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Antoine Watteau

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HIGH ART

the play of light and colour on and around different surfaces. In his mature period he worked often with two or three colours of chalk, and he developed the *trois crayons* technique with a mastery scarcely rivalled before or since. In principle, when using three chalks, black describes costume and hair, sanguine colours the flesh, and white makes the highlights. But in Watteau's hands the chalks tend to work intimately together, crossing their natural boundaries. Furthermore, by the colour of the paper and different tones of black and red chalks their range is often extended well beyond the basic three colours. Watteau's chalk images evoke a luminous, coloured environment, which seems, indeed, the very semblance of reality (colourplates 13, 14).

Rubens is probably the only artist whose *trois crayons* drawings are of a quality comparable to Watteau's, and in Crozat's collection and wherever else Watteau found them he must have looked long and hard at them. But Rubens' drawings may only have been the best works of the kind he saw. The technique itself, imported from Italy, was well-established in France by the end of the seventeenth century. Pierre Mignard, Largillierre, Antoine Coypel and La Fosse are among the artists who used it, the last two with special effectiveness.²⁷ La Fosse, in fact, seems to have drawn commonly with three chalks,²⁸ and such drawings by him that we know suggest Watteau learned much from his practice. It is certainly an indication of the likely influence of the older man that two well-known *trois crayons* drawings long believed to be by Watteau have recently been reattributed, convincingly, to La Fosse.²⁹

There are no examples of direct borrowings by Watteau from La Fosse, but his work may have been an important presence in Watteau's mind for a time. A compositional drawing for a *Finding of Moses* (fig. 59) shows that to some extent Watteau saw the art of the past through the intermediary of La Fosse. One doesn't know why he made the drawing (no painting by him of the subject is recorded),³⁰ but it shows what kind of history painter Watteau might have become. He was working here in a mode that had been developed especially by Francesco Albani, in whose pictures idyllic, naturalistic landscapes serve as settings for historical subjects. Albani's works became very popular in France around 1700 and Watteau, as I have noted, was employed at one time making copies of pictures by Albani.³¹ The landscape in Watteau's drawing is beautifully integrated with the religious subject. It is peaceful and welcoming, poetically the perfect location for the event. A soft light fills the space, and the trees rise like celebratory voices around the scene of Moses' salvation. The landscape itself, with its tall, wavy trees, has a rather Flemish character, but in the present context it is the sources of the figure group that concern us.

The Egyptian princess, her pose and costume, and her retinue strongly reflect Veronese's depiction of the subject, one version of which was in Crozat's collection (fig. 60). Veronese's picture was also the inspiration for the painting La Fosse had made for the Petits Appartements at Versailles (fig. 61). Watteau used Veronese's image in the light of La Fosse's modern treatment of it. The motif of the parasol was taken from La Fosse, and, more important, so was the formulation of the figure grouping. Veronese, in a manner fairly typical of sixteenth-century style, arranged the figures in a rather shallow space on an unbroken diagonal rising from left to right. La Fosse's design is spatially more

figure 60 (above left)

PAOLO VERONESE

The Finding of Moses

Washington, D.C., National
Gallery of Art (Andrew W.
 Mellon Collection)

figure 61 (above right)

CHARLES DE LA FOSSE

The Finding of Moses

Paris, Louvre (Cliché des
Musées Nationaux)

figure 62 (below)

