

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



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 Castelferretto Collection*, 2 July 1996, p.270, under lot 242.

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 unmistakable.'

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.