

THE
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BULLETIN

WINTER 1989/90



JEAN-BAPTISTE
Greuze

JAMES THOMPSON

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
OF ART

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On the covers: Details from *The Broken Eggs* (fig. 12)

Note

The works of Boucher, Chardin, and Fragonard fill the sixty years separating Watteau's atmospheric Rococo creations and David's crisp Neoclassical epics. Far less known and appreciated than these painters, Jean-Baptiste Greuze has been called by Pierre Rosenberg "one of the most misunderstood, . . . artists in the whole history of painting." Yet Greuze is the artist whose work most successfully bridged the two extremes of eighteenth-century French painting; his extraordinary popularity in his own time provides the best transition from Watteau's small admiring circle of *amateurs* to David's fervent Revolutionary masses. Although Watteau was dead before Greuze was born, something of the earlier painter's love of fabric and flesh survives in the complexions and costumes of Greuze's characters. But these clothes have been significantly altered, from the impeccable silks and satins of the aristocracy to the disordered linens of the lower classes; and the scene has shifted from pleasure parks to cottage interiors. David's classical compositions may be far removed from Greuze's in historical setting, but both

their pictorial construction and a portion of their animating idealism had been anticipated in the works of the older artist.

James Thompson, assistant professor of art history at Western Carolina University, admirably assesses Greuze's achievement in the following essay on the paintings and drawings by the artist in the Metropolitan Museum, the most extensive collection of his works outside the Louvre. Thompson's interest in Greuze dates back to the early 1970s, when, as an assistant in the Museum's Department of European Paintings, he wrote a brilliant paper on *The Broken Eggs*. In 1984 he contributed a note to the *Metropolitan Museum Journal* relating a red-chalk drawing in Vienna to the young boy in the painting.

Beginning in early March, most of the Metropolitan's works reproduced in this *Bulletin* will be displayed in a special exhibition at the Museum.

Everett Fabry

JOHN POPE-HENNESSY CHAIRMAN,
DEPARTMENT OF EUROPEAN PAINTINGS



1

Self-portrait of Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805)

ABOUT 1785

OIL ON CANVAS, 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 28 $\frac{1}{16}$ IN. (73 × 59 CM)

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

JEAN-BAPTISTE
Greuze

THE WORK OF Jean-Baptiste Greuze is one of the major pictorial manifestations of the French intellectual phenomenon known as the Enlightenment, a movement best embodied in its three principal writers: Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot. Greuze shared some of Rousseau's optimistic faith in man's natural virtue in simple surroundings, away from the corrupting influence of society. Occasionally the painter was also able, like Voltaire and Diderot, to satirize society's decadence; and he certainly delighted, as they did, in exploiting the period's fascination with the erotic. But Greuze's greatest popularity was based on his carefully staged and elaborately posed moralizing scenes of rural domesticity. These emotionally charged, didactic compositions are closely related to contemporary developments in the novel, particularly the work of Rousseau, and also paralleled and influenced the theatrical development of the "bourgeois drama," by Diderot and other authors. Through his subject pictures, which represent only part of a long and complex career, Greuze became, in Sir Michael Levey's words, "the most important painter of mid-eighteenth-century France."

Greuze's career affirms two artistic clichés: first, that artists often spend their lives recasting alternative versions of the same work in different forms; and second, that much

of what they produce can be read on some level as autobiography. Just as Greuze often unbuttoned his characters *literally*, baring their attractive, sensuous bodies, and *figuratively*, revealing with great theatricality their expressive moods and emotions, so, too, his pictorial actors frequently represent the painter's own inner state, either projecting his fantasies or articulating his own experience: his hopes of how life might be lived happily, his hard-earned knowledge of how it could all go wrong. Diderot (fig. 2), the first great art critic in France (or anywhere else), recognized Greuze's deep identification with his characters:

When he works, he is completely absorbed by his picture; it affects him profoundly, he carries around with him the personality of the figure he is portraying in his studio, sad or gay, foolish or serious, flamboyant or reserved, according to whatever has occupied his brush and his imagination that morning.

The collection of paintings and drawings by Greuze in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the single most representative sample of his work in America, allows us to examine several milestones in his productive life, as well as to establish some recurrent formal and thematic preoccupations of his complicated creativity.