The Triomphe de Cérès

The Triumph of Ceres

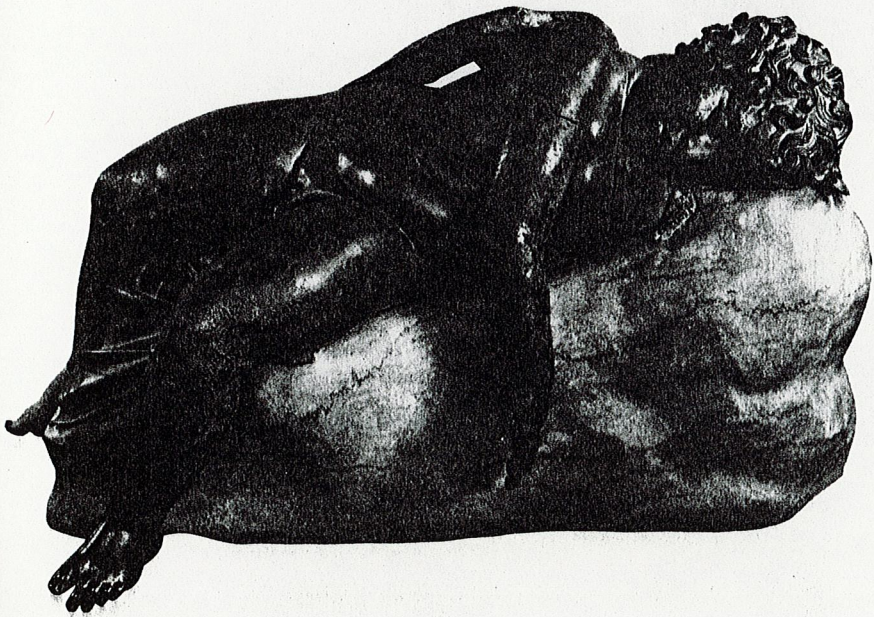
Engraving after Watteau

original, 45 x 55.6 cm

London, Trustees of the
British Museum

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Renaissance, although then the *tondo*, the circular format, was more favoured than the oval, which was more characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In either case, what had always been required was a design and arrangement that made human forms appear at once perfectly natural in attitude and actions while ordered according to an ideal, formal scheme imposed by the shape of the frame. Nothing in Watteau's previous career had quite prepared him for the present undertaking. Of course, his experience as an ornamentalist had accustomed him to work in terms of the formal relationship between picture field and frame, but the large scale of the 'Seasons' (about 57 in./144.8 cm. high), and the almost half life-size figures that were to fill them confronted him with a new kind of challenge.

The representation of the nude figure was itself a challenge. Naturally, he had made life studies after the nude model when he was studying at the Académie. How satisfactory they were by academic standards we do not know, but by the time he began working on the 'Seasons' Watteau's normal artistic perception of the human figure was decidedly unacademic. He saw spontaneous movement rather than anatomical structure, idiosyncratic gestures rather than the principles of skeletal connections, and costume rather than musculature.³⁸ And nude figures, however seen, had not previously had much importance in his work.

While he was occupied with the 'Seasons' commission, roughly between 1713-14 and 1716,³⁹ Watteau made a number of paintings of mythological and allegorical nudes. Almost without exception they reflect one or both of the main challenges set by the 'Seasons': they study, by means of imitation and variation, the formal ideals shaping nudes by masters of figure painting; and they test nude forms in the decorative eddys and circumrotations created by oval formats. In *Le Triomphe de Cérès* (fig. 62), *L'Enlèvement d'Europe* and *Les Amusements de Cythère* Watteau adopted figural inventions of Italian old masters. For *Le Bain de Diane* (fig. 64) he derived the nude from a painting by a modern French artist, Louis de Boullongne (fig. 65). The borrowings, whatever the source, are mostly intended as aids in mastering complicated poses and sensuous movements, which must have been Watteau's initial concerns as he made his plans for Crozat's pictures. Three other paintings issue from the next stage of his work. *L'Amour désarmé* (fig. 66), *L'Automne* and *Jupiter and Antiope* (fig. 68) contain nudes inscribed in ovals, and a comparison of the first and last named shows the artist's rapid progress in coming to grips with the special design problem posed by the 'Seasons'.

L'Amour désarmé is conceived largely in terms of a two-dimensional configuration that is almost diagrammatic in suggesting a wheel and spoke-like structure, and that in consequence gives an impression of stiffness and artificiality. Interestingly, the figure group is taken from a drawing made on a rectangular format by Veronese (fig. 67; a sheet that was owned by Crozat⁴⁰). By way of experimenting with the form to frame relationship Watteau tested the inherent rotational forces in this group on an oval format. But he did not develop them and, after centring the group on the canvas, he limited himself to making almost imperceptible adjustments, like lengthening the vertical axis of the figures.

