

François BOUCHER (Paris 1703 - Paris 1770)

Six Putti in Clouds Supporting a Cartouche with the Letters AN

Black chalk, with stumping and touches of white heightening, on buff paper.

426 x 558 mm. (16 3/4 x 22 in.)

François Boucher often produced finished drawings of children and putti as autonomous works of art, which proved very popular with collectors. Often these groups of infants or winged putti were taken from his paintings and worked up into independent compositions, and several of these drawings were engraved by different printmakers and included in five Livres des groupes d'enfans, published by Huquier. The Goncourt brothers wrote of these winged putti that '*They appear everywhere in [Boucher's] work…They are always a charming spectacle, with their fat little hands, their rotund stomachs and navels like dimples, their cupid's bottoms, their chubby calves.*' As the Boucher scholar Alastair Laing has further noted, '*There were two kinds of subject matter that Boucher made utterly his own, engraved images of which reached the remotest corners of Europe, and formed a repertoire upon which other artists and craftsmen could draw: the pastoral and putti…The French call cupids amours, or "loves", which makes their underlying message much plainer. Boucher was particularly good at showing cupids disporting in the air, since that gave his imagination the freest rein.*'

Relatively few drawings by Boucher related to his ornamental designs have survived. As Françoise Joulie points out, '*Boucher's contributions to the decorative arts are well known, but drawings related to his work in this genre are rare. Those fewextant drawings reveal his designs for andirons, chandeliers, clocks, musical instruments, screens and silverware, as well as schemes for porcelain for the manufactories of Sèvres and Vincennes. The earlier drawings are strongly marked by the Rococo mode – a style he helped to create – and the later works, especially those after 1760, are imbued with an elegant, discreet Neoclassicism.*'

This sizeable sheet aptly highlights Boucher's abilities as a designer of cartouches and frames, and can be closely related to two equally large and stylistically comparable drawings of putti surrounding an ornamental shield surmounted by a ducal crown. Of a similar technique and scale to the present sheet but oval in format is a drawing formerly in the Houthakker collection and today in the Horvitz collection in Boston, while another related drawing of a cartouche with a coat of arms supported by putti is in the

Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

The late Alastair Laing was the first to suggest that the initials *AN* visible on the shield in the present sheet indicate that it may have been intended for a commission from Adrien Maurice de Noailles, 3rd Duc de Noailles and Maréchal de France (1678-1766). He also noted that the shield in the Horvitz drawing incorporates the order of the Golden Fleece, and that the Duc de Noailles was one of the very few nobles in France who had earned that particular decoration, which he was awarded in 1702. The scale of the present sheet, and of the two related drawings in the Horvitz and Fitzwilliam Musuem collections, would suggest that all three may have been studies for the decoration of the door panel of the duke's coach. (Indeed, the fact that Fitzwilliam drawing is pricked for transfer would also support such a connection.) As Laing further points out, '*It is hardly likely that Boucher would have undertaken the actual task of painting coach panels himself, or even that his studio would have done so…They will instead have been executed by one of the specialist carriage-painters, capable of providing the brilliantly varnished finish that such works required...Thanks to these three drawings, we can see that Boucher was indeed capable of effortlessly turning to making designs for such bagatelles when occasion arose.*'

The present drawing once belonged to the art historian Michael Jaffé (1923-1997), who served as director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge between 1973 and 1990.

Literature:

Paris, Galerie Heim, and elsewhere, *Cent dessins français du Fitzwilliam Museum* Cambridge, exhibition catalogue, 1976, p.5, under no.6; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, and elsewhere, *European Drawings from the Fitzwilliam*, exhibition catalogue, 1976-1977, p.62, under no.97; Alastair Laing, 'A group of Boucher's designs for coach panels', in Peter Fuhring, *Design into Art. Drawings for Architecture and Ornament: The Lodewijk Houthakker Collection*, London, 1989, Vol.I, p.118, fig.12; Jane Munro, F*rench Eighteenth Century Drawings in the Fitzwilliam Museum*, exhibition brochure, 2000-2001, unpaginated, under no.7; Françoise Joulie et al, *Esquisses, pastels et dessins de François Boucher dans le collections privées*, exhibition catalogue, Versailles, 2004, p.90, under no.40; Alvin L. Clark, Jr., ed., *Tradition & Transition: Eighteenth-Century French Art from The Horvitz Collection*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, 2017, p.142, under no.45 (entry by Françoise Joulie).

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.

Boucher'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.