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

The known facts of Greuze's early life are few. On August 21, 1725, in Tournus, a small town not far from Lyons, Jean Greuze was born, the sixth of nine children. His experience of growing up in a family large by today's standards should not be forgotten in considering the uncounted infants who eddy through several of his compositions (figs. 3, 4). Nor should his humble background: Greuze's relations with his provincial roots were complex. On the one hand, he was upwardly mobile, lengthening his name to "Jean-Baptiste" for a more refined ring and improving the profession of his father and grandfather from "roof tiler" to "architect" on his marriage certificate. On the other hand, he theatrically re-created small-town life in his most successful paintings and sincerely believed the public and critical perception of him as a "natural" artist, a rough diamond to whom rules and categories did not

comfortably apply. Throughout his career both critics and fellow artists constantly complained that he did not know how to behave properly.

Greuze is said to have shown a passion for art from the age of eight, a passion that he had to conceal from his disapproving father. A careful gift drawing by Greuze, which his father initially mistook for an engraving, made the parent aware of the son's exceptional ability and ultimately gained his consent for his son to begin serious artistic study with Charles Grandon, one of the best painters in Lyons. A bizarre anecdote from that stay, recorded by Grandon's son-in-law, hints at the future erotic intensity with which Greuze would imbue articles of dress: the young painter was once caught on the floor of the studio, covering with kisses a shoe left behind by his master's wife, for whom he had developed an obsession. Greuze came to Paris about

2

Denis Diderot (1713–1784)

PROBABLY 1766

BLACK AND WHITE CHALK, STUMPED, ON BROWN PAPER

14¼ × 11¾ IN. (36.1 × 28.3 CM)

THE PIERPONT MORGAN LIBRARY, NEW YORK

PURCHASED AS THE GIFT OF JOHN M. CRAWFORD





3

Detail of *Domestic Scene* (fig. 31)



4

Detail of *The Hermit* (fig. 32)

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

1750 and continued his education at the Academy. There Greuze overstepped the malicious hazing and envious slander of his fellow students by appealing directly to his teachers. He was apparently motivated, then as later, by the naive conviction that undisputed renown and unqualified success were the just deserts of uncompromised talent.

In 1755 Greuze's demonstrable gifts as a draftsman, portraitist, and genre painter gained him election as an associate member of the Academy, after a fraction of the usual apprenticeship. His Salon debut a few months later

was nothing less than splendid. Two of the works he showed then are illustrated here—*The Blind Man Deceived* (fig. 5) and *A Child Sleeping on His Book* (fig. 6). Two others no less important are not: *The Head of the Family Reading the Bible to His Children* and *Portrait of Monsieur de Silvestre*. The latter depicted the director of the Academy, and according to one account, Greuze painted him to dispel rumors that the young artist had received help in executing some drawings that had much impressed his instructor. Currently missing, the picture appears from a photograph to have been an extraordinary early effort, the first of Greuze's sensitive

