

# STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



**François BOUCHER (Paris 1703 - Paris 1770)**

## **Neptune Rescuing Amymone**

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) applied twice, once near the lower right corner of the mount and again in the centre, just below the bottom of the oval composition.

Inscribed F. Boucher near the lower right corner of the mount.

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

This drawing is closely related to a painting by Boucher of Neptune Rescuing Amymone, signed and dated 1764 and today in the collection of the Château of Versailles. The Versailles painting was one of a set of four large oval canvases painted by Boucher in 1763 and 1764, as models for tapestries. Two upright oval paintings – one depicting Aurora and Cephalus, signed and dated 1763, and the other Vertumnus and Pomona, dated the following year - are today in the Louvre, while a pair of transverse or horizontal oval compositions – of Venus at the Forge of Vulcan and Neptune Rescuing Amymone, the latter dated 1764 – are at Versailles, on deposit from the Mobilier National.

These four paintings by Boucher were in turn used for the central medallions of a set of tapestries ordered in 1763 from the Gobelins manufactory by George William, 6th Earl of Coventry, for a room in his country seat at Croome Court in Worcestershire, which was in the process of being remodelled by the architect Robert Adam. Commissioned by the Earl of Coventry from the master weaver Jacques Neilson, the head of the Gobelins workshop, these tapestries depicted simulated paintings of subjects from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* hung upon imitation crimson damask grounds. The tapestries, symbolizing the four Elements, comprised two upright ovals of Aurora and Cephalus and Vertumnus and Pomona, representing allegories of Air and Earth, respectively, and a pair of transverse or horizontal ovals depicting Venus Visiting Vulcan (Fire) and Neptune Rescuing Amymone (Water). Boucher's oval compositions were inserted into the tapestry designs as central medallions with fictive frames, to which were added elaborate decorative borders (*alentours*) designed by Maurice Jacques. As Alastair Laing has pointed out, '[Boucher's] oval compositions, both upright and transverse, were only commissioned once the end of the Seven Years war, and the visit [to Paris] of the 6th Earl of Coventry, enabled Jacques Neilson, using Boucher and Maurice Jacques, to put into effect his plans for a set of tapestries

with simulated framed paintings on simulated damask grounds with ornamental borders, that he had been proposing since 1758.' Woven between 1764 and 1771 for Croome Court, this first set of the so-called Tentures de Boucher, today adorns a room from that house in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Boucher kept a studio at the Gobelins tapestry factory from 1749, and between 1755 and 1765 served as surinspecteur at the manufactory. He produced a number of paintings to be copied as tapestries at the Gobelins, the most significant of which to survive are the Tentures de Boucher. As Laing has noted, 'Right up to the end of his life Boucher was producing paintings – not always of mythological subjects – for successive sets of the Tentures de Boucher, almost all of which were commissioned by grand foreign – and particularly English – clients; and this was continued after his death, based upon paintings that he had left behind. They were amongst the most successful sets of tapestries ever woven at the Gobelins.' Related to the central medallion of the tapestry of Neptune Rescuing Amymone, the present sheet, which may be dated to 1764, depicts the sea god Neptune, armed with his trident, leaping from his horse-drawn chariot to save Amymone from the ravages of a satyr.

Boucher had earlier treated the theme of Neptune and Amymone in a tapestry design for the Beauvais manufactory of 1750<sup>10</sup>, although this was different in composition to the present sheet and the version of the subject in the Tentures de Boucher. The painting which served as the model for the 1750 tapestry is lost, although a preparatory drawing by Boucher, with considerable differences from the tapestry, is in the Louvre.

#### **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.31, no.533 (as Neptune, Colère de); Alexandre Ananoff, L'oeuvre dessiné de François Boucher (1703-1770), Paris, 1966, Vol.I, p.239, no.920 (as La Colère de Neptune); Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, François Boucher, Lausanne and Paris, 1976, Vol.II, p.161, no.483/1, fig.1363; Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, L'opera completa di François Boucher, Milan, 1980, p.127, under no.509; Edith Appleton Standen, European Post-Medieval Tapestries and Related Hangings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1985, Vol.I, pp.393-394, 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, chinoiserie and portraits – and designed tapestry cartoons for the Gobelins tapestry manufactory, where he succeeded Jean-Baptiste Oudry as surinspecteur. 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 unmistakable.'

The artist's drawn oeuvre includes all manner of subjects, including pastoral scenes, nudes, religious, historical and mythological subjects, book illustrations, chinoiserie, 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.