The so-called *Jupiter and Antiope*,⁴¹ sadly in not very satisfactory condition, is a more

Figure 70 (above left)
Winter

Engraving (here reversed)
after Watteau
Original, 143.1 x 121.5 cm
London, Trustees of the
British Museum

Figure 71 (above right)
WATTEAU, *Le Printemps*
(*Springtime*)

119 x 98 cm
Destroyed, formerly Collection
of Lady Sybil Grant (London,
National Gallery)

Figure 72 (below left)
Autumn

Engraving (here reversed)
after Watteau
Original, 143.1 x 121.5 cm
London, Trustees of the
British Museum

Figure 73 (below right)
PETER PAUL RUBENS

Bacchus on a Barrel
Leningrad, Hermitage

advanced, and much more self-confident, work. The forms seem to arrange themselves naturally in response to the plan and overall rhythms of the design. What is more, the figures are tied by curved spatial, as well as surface, patterns to the shape and movement of the curved frame. 'Antiope's' reclining body defines the horizontal axis of the oval, the valley of her torso marking the vertical axis. From the inner depth of the figure design, where the female hip is cradled by the male body, her left thigh and calf extend outwards. They cross the folded right leg, and two curves, one long and one short, are formed in parallel to the outer oval. 'Jupiter' reaches across to his right to lift the drapery that covered the woman, his arm and shoulders following the line of the frame. His body takes the same line forward as it arches over the pearl-white form of the sleeping nude.

Jupiter and Antiope has reminded critics of works by Titian and Van Dyck, and, in fact, the male figure may have been inspired by a similar one seen in a painting by the Flemish master.⁴² But if so, now, unlike the borrowing from Veronese in *L'Amour désarmé*, the source was only a stimulus, a starting point for posing the live model. The artistic ideal was absorbed into, and became, in one of the most powerful of Watteau's studies of the nude, a component of the reality of observed posture and movement (colourplate 14). One formal derivation in the picture, a learned classical reference, is a little unexpected in Watteau's art. The image of deep slumber was taken from the famous Hellenistic statue of *Sleeping Eros* (fig. 69), which is known in many copies. But the source was not used slavishly. The upper part of the nymph's body and her arm, hanging loose in her total abandonment to sleep, follow the statue fairly closely. The arm, however, was moved a bit to reveal the breasts, and the legs were redesigned in relation to the male figure and the oval frame.

Jupiter and Antiope must be about contemporary with *Autumn* and *Spring*, the most advanced of the allegories made for Crozat's dining room. *Winter*, known only from a reproductive engraving (fig. 70), seems tentative and a little awkward in design. *Summer* (fig. 71), though resplendent in a silvery brightness reflective of Watteau's study of Veronese's art, is compositionally unambitious. But the elaborate design of *Autumn*, as we see it on an engraving made after it (fig. 72), has a grandeur and ease, a positive sensuality, that makes one lament profoundly the loss of the original. And *Spring*, rediscovered in 1964, but tragically destroyed by fire just two years later, sang in forms and colours that can at least still be partially appreciated in photographs taken of it (colourplate 15).

Autumn is a compositional *tour de force*, and it must have been meant quite consciously as a display of the inventive adaptation of a famous painting that hung nearby it. The composition derives from Rubens' *Bacchus on a Barrel* (fig. 73), which was owned by Crozat.⁴³ The *putto* at Bacchus' knee was taken over almost unchanged. Bacchus himself, however, though based on Rubens' figure is no longer a grotesque drunkard. He has become the young, handsome Dionysus, redolently sensual. His pose has also been altered, so that, leaning back with his arm more sweepingly extended, his body describes a concavity that echoes in depth the oval surround of the picture. The bacchante who fills his cup in Rubens' picture has become a satyr, whose pose, studied from life in three surviving drawings by Watteau,⁴⁴ was made to harmonize with the curving rhythms of the composition. Lying at the feet of Bacchus is a female votary. Her form is derived from a