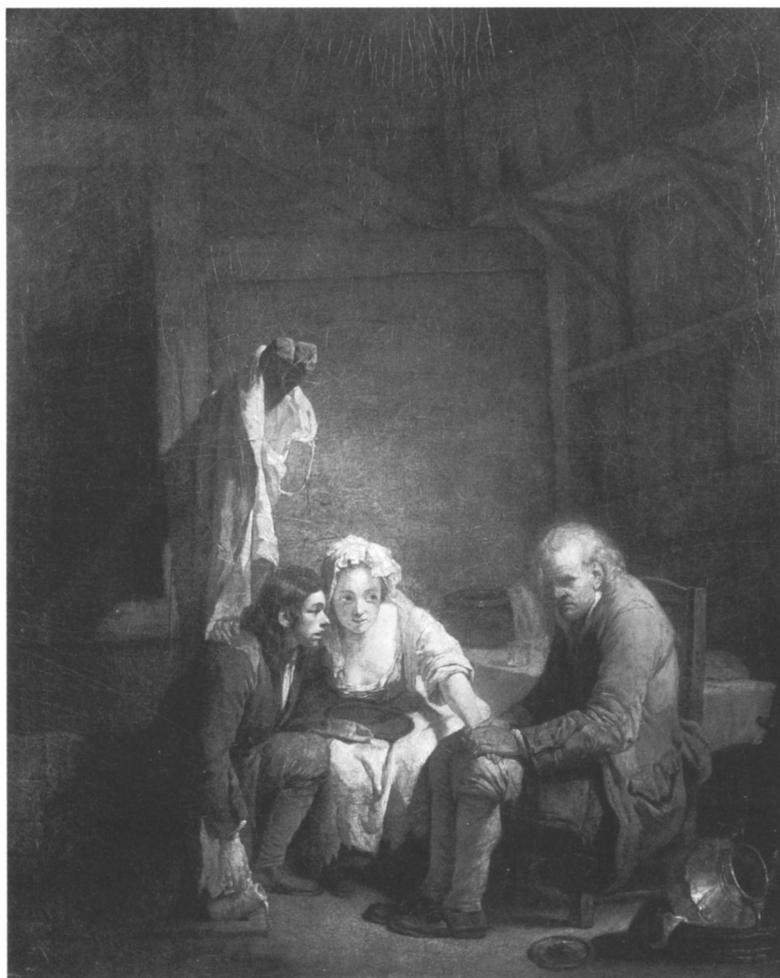
5

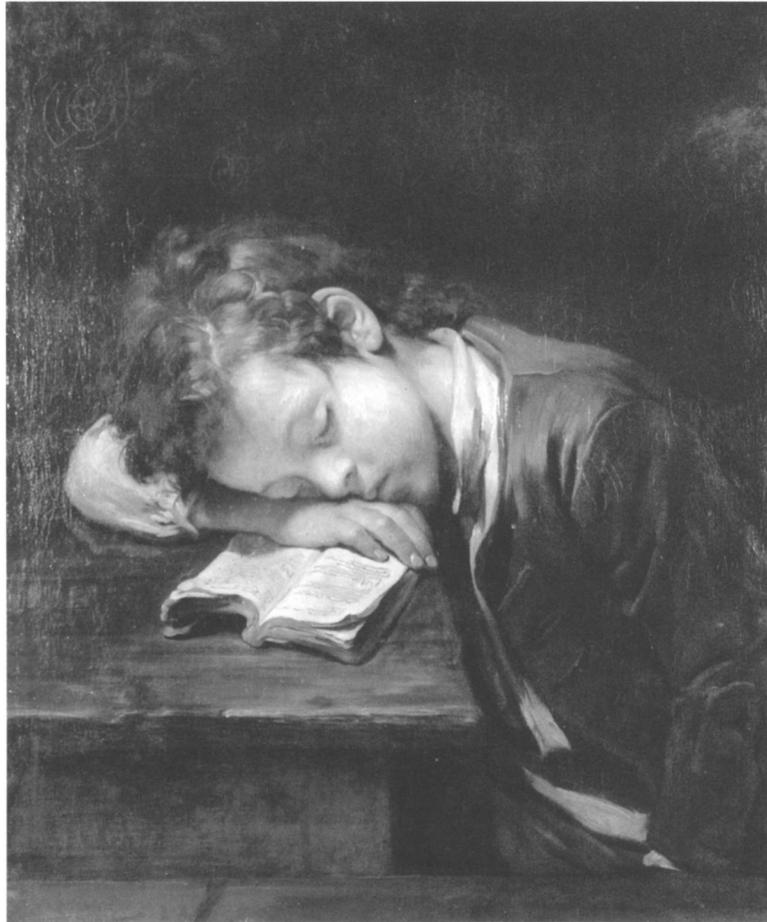
The Blind Man Deceived

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1755

OIL ON CANVAS, 26 × 21¼ IN. (66 × 54 CM)

PUSHKIN STATE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, MOSCOW





6

A Child Sleeping on His Book

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1755

OIL ON CANVAS, 26 × 20 IN. (66 × 52 CM)

MUSÉE FABRE, MONTPELLIER

restatements of Rembrandt's portrait style. In hindsight, *The Head of the Family Reading the Bible to His Children* (private collection, Paris) becomes the clear precursor of Greuze's celebrated series of subject paintings executed in the 1760s with a related cast of characters. Although seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish artists, notably David Teniers, offer some precedent in terms of subject and composition, Greuze's works were an original mixture of anecdotal genre and didactic history that Diderot later christened "moral painting." They depicted different events centered on the same basic theme: the touching simplicity, honesty, and virtue of country life.

