

François BOUCHER (Paris 1703 - Paris 1770)

Study of a Male Nude Holding a Hammer Above his Head

Red chalk, with touches of white heightening, with framing lines in brown ink, on buff paper, backed.

310 x 189 mm. (12 1/4 x 7 3/8 in.)

As Margaret Morgan Grasselli has noted, 'Probably because of his marked preference for women as models and subjects, Boucher made far fewer studies of male nudes. Not surprisingly, these are handled in a manner that reflects an entirely different attitude towards the models and underlines their very real physical dissimilarities from women. Instead of the long, smooth, sensuously curving contours that emphasize soft, seductive female forms, Boucher…uses sharper, more forceful strokes and handles the surfaces in a way that brings out the hard, muscular conformation of the male body. He also gives his male figures more physically powerful attitudes, sometimes making them almost burst from the page, completely unlike the graceful, often languorous and perfectly contained poses of his nymphs and goddesses.' The majority of Boucher's extant drawings of male nudes are academic studies of posed life models in red (or occasionally black) chalk, which he produced for students to copy, in his role as a professor at the Académie Royale from 1735 onwards. Several of these drawn académies were later engraved and published, most famously in the Livre d'Académies dessinés d'Après le naturel par François Boucher Peintre du Roy, published between c.1750 and 1754.

A number of drawings of male nudes by Boucher, however, were not done as teaching exercises but as preparatory studies for paintings. As Alastair Laing has noted of this drawing, '[It] is a genuine study for

a painting, rather than a derivative from a painting, done for collectors.' The drawing may be related to an important painting by the artist; the Venus at the Forge of Vulcan, dated 1747, in the Louvre. A monochrome oil sketch for the composition is in the Louvre, while a drawing for a different forger in the painting, executed in black chalk, is in the Musée Sainte-Croix in Poitiers. A study for the Cupid with arrows and a dove may have been made after the figure in the painting, as a drawing for a collector, rather than as a preparatory study for it. No other preparatory drawings related to the painting of Venus at the Forge of Vulcan are known.

The standing figure in the present sheet was later reused in a more ambitious composition of the subject of Venus at the Forge of Vulcan, designed by Boucher for a tapestry woven at Beauvais between 1754 and 1756, for which a grisaille sketch is in the Louvre.

To judge by his distinctively rugged appearance, the model for both of these drawings seems to be Jean-François Deschamps, a popular model at the Académie whom Boucher favoured for drawings and paintings of the male nude from around 1740 onwards. Boucher's contemporary, the writer Claude-Henri Watelet, in his posthumously published Dictionnaire des beaux-arts, noted that 'sometimes Deschamps was the ever-youthful Mercury, sometimes the terrible Mars, sometimes Neptune, Pluto, Jupiter…There was nothing about him, including his head, that could not sometimes be recognised, and one was astonished to see his somewhat Bacchic face become that of a hero or a God.' Among stylistically comparable red chalk drawings of male nudes by Boucher, also posed by Deschamps, are two studies in a Swiss private collection.

Exhibitions

London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, *European Drawings: Recent Acquisitions*, 1988, no.63.

Literature:

Possibly Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *L'opera completa di François Boucher*, Milan, 1980, p.111, under no.313; London, Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, *European Drawings: Recent Acquisitions*, exhibition catalogue, 1988, unpaginated, no.63; New York, Thomas Le Claire Kunsthandel at W. M. Brady & Co., *Catalogue IX: Master Drawings 1500-1900*, exhibition catalogue, 1994, under no.29; London, Christie's, *Old Master Drawings, including 17th Century Italian Drawings from the Ferretti Di Castelferreto Collection*, 2 July 1996, p.270, under lot 242.

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 differents 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 (agrée) 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 chateaux 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, chinoiseries 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 Deshays 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, chinoiseries, 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 Barthelémy-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.

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