

JEAN-FRANÇOIS HEIM  
FINE ARTS

**FRANÇOIS BOUCHER**

Paris 1703 - id. 1770

French School

**ALLEGORY OF WINTER**

Oil on canvas  
H. 0,56 m; W. 0,69 m

DATE: 1766-1767

PROVENANCE:

Liquidation sale of the company "Styles", Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 4 December 1922, n°11, reproduced (sold for Fr18,000 to M. Decour)

M. Decour collection, Paris

His sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 25 November 1969, n°32

Private collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *François Boucher, catalogue des peintures*, vol. II, Geneva, 1976, n°373, reproduced (as 'François Boucher').

RELATED WORKS:

François Boucher, graphite and wash drawing showing the same two children trapping birds, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. no. 4908), A. Ananoff and D. Wildenstein, *François Boucher, Catalogue des peintures*, vol. II, Geneva, 1976, n°373/1, fig. 1093.

Jean-Baptiste Le Prince (1734-1781), *La Chasse*, etching and drypoint after the drawing by Boucher (see above), A. Ananoff and D. Wildenstein, *François Boucher, Catalogue des peintures*, vol. II, Geneva, 1976, n°373/2, fig. 1092; Pierrette Jean-Richard, *L'œuvre gravé de François Boucher dans la collection Edmond de Rothschild*, Paris, 1978, n°1384.

Fire screens *Les Enfants se réchauffant* woven by the Gobelins Manufactory (see note 4).

**Children shown in French painting reached a peak in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The publication in 1762 of Rousseau's *Émile*, provoked a lively interest in issues of relating to learning. This pastoral scene, with its incredibly fresh and graceful style, is a perfect example of this fashion.**

**Boucher**

With his vision of a happy world, François Boucher is one of the most characteristic painters of the reign of Louis XV. With his elegant liveliness, which was both amiable and facile, his sense of ornamentation, he contributed to the development of the rococo style and its arabesques and twisting curves. A great decorator, he is associated with the most important commissions by the royal family, worked for private residences, and designed decors for the Opera, in addition to preparing cartoons for the royal tapestry manufactories. His art was widely circulated through the decorative arts and printmaking. Boucher enjoyed a highly successful career and received all the honours of his profession. When Jean-Baptiste Oudry died in 1755,

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he was appointed Inspector at the Gobelins manufactory before succeeding Carle Vanloo in 1765 as First Painter to the King and Director of the Académie.

### **Children in Boucher's Work**

In the second half of the century, children were considered for themselves as beings with feelings, and no longer as imperfect mini adults. They appear frequently in Boucher's work, and his depictions can be divided into three types.<sup>1</sup> He showed them as putti, nude babies, sometimes with wings, or small children in clothes, usually symbolising the arts and the sciences. "Country children", make up the third group. Aged between seven and ten, they are neither small children, nor adolescents. They wear contemporary costume, without any social reference: neither aristocrats nor peasants. Always shown outside, they engage indifferently in rural activities, such as going fishing or braiding crowns, playing the bagpipe, or feeding chickens. This type of depiction frequently appears in designs for chairs, sofas and fire screens made at the Gobelins factory during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **A Painting that is a Source of Inspiration**

Our painting shows this type of children. A girl and boy, sitting in front of a hedge, are warming themselves by a fire. The girl, wearing a blue corsage and a yellow dress, seems to be consoling her little brother, who is in blue breeches and a red jacket, his head wrapped in a handkerchief. With these children warming themselves by a fire, Boucher has adapted one of the common iconographies of Winter in series of the four seasons.<sup>2</sup>

The children of our painting can be found in a drawing by Boucher at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London,<sup>3</sup> where their pose is identical next to a birdcage. A certain number of elements are slightly different to our painting, such as the boy's legs which hide his sister's and the presence of a hut in the background. This drawing has a vertical format in a rococo frame made of arabesques. The same pair of children appears on an oval fire screen in a vertical format woven by the Gobelins factory, of which at least five examples are known.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edith A. Standen, "Country Children: Some 'Enfants de Boucher' in Gobelins Tapestry", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29, 1994, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> In his series of the Four Seasons painted in 1744-1745, Boucher illustrates *Winter* by putti who are warming themselves in front of an open fire. A. Ananoff, D. Wildenstein, *L'opera completa di Boucher*, Milan, 1980, no. 288, *L'Hiver*, 1745, oil on canvas, H. 0,90 m; W. 1,16 m, current location unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Pencil and wash drawing, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (inv. no. 4908), A. Ananoff and D. Wildenstein, 1976, n°373/1, fig. 1093. Composition etched by Jean-Baptiste Le Prince with the title *La chasse*, A. Ananoff and D. Wildenstein, 1976, n°373/2, fig. 1092 and Pierrette Jean-Richard, *L'œuvre gravé de François Boucher dans la collection Edmond de Rothschild*, Paris, 1978, n°1384. This drawing can be connected to a porcelain serving platter made at Vincennes, in the Louvre, Tamara Préaud and Antoine d'Albis, *Porcelaine de Vincennes*, Paris, 1991, no. 186, see Edith A. Standen, "Country Children: Some 'Enfants de Boucher' in Gobelins Tapestry", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29, 1994, p. 130 note 41.

<sup>4</sup> Of the fire screens of *Children Warming Themselves*, woven by the Gobelins factory; three are in Munich (Residenz), at Michelham and at Welbeck Abbey; a fourth example made for Madame de Pompadour, passed to the Gregory family collection and was bought by the Duveen Brothers, in 1903, Georges Cooper collection, current location unknown; a 5<sup>th</sup> fire screen was bought by the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Coventry from Jacques Neilson's son for Croome Court in 1768, see Edith A. Standen, « Country Children: Some 'Enfants de Boucher' in Gobelins Tapestry », *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29, 1994, p. 130 note 43.

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Jean-Baptiste Le Prince  
(1734-1781), *La chasse*,  
etching and drypoint, after  
Boucher



Neilson after Boucher, *Two  
Children Warming Themselves  
in front of a Fire*, tapestry for a  
fire screen, Gobelins Factory,  
Munich, Residenz.

## Expertise

After examining our painting directly, Françoise Joulie<sup>5</sup> has confirmed that it is by François Boucher. Alastair Laing,<sup>6</sup> who received photographs of the painting after it was cleaned, also considers it an autograph and authentic work by the artist. He noticed a pentimento on the boy's forehead and especially appreciated the spontaneous handling in the wheat grains and the flowery branches. He also noted that our picture's format and composition are different to the fire screens. A copy must have been made to serve as the model for the tapestries. Referring to the purchase of one of the fire screens in 1768,<sup>7</sup> he suggests dating our painting around 1766-1767.

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<sup>5</sup> Françoise Joulie examined the painting in Paris, on 26 October 2021. Françoise Joulie and Alastair Laing are today the authorities for anything to do with paintings and drawings by Boucher.

<sup>6</sup> Email of 2 October 2021.

<sup>7</sup> One of the fire screens, *The Children Warming Themselves*, was bought in 1768 by the 6th Earl of Coventry from Jacques Neilson's son for Croome Court. Geoffrey Beard, "Decorators and Furniture Makers at Croome Court", *Furniture History*, no. 29 (1993), p. 96; Edith A. Standen, "Country Children: Some 'Enfants de Boucher' in Gobelins Tapestry", *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 29, 1994, p. 130, note 43.