The Blind Man Deceived tells a different, darker story. A craggy old man, whose sightless eyes are shadowy sockets, firmly clasps on his knee the left hand of a much younger

woman. She in turn has thrown her right arm around a serving boy emerging from the cellar, who is so startled that he spills the pitcher of beer he was sent to fetch. This interconnected, irregular sequence establishes the personalities of its principals in an uncomfortable, tense equation. The foolish, frightened young man stumbles forward with his mouth open, the shrewd beauty watches the old man with the eye of an amused cat, and finally, the title character himself suggests, with his grim and grizzled face, that had he but eyes to see, he would not take kindly to the goings-on so painfully obvious to the viewer. The old man—whether aged husband or father—is tricked, and the youth led astray by the spotlight schemer in the middle. Not for the last time did Greuze portray woman as the principal sexual aggressor and deceiver, a prophetic early notion for which his own



7

A Young Peasant Boy

ABOUT 1763

OIL ON CANVAS, 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ IN. (48 × 39 CM)

BEQUEST OF MICHAEL FRIEDSAM, 1931. THE FRIEDSAM COLLECTION

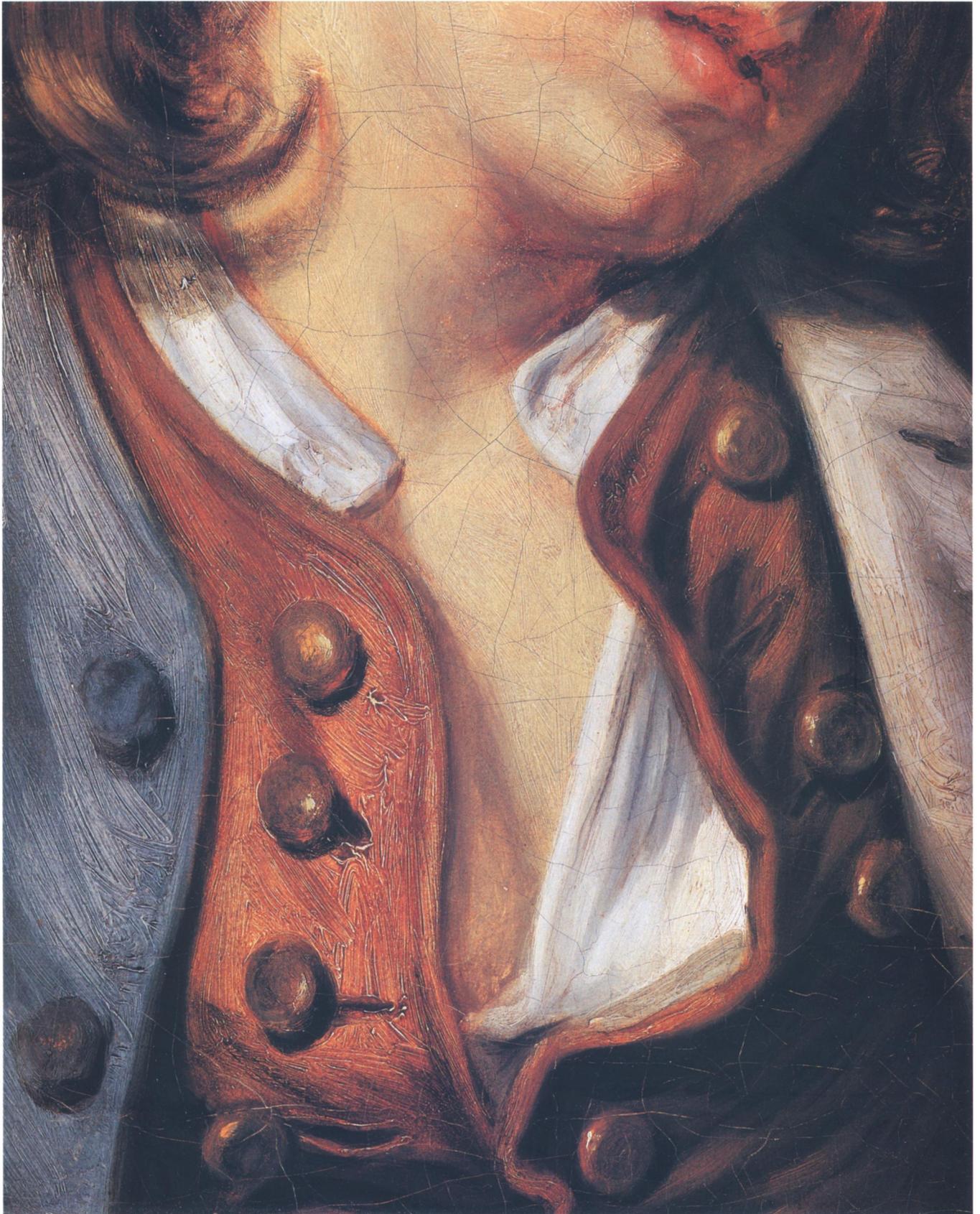
32.100.137

married life would provide nightmarish fulfillment. The critic who called Greuze “the Molière of our painters,” after seeing the 1755 Salon, must have had this barbed visual comedy in mind.

A Child Sleeping on His Book is one of the freshest pictures Greuze ever painted. Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin is the French eighteenth-century artist most celebrated for his accurate depiction of children, but Greuze’s realism has little in common with the figure pieces of his distinguished contemporary. Greuze’s work is much more physically sensuous, an effect Chardin achieved only in representing food. The boy’s hair is tousled, his book well worn. He is,

in fact, the image of his creator: an undisciplined, lovely country lad, skipping stages in his education.