Plate 14
WATTEAU, Study for *Jupiter and Antiope*
Sanguine, black chalk and white wash
24.5 × 29.8 cm
Paris, Louvre (Cliché des Musées Nationaux)

figure in Titian's *Andrians*, and the idea of her arm with upraised glass is borrowed from the companion of the woman in Titian's painting (fig. 75).⁴⁵ The borrowing was carefully chosen in terms of the needs of the design. The figure emerges from within the picture and her body, as it curves forward, provides a counterpoint to Bacchus' posture while it completes the three-dimensional melody of the oval painting.

The reclining woman appears in a drawing by Watteau (fig. 74) made either directly from Titian's composition, or from a model posed as Titian's figure. It may have been made in preparation for *Autumn*, or like so many of Watteau's drawings after the masters, made originally just to study and record the form. These uncertainties are in themselves significant. For in Watteau's maturity details from the art of the past merged with studies from life in his mind and sketchbooks. They embedded themselves in the larger body of images that comprised the forms of his own pictorial world.

One imagines that *Autumn*, in accord with the season, was painted in warm, deep tones, and, like *Jupiter and Antiope*, was linked closely to the colourism of Titian and Rubens. *Spring* (colourplate 15) had the clear colours of brightening skies. Blue and white set off Flora's fair skin and hair, and the picture's silvery, high-keyed tonality evidently depend on the sunny radiance of Veronese's works. Zephyr, however, still looks back to Titian; he is a variant of the nude man pouring wine in the *Andrians* (fig. 75). Probably, the form was studied in now lost life drawings. The figure of Flora, which may have been distantly suggested by one of La Fosse's drawings related to the 'Seasons' project,⁴⁶ was developed in a stunning *trois crayons* life study (fig. 76). In the painting Flora's form was adjusted to relate it intimately to Zephyr's pose and gesture, and to the shape of the frame. In the final work, too, the model's physiognomy was slightly reshaped so that she became a charming *gamine*, expressive of the youthful sprightliness of springtime.

The composition of *Spring* is less elaborate than *Autumn*, but in its lyrical loveliness the painting belongs to the highest order of artistic accomplishment. Our illustration shows it after it had been slightly cut down. The alteration resulted in the loss of the season's zodiacal signs of the ram, bull and twins at the left side of the picture,⁴⁷ which marginally impairs the effectiveness of the composition. But it in no way hampers one's appreciation of the work's formal beauty. The interlaced limbs of the figures – so perfect in suggesting the loving union of the flower-goddess and the springtime breeze – the soaring arc of Zephyr's arm, rising like the wafting wind, the inclined head of Flora, the large, rounded shapes of her breasts, even the arched curve of her foot, are all wonderfully natural in individual appearance and exquisitely integrated parts of an orchestration of curvilinear forms and movements.

Watteau never received another commission like the 'Seasons'; or perhaps he never accepted another. Mythology and allegory were displaced in his imagination by another kind of fantasy, the *fête galante*. But the four 'Seasons' show what Watteau might have done in other circumstances. As it is, the pictures represent a Watteau who had momentarily moved into the mainstream of eighteenth-century French art. For the 'Seasons' descend, in style and conception, from the work of La Fosse, and they bear artistic ideas that were soon developed by Lemoine and perfected by Boucher.

