

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 signed and dated 1764 – are the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes.

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 1750¹⁰, 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. Soulié 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; Guillaume Kazerouni, Peintures françaises des XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes: Catalogue raisonné, Rennes, 2021, p.304, under nos.95-96, fig.5.

Artist description:

As a modern writer has noted, 'Boucher is the artist par excellence of the French Rococo, in which a perceptive wit, a sense of elegance and a conscious feeling for style were combined with a fluent imagination; this was art designed for a sophisticated audience, for an urban and country society.' The son of a painter at the Académie de Saint-Luc, François Boucher was a pupil of the painter François Lemoyne and the engraver Jean-François Cars. Although he won 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, and was obliged to remain in Paris. His first significant project was producing numerous engravings after drawings by Antoine Watteau for Jean de Jullienne's Figures de différents caractères. The payment he received for this work allowed the artist to travel to Rome at his own expense; he arrived in Italy in 1728, lodging at the Académie de France, and returned to Paris around 1731, when he was admitted (agréé) into the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture as a history painter. While his early reputation was based on his work as a designer and printmaker, resulting in numerous

drawings for prints and book illustrations, he also painted several works for the Parisian home of his first significant patron, the lawyer François Derbais, executed between 1732 and 1734. Reçu at the Académie in 1734, Boucher received his initial royal commission not long afterwards, for four grisaille paintings for Versailles. He soon became the favourite painter of Louis XV's mistress, the Marquise de Pompadour, and painted decorations for the royal châteaux at Versailles, Fontainebleau, Marly and elsewhere, as well as several private homes in Paris, notably the Hôtel de Soubise and the Hôtel Mazarin.

Appointed a professor at the Académie Royale in 1735, Boucher painted numerous easel pictures – pastoral landscapes, religious and mythological subjects, genre scenes, chinoiserie and portraits – for private clients in France, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Poland, while also producing several tapestry cartoons for the Beauvais and Gobelins manufactories, where he succeeded Jean-Baptiste Oudry as inspecteur des ouvrages in 1755. He designed stage sets and costumes for the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique in the 1740s and created designs for Vincennes and later Sèvres porcelain throughout the 1750s and early 1760s. In 1765 Boucher was named premier peintre du roi, or First Painter to the King, and also appointed director of the Académie Royale. In 1770 he died at his lodgings in the Louvre and was buried in the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. Among his pupils were Jean-Baptiste Deshayes and Pierre-Antoine Baudouin, both of whom became his sons-in-law and predeceased him, as well as Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Jean-Baptiste Le Prince and Gabriel-Jacques de Saint-Aubin.

A gifted draughtsman, François Boucher was as prolific as he was talented, and claimed to have produced ten thousand drawings over a career that lasted some fifty years. He was, in fact, perhaps the most prolific French draughtsman of the eighteenth century, and his drawn oeuvre includes pastoral scenes, nudes, religious, historical and mythological subjects, book illustrations, chinoiserie, landscapes, genre scenes, studies of children and heads, as well as designs for tapestries, porcelain and fountains. Although most of his drawings were preparatory studies for his paintings, Boucher also produced 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) a dark brown chalk, he also made highly finished drawings in pastel and, at times, drew on coloured paper. As Pierre Rosenberg has succinctly noted, 'Boucher's love of drawing never waned with time and success. Admittedly, drawing was kept in its proper place, as a vital link between the conception or the idea of a work or composition, and its realization, its metamorphosis into a painting... To quote Mariette, Boucher "was a born painter", but he placed great emphasis on drawing throughout his entire career.' Boucher's drawings were avidly collected in his lifetime by such connoisseurs as Barthélémy-Augustin Blondel d'Azaincourt, Paul Randon de Boisset, Pierre-Jacques-Onésyme Bergeret de Grancourt, Gilbert Paignon-Dijonval, Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireuil, Count Carl Gustaf Tessin, and many others.

Boucher'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.