The later *Young Peasant Boy* (fig. 7) in the Metropolitan Museum demonstrates a similar fascination with surface textures, as the artist unfastened three layers of the youth’s costume so that a peninsula of soft skin extends down toward the bottom of the composition. Or perhaps we should say the youth’s costume unbuttoned itself, for clothes in Greuze have a curious life of their own: items of dress are almost invariably half-undone, dishabille generally dominates. The shadows on the young boy’s face are enlivened with strokes of sharp orange, while his pale brown



8

Detail of figure 7

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

hair catches a golden sheen in the light that falls from the upper left. This picture may well have been one of a pair, the other being a painting such as *Tender Desire* (Musée Condé, Chantilly), in which a similar-size young girl leans and looks to the left in an answering arc.

After his first Salon Greuze visited Italy. He was recommended as a traveling companion for the Abbé Gougenot by the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (whose portrait he painted for the next Salon, perhaps out of gratitude). Charles Natoire, Greuze's first teacher in Paris, was in Rome, where

he had been appointed director of the French Academy in 1751. Assessing Greuze over a year into his stay, Natoire wrote of his former pupil: "He is a young man who works with difficulty, and, in spite of all his talent, easily succumbs to innumerable impressions which upset his tranquillity." Natoire may have been referring to Greuze's star-crossed, unconsummated love affair with an Italian countess, from whom the painter, with self-styled nobility, walked away, but whose memory he guarded as an ideal contrast to the sad, sordid realities of his own later marriage. Any effect

9

The Neapolitan Gesture

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1757

OIL ON CANVAS, 28¾ × 37⅞ IN. (73 × 94.3 CM)

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM, MASSACHUSETTS,
CHARLOTTE E. W. BUFFINGTON FUND





10

Detail of figure 9

on his art of the year and a half Greuze spent in Italy has been dismissed by subsequent writers, and certainly Greuze's effusive remarks on Raphael found no visual echo in his work; influence from the soft skin tones of Guido Reni's sensuous female saints is harder to deny. Possibly, too, Greuze's experience of the flamboyant gestures that, then as now, were an essential component of Italian speech helped push the French artist toward the extravagant hand movements that characterize the mute melodramas for which he became so famous.