Plate 16
WATTEAU, *L'Été (Summer)*
142 × 115.7 cm
Washington, D.C., National
Gallery of Art (Samuel H.
Kress Collection)

portrait of a special, professional aspect of a person, rather than of what one might call his 'true' self. Attempts to identify the sitter as one of the known actors of the time, Angelo Costantini or Luigi Riccoboni, have failed, however, and most scholars now assume that it shows a friend of Watteau dressed in the costume of Mezzetin. The assumption is reasonable enough, given Caylus' report that the artist owned comedians' costumes in which he dressed and drew people who were willing and able to pose for him.¹⁵

The new assumption involves a reinterpretation of the image, from a record of a comedian in costume to a picture of a distinct personality posing as an actor. As such the painting would be a real portrait, its sitter meant to be recognized by the spectator, and its character would be similar to the portrait of Sirois and his family (colourplate 53), which will be discussed later. As it is, the model for the figure, seen in a stupendous life study (colourplate 49), seems to be the same person who posed for a number of nude studies that Watteau made in preparation for his paintings of *Jupiter and Antiope* (fig. 68; colourplate 14) and the Crozat 'Seasons.'¹⁶ The sitter was therefore almost certainly a professional model and not someone who would normally have been known to the people who originally admired the picture. Nor would he have been of interest to them as a person. The painting, then, is in effect an ideal portrait, a picture of an imaginary Mezzetin serenading an unseen woman, who, symbolized by the statue at the left, deigns not yet to smile at him. At its aesthetic core is figural and physiognomical expression rather than feature, and the aching longing expressed by the comedian is meant as a comment on a universal state of soul.

The 'portraits' that appear in Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and related works were concomitants of his creative process. The precise transcription of his drawings necessarily brought individualized physiognomies as well as gestures and poses into the paintings. Watteau himself generally seems not to have been concerned about the extent to which the people in his pictures were actually recognizable, although from time to time, and more often in his later career, he exploited the possibilities of this latent portraiture.

A drawing and two paintings nicely illustrate the shifting value Watteau assigned to such portraits. The man in the drawing in fig. 166 is, by an unusual circumstance, identifiable as a certain Le Bouc-Santussan. An inventory made in 1777 after the death of his son's widow records an engraving of Watteau's *La Famille* (fig. 167), in which the figure in the drawing reappears. The inventory notes that the print represents Le Bouc-Santussan and his family. We know little about this man, except that he was acquainted with Watteau and Gersaint. No professional model, his son, a goldsmith and jeweller, was to marry Gersaint's eldest daughter.¹⁷

In making the drawing Watteau was interested in the pose, its odd fusion of arching embrace and pointed invitation. The face of the figure, although carefully drawn, was evidently not studied with any intent to make a recognizable portrait. The view of the head was dictated by the pose of figure, and it resulted in a foreshortened, three-quarter profile seen from above that makes grasping the actual resemblance to an individual difficult. In fact, the formal distortion of the face has a more distinctive character than the features themselves, which is surely why this man and 'Poisson' (fig. 38), whose head is similarly

design (D-V, I, p. 286) and Watteau's preparatory drawings (P-M, I, nos. 515, 517) authenticate it.

42 Parker, 1931, p. 43, no. 21, suggested a figure in Van Dyck's *Christ Carrying the Cross* (Antwerp, St-Pauluskerk), but the relationship may well be only coincidental. The painting as a whole, however, was probably inspired by a version of Van Dyck's *Jupiter and Antiope* (cf. R-C, no. 104).

43 The derivations were first noted by Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

44 P-M, I, nos. 516, 518, 521. No. 511 is a study for Bacchus.

45 Cf. Levey, 1964, p. 57.

46 Levey, *ibid.*, comments on the sources of the two figures.

47 For the original state of the picture see D-V, IV, no. 105.

48 Cf. Rubin, pp. 61-2.

49 In Champion, p. 94.

50 P-M, I, nos. 523-8; II, no. 607. See further on these drawings, Posner, 1973, pp. 54-65.

51 *Catalogue ... de l'oeuvre d'Antoine Watteau*, Paris, 1875, p. 171. Goncourt knew only Philippe Burty's sketch of the picture (illustrated in J. Adhémar, 'Lettres adressées aux Goncourts', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, LXXII, 1968, p. 230, fig. 1).

52 The picture is known from the tapestry made in Russia in 1727 (our fig. 79) that has been thought, probably mistakenly, to reproduce a painting by Rubens. Whatever the original picture, neither it nor a copy of it is known, but Nanette Salomon kindly called my attention to an altered, repainted version of it (lost since 1936) known from a photograph in the Netherlands Institute for Art History (neg. no. 78/4317). This painting was ascribed to Jan van Noordt, but Dr Willem van de Watering suggested to me that it is closer to Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert.

