

Fragonard

Jean-Honoré Fragonard was born on April 5, 1732 at Grasse, Alpes-Maritimes, the son of a glover. He was articled to a Paris notary when his father's circumstances became straitened through unsuccessful speculations, but he showed such talent and inclination for art that he was taken at the age of eighteen to François Boucher, who, recognizing the youth's rare gifts but disinclined to waste his time with one so inexperienced, sent him to Chardin's atelier. Fragonard studied for six months under the great luminist, and then returned more fully equipped to Boucher, whose style he soon acquired so completely that the master entrusted him with the execution of replicas of his paintings.

Though not a pupil of the Academy, Fragonard gained the Prix de Rome in 1752 with a painting of "Jeroboam sacrificing to the Idols," but before proceeding to Rome he continued to study for three years under Charles-André van Loo. In the year preceding his departure he painted the "Christ washing the Feet of the Apostles" now at Grasse cathedral. In 1755 he took up his abode at the French Academy in Rome, then presided over by Charles-Joseph Natoire.

It was in these romantic gardens, with their fountains, grottos, temples and terraces, that he conceived the dreams which he was subsequently to embody in his art. Added to this influence was the deep impression made upon his mind by the florid sumptuousness of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, whose works he had an opportunity of studying in Venice before he returned to Paris in 1761. In 1765 his "Corsus et Callirhoe" secured his admission to the Academy. It was made the subject of a pompous eulogy by Diderot, and was bought by the king, who had it reproduced at the Gobelins factory. Hitherto Fragonard had hesitated between religious, classic and other subjects; but now the demand of the wealthy art patrons of Louis XV's pleasure-loving and licentious court turned him definitely towards those scenes of love and voluptuousness with which his name will ever be associated, and which are only made acceptable by the tender beauty of his color and the virtuosity of his facile brushwork such works as the Serment d'amour (Love Vow), Le Verrou (The Bolt), La Culbute (The Tumble), La Chemise enlevée (The Shirt Withdrawn), and The Swing (Wallace collection), and his decorations for the apartments of Mme du Barry and the dancer Marie Guimard.

The French Revolution made an end to the ancien régime, and Fragonard, who was so closely allied to its representatives, left Paris in 1793 and found shelter in the house of his friend Maubert at Grasse, which he decorated with the series of decorative panels known as the Roman d'amour de la jeunesse, originally painted for Mme du Barry's pavilion at Louveciennes. The panels came into the possession of J. Pierpont Morgan, who subsequently sold them to Henry Clay Frick. They occupy the walls of a marvelous Salon of the Frick Collection in Manhattan, overlooking 5th Avenue. Fragonard returned to Paris early in the 19th century, where he died on August 22, 1806, neglected and almost forgotten.

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