GREUZE'S second Salon, in 1757, solidified the considerable success of his first. A pair of anecdotal pictures were among four works that affected to portray incidents of Italian life. In the later and less focused of the two, *The Neapolitan Gesture* (fig. 9), nothing is quite what it seems. A youth—described in the Salon catalogue as a Portuguese nobleman—has disguised himself as a door-to-door salesman in order to get near the object of his desires.

Mocking his unmasking with the movement of her left hand that gives the picture its title, the young woman at the same time gazes longingly after him, and extends her right hand as if to encourage another sneak attack. The old servant makes explicit with her outstretched left palm just what she is guarding, but her right hand, in expelling the young man, also paradoxically appears to restrain and unite him with the young woman. Scrambling over an antique capital fragment, the excited dog is held back by a concerned child, a duo Greuze enlarged and reworked for a Salon picture twelve years later. The outward gaze, appealing to the spectator, is echoed with deeper comprehension by the older brother behind. At work is a compositional ambivalence, so that the picture's narrative message of simple morality is undercut, complicated, even contradicted by the painter's approach.

Greuze judged and ordered *The Broken Eggs* (fig. 12) much better; it is the first in a sequence of memorable works in which he used a shattered object to symbolize lost chastity. As in all his greatest domestic dramas, the scene is set indoors. The principal actors are remarkably similar, though

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

not identical, to those in the subsequent *Neapolitan Gesture*, with only a younger child and dog omitted. But here there are no equivocations or disguises, save that worn by the small boy on the right. For he, with his bow and arrow and blond hair, is a solemn, plainclothes Cupid, silently commenting on the irreparable consequences of erotic abandon. When Fragonard met Greuze in Rome at the time of this picture, he called him an “amorous cherub” on account of his golden curls, and that epithet enriches the notion of the little boy as the proxy bearer of the painter’s message. The child also forms part of a compositional triangle that unites the disconsolate ex-maiden with the oafish swain and the angry old woman. The guilty young man, in attempting to doff his tricorn hat, shields the right side of his face, like a racketeer hiding from the flashbulbs of photographers. Detaining the offender with her left hand, the accusing crone points dramatically downward with her right, like some ancient displaced angel from a lost Annunciation, peddling not prophecy but postmortems. Loveliest of all is the fallen girl: cushioned from the cold, hard floor by her voluminous skirts, she has found a comfortable,

penitent-Magdalen pose, in which sorrow can sit for a long spell. The recently acquired worldly knowledge renders her gentle beauty all the more endearing. Her red eyes imply past and future tears, her drawn-up lower lip sorrow or pique. With her hands lightly interlocked around her left knee, she looks as if she might be twiddling her thumbs while weathering the aged woman’s invective. Greuze’s dramatic organization is tight but fluid, and his painting of textures—eggshells, a straw hat, linen blouses, peasant crockery, and (need it be said?) soft skin—is miraculous. A perfect light sexual comedy, *The Broken Eggs* has never quite received the appreciation it deserves, perhaps because of its limited aims, unfashionable theme, and subtle humor.

Recent scholarship has fixed the source of the picture’s subject in the coarser company of Dutch art (a painting by Frans van Mieris engraved by Greuze’s friend Pierre Moitte), but *The Broken Eggs* follows equally closely a native French tradition manifested in works such as François Boucher’s 1734 *The Beautiful Kitchen Maid* (fig. 14), where, in a similar scullery, eggs also serve as a symbol of female virtue, *falling* rather than *fallen*. But with the two pictures’

11

Detail of figure 12





12

The Broken Eggs

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1757

SIGNED AND DATED (LOWER RIGHT): GREUZE F. ROMA/1756

OIL ON CANVAS, 28¾ × 37 IN. (73 × 94 CM)

BEQUEST OF WILLIAM K. VANDERBILT, 1920

20.155.8





14

The Beautiful Kitchen Maid

BY FRANÇOIS BOUCHER, 1734

OIL ON PANEL, 22 × 17¼ IN. (56 × 43.5 CM)

MUSÉE COGNACQ-JAY, PARIS

obvious similarities of subject and setting, there are also significant differences in treatment: Greuze appears positively understated in comparison to Boucher, who paralleled his amorous assault with a barrow-load of sexually suggestive vegetables. And while Boucher's aroused young man breaks the eggs and bypasses the keys that bar the object of his lust, a feral cat in the lower right savages a limp chicken.