53 Posner, 1973, p. 64, figs. 23, 24.

54 The following remarks are drawn from my essays of 1972 ('Watteau's *Reclining Nude* and the "Remedy" Theme', *Art Bulletin*, LIV, pp. 383-9) and 1973, to which the reader is referred for more extensive discussion and documentation.

55 Marcel, pp. 182-3.

56 In Champion, p. 94.

57 Posner, 1972 (as in n. 54, above), p. 386.

58 Posner, 1973, pp. 34, 99, n. 32.

59 An exception may be our figure 86, if it really is after an Italian original. It was used in the background of *La Leçon d'amour* (colourplate 23).

60 Caylus, in Champion, pp. 97-8. Drawings of this kind have not been identified. (Cf. P-M, I, p. 40.)

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

62 Paris, pp. 201-06.

63 Most of Watteau's copies and imitations of Venetian landscape drawings are mature in style and probably date from 1714 and after, when Crozat acquired the bulk of the originals (D-V, I, p. 49). Still, Watteau probably knew some examples earlier (P-M, I, p. 39), and

of course he had long been familiar with Flemish landscape styles.

64 I do not believe R-C, nos. 17 and 18 can be as early as 1707. They reflect an interest in Italian and Flemish landscapes and fit best into the period just after 1712.

65 It was engraved in 1729 (D-V, III, no. 164). I have not seen the painting illustrated in fig. 87, but it has not been questioned. I believe that only *La Bièvre à Gentilly* (fig. 90) is also an authentic surviving landscape. The most important other landscape paintings now attributed to Watteau are R-C, nos. 98, 128.

66 The stylistic affinity of Watteau and Dughet is strikingly indicated by a drawing authoritatively attributed to Watteau that has proved to be a study by Dughet for a view of Tivoli. (P. Rosenberg, *French Master Drawings of the 17th & 18th Centuries in North American Collections*, London, 1972, no. 46.)

67 Eidelberg, 1967, pp. 177-9.

68 The three are *Le Marais* and its pendant *L'Abreuvoir* (D-V, IV, no. 137), also made in the Porcherons district, and the closely related *Vue de Vincennes* (D-V, IV, no. 211). These pictures must date from after 1712, before when Watteau apparently had not met Crozat. On the basis of the prints and related drawings they appear to be no later than about 1715.

69 See D-V, III, no. 136. *Le Marais* and its pendant were evidently painted in the studio, where Watteau did not hesitate to 'improve upon the views he had sketched from life. See further, C. Eisler 'Two Immortalized Landscapes. Watteau and the Recueil Julien', *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, XXIV, 1966, pp. 165-76; Eidelberg, 1967, pp. 174-5.

70 First published by J. Mathey ('A Landscape by Watteau', *Burlington Magazine*, LXXXIX, 1949, pp. 273-4), the picture has no known history, but seems universally accepted. The identification of the site is speculative.

71 P-M, I, p. 59; Eidelberg, 1965, pp. 61-62.

72 The picture was attributed to Mercier by Adhémar (1950, p. 233, no. 220). The painting of the figures is weak and one cannot exclude collaboration in this area. But the landscape is masterful and the picture can be traced back to 1726, when it was given to Watteau himself (M. Eidelberg, 'La Boudense', *Burlington Magazine*, CXI, 1969, pp. 274-8; also Raines, p. 61).

73 One is the park at Montmorency in *La Perspective*. See below Chap. 4, p. 148.

74 In Champion, p. 101.

75 Nordenfalk, 1953, p. 153.

76 In Champion, pp. 44-5.

77 This particularly vexed Caylus. (In Champion, pp. 101-02.)

CHAPTER 4

1 Tessin visited him there 13 June. See Nordenfalk, 1953, p. 153.

2 The following description is based primarily on Caylus' bio-