexandre Ananoff, L'oeuvre dessiné de François Boucher (1703-1770), Paris, 1966, Vol.I, p.239, under no.920; Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, François Boucher, Lausanne and Paris, 1976, Vol.II, p.295, no.670/1, fig.1750 (as Venus and Endymion); Edith Appleton Standen, European Post-Medieval Tapestries and Related Hangings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1985, Vol.I, p.394, under no.57.

Artist description:

A pupil of the painter François Lemoyne and the engraver Jean-François Cars, François Boucher's first significant project was producing numerous engravings after drawings by Antoine Watteau for Jean de Jullienne's *Figures de différents caractères... par Antoine Watteau*, also known as the *Recueil Jullienne*. Despite winning the Prix de Rome in 1723, Boucher was unable to take up the scholarship in Italy due to a lack of space at the Académie de France in Rome. He eventually went to Rome at his own expense in 1728, lodging at the Académie de France and returning to Paris around 1731. Received into the Académie Royale in 1734, Boucher soon earned a number of significant commissions. The favourite painter of Louis XV's mistress, the Marquise de Pompadour, Boucher painted decorations for Versailles, Fontainebleau, Marly and elsewhere, as well as several private homes in Paris. He also painted numerous easel pictures – pastoral landscapes, religious and mythological subjects, genre scenes, chinoiseries and portraits – and designed tapestry cartoons for the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, where he succeeded Jean-Baptiste Oudry as surinspector. He also provided designs for Sèvres porcelain and produced a large number of drawings for prints.

In 1765 he was named premier peintre du roi, or First Painter to the King, and also succeeded Carle Vanloo as director of the Académie. By the end of his career, however, Boucher's style had become somewhat obsolete, and had largely fallen out of favour. Among his pupils were Jean-Baptiste Deshayes and Pierre-Antoine Baudouin – both of whom became his sons-in-law – as well as Jean-Baptiste Le Prince, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Nicolas-Guy Brenet and Gabriel de Saint-Aubin.

A gifted draughtsman, Boucher was as prolific as he was talented, and claimed to have produced ten thousand drawings over a career of some fifty years. One of the leading painters in France between the 1730s and the 1760s, Boucher was also one of the most prolific French draughtsmen of the eighteenth century. As one modern scholar has noted of the artist, 'Every medium served him: pen, pencil, watercolor, chalk, especially his favorite trois crayons, bistre wash, india ink, grisaille, and often a combination of several of these. No subject was too lofty or too humble to engage his attention. Whether he drew from life or from his fertile imagination... Boucher's masterly touch is always present, always unmistakeable.'

The artist's drawn oeuvre includes all manner of subjects, including pastoral scenes, nudes, religious, historical and mythological subjects, book illustrations, chinoiseries, landscapes, nudes, genre scenes, studies of children and heads, as well as designs for tapestries, porcelain and fountains. He produced many finished drawings as independent works, often adapting and elaborating a head or figure from one of his paintings. While his preference was for black, red, and (particularly in his later years) brown chalk, Boucher also made highly finished drawings in pastel and, at times, drew on coloured paper. A large number of his drawings were finished works for collectors and the art market, and many were engraved and reproduced in considerable numbers – often making use of new printmaking techniques that allowed chalk drawings to be reproduced with a high degree of verisimilitude - by such printmakers as Louis-Marin Bonnet, Gilles Demarteau or Gabriel Huquier. His drawings were greatly admired, and while many were preparatory studies for his paintings, others were produced as finished works of art, to be sold to collectors or reproduced by engravers. Indeed, Boucher's popularity as a draughtsman owes much to the fact that many of his drawings were reproduced and widely distributed as engravings.