Greuze soon became involved in a romantic intrigue of his own, and an appropriate illustration of his later jaundiced account of the proceedings would resemble the Boucher *Kitchen Maid*, with the two principals reversed. As Greuze told the story, he was mildly intrigued, like many other men (including Diderot), by Anne-Gabrielle Babuti, the pretty daughter of a well-known Paris bookseller. Greuze's pleasure in her company was, he later protested, misread; and the young woman bought herself a pair of gaudy earrings, putting it about that they were an engagement present from the promising young painter. When Greuze retreated for a time in fear at her forward gesture, she rushed to his house, battering the door until she was received; then, throwing herself at his feet, she clasped his legs with

profuse apologies, countless tears, protestations of deepest love—and an iron grip she refused to relinquish until he promised to marry her. For the first of unnumbered times Greuze gave in to that formidable female, consenting to become perhaps the most unhappily married painter in history.

Mme Greuze's good looks were widely noted. Diderot, who was later to describe her as "one of the most dangerous creatures on earth," suggesting she be exiled to Siberia, was a frequenter of the Babuti bookshop and just might have been involved with her before she trapped the painter. Diderot's eloquent early reference to her distinctive features—"doll-like, white and perfect like the lily, [touched in] pink like the rose"—is a fair description of the "Greuze girl" type, and the painter's contemporary critics commonly remarked the recurrence of her features in his work, not just as a portrait subject but also as an allegorical and dramatic protagonist. Thus Mlle Babuti furnishes an antithesis to those successive exemplary spouses of Peter Paul Rubens, Isabella Brandt and Helena Fourment, whose visages together informed and affected almost every female

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figure ever represented by Greuze's Flemish predecessor and his inspiration as a colorist and painter of lifelike skin.

A picture that traditionally has been considered a depiction of Mme Greuze, *The Wool Winder* (fig. 15) in the Frick Collection, was shown in the 1759 Salon, soon after the couple were married. In this delicate genre piece, the thirty-year-old wife has been almost transformed into a teenager, whose porcelain perfection of features and complexion matches Diderot's description. A proper portrait

of Mme Greuze, currently lost, was one of a trio of family likenesses the painter presented at the Salon of 1761. The superb representation in that Salon of his father-in-law, François Babuti (fig. 16), is arguably the most penetrating picture Greuze ever painted. Perhaps more than any other French portrait of the time it reflects an understanding of the exceptional works Rembrandt had produced in Holland over a century before. Greuze's splendid self-portrait in the Louvre (fig. 1) has softer handling, suggestive of a date over

15

The Wool Winder

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1759

OIL ON CANVAS, 29¼ × 24 IN. (74.3 × 61 CM)

THE FRICK COLLECTION, NEW YORK





16

François Babuti

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1761

OIL ON CANVAS, 23½ × 19 IN. (59.7 × 48.2 CM)

PRIVATE COLLECTION, PARIS



17

The Village Marriage

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1761

OIL ON CANVAS, 36¼ × 46⅞ IN. (92 × 117 CM)

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

two decades after the one Greuze exhibited in 1761, but shares much of the perceptive insight and felicitous execution evident in the earlier portrait of his father-in-law.

YET if Greuze's exceptional skills as a portraitist were becoming much appreciated, the work in the 1761 Salon that really made him famous was *The Village Marriage* (fig. 17), representing the moment in a family wedding ceremony when the father of the bride presents her dowry to his new son-in-law. As a domestic drama, this painting was the successor to Greuze's *Head of the Family Reading the Bible* of the 1755 Salon and, to a lesser extent, to *The Broken Eggs* from 1756. Combining the pious moral tone of the former with the representational skills of the latter, the picture caused an absolute sensation (what the French call a *succès fou*) and has remained to this day Greuze's most famous work. Much of the credit for its celebrity, then and now, must be given to Diderot, who wrote a long postscript to his Salon account, highly praising the picture when the painter added it ten days before the close of the exhibition. Like many of history's great wits, Diderot was surprisingly concerned with moral decency in its most profound senses, and he thought that responsible painters should act on those concerns. Much of his criticism attacked artists who did not, but at least twice in his career he thought he had found painters who shared his longings: the first time was in 1761 with Jean-Baptiste Greuze; the second was in his final Salon discussion twenty years later, when he presciently charted the rising star of Jacques-Louis David.

Diderot's unmitigated advocacy of Greuze began with *The Village Marriage*, but had to wait until the 1763 Salon for fully meditated expression. Commencing with an emphatic endorsement—"Here is my man: Greuze"—the critic passed almost immediately to Greuze's *Filial Piety*, painted that year, and stated: "Above all the genre pleases me: it is moral painting." With this 1763 critique and until the 1769 *débâcle* of the Academy reception, Diderot became for Greuze "at once his sycophant and his master," as the Goncourt brothers a century later astutely described him. An artistic document of their relationship is Greuze's chalk portrait of the critic in the Morgan Library (fig. 2). Reminiscent of antique profiles, the drawing was mentioned by Diderot as part of a verbal self-portrait:

I have a high forehead, very sparkling eyes, rather broad features, and quite the head of an ancient orator; a good nature which nearly approaches stupidity or the provincialism of olden times. Without

the exaggeration of my features in the engraving after the drawing by Greuze, I would look much better. I have a mask which deceives artists.

Undoubtedly Diderot would have had fewer reservations about Greuze's chalk heads in the Metropolitan's collection, for these impressive large drawings are likenesses transmuted into *dramatis personae*. *Head of an Old Woman Looking Up* (fig. 18) is a finished study for a figure from a lost painting of the early 1760s, whose composition survives reversed in a later engraving (fig. 19). One of several letters that Greuze wrote to the *Journal de Paris* to court publicity by explaining his pictures identified the inspiration for this work as a conversation he had overheard on the Pont Neuf, where one woman spoke to another of a harsh stepmother who provided a child only with bread hard and stale enough to break teeth. In the engraving the malign mother and her equally unpleasant, gloating daughter occupy the center of the composition, while the abused stepdaughter is on the left with a young boy; the grandmother of the mistreated girl raises her hands to heaven on the right, bewailing the bitter misery that the death of her daughter has brought upon the grandchild. The pose of *Head of an Old Woman Looking Up* is that of the grandmother in the painting, without the gesticulating hands. The absent extremities, as well as the indicated support for her leaning head, suggest that this careful drawing was done from life.

Although the other two head studies in the Museum cannot be related so specifically to this or other Greuze compositions, their function is unquestionably the same. *The Head of a Girl Looking Up* (fig. 20) is an embodiment of innocent virtue, much like the stepdaughter in the engraving. In the drawing Greuze's parallel hatchings delicately intersect to define the shape of the girl's neck; the artist has made each large upraised eye almost the width of her solemn little mouth. *Head of a Young Boy* (fig. 21) more closely approximates the movement of the stepdaughter in the engraving, but does not necessarily bear her burden of sorrow. The looser technique suits the pose, which is altogether more dynamic, less meditative than that of the young girl, with the head dramatically tilted and twisted, looking back and up to the right.

A painted *Head of a Woman* (fig. 22), also in the Museum's collection, is an artistic document similar to the red-chalk drawings: it is a study of a character that might have served as a participant in any number of the painter's pictorial dramas. Over the years this handsome young woman has been identified with several paintings, such as *The Drunkard's*



18

Head of an Old Woman Looking Up

RED CHALK, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{16}$ IN. (41 × 32.5 CM)

ROGERS FUND, 1949

49.131.1



19

La Belle-mère (The Stepmother)

ENGRAVING BY J.C. LEVASSEUR AFTER A LOST PAINTING BY GREUZE, 1781

14 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ IN. (36.4 × 44.4 CM)

BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS



20

Head of a Girl Looking Up

RED CHALK, 13 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 11 $\frac{1}{16}$ IN. (35.3 × 28.4 CM)

ROGERS FUND, 1949

49.131.2

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE



21

Head of a Young Boy

RED CHALK, 11¹/₆ × 9¹/₂ IN. (30 × 24.2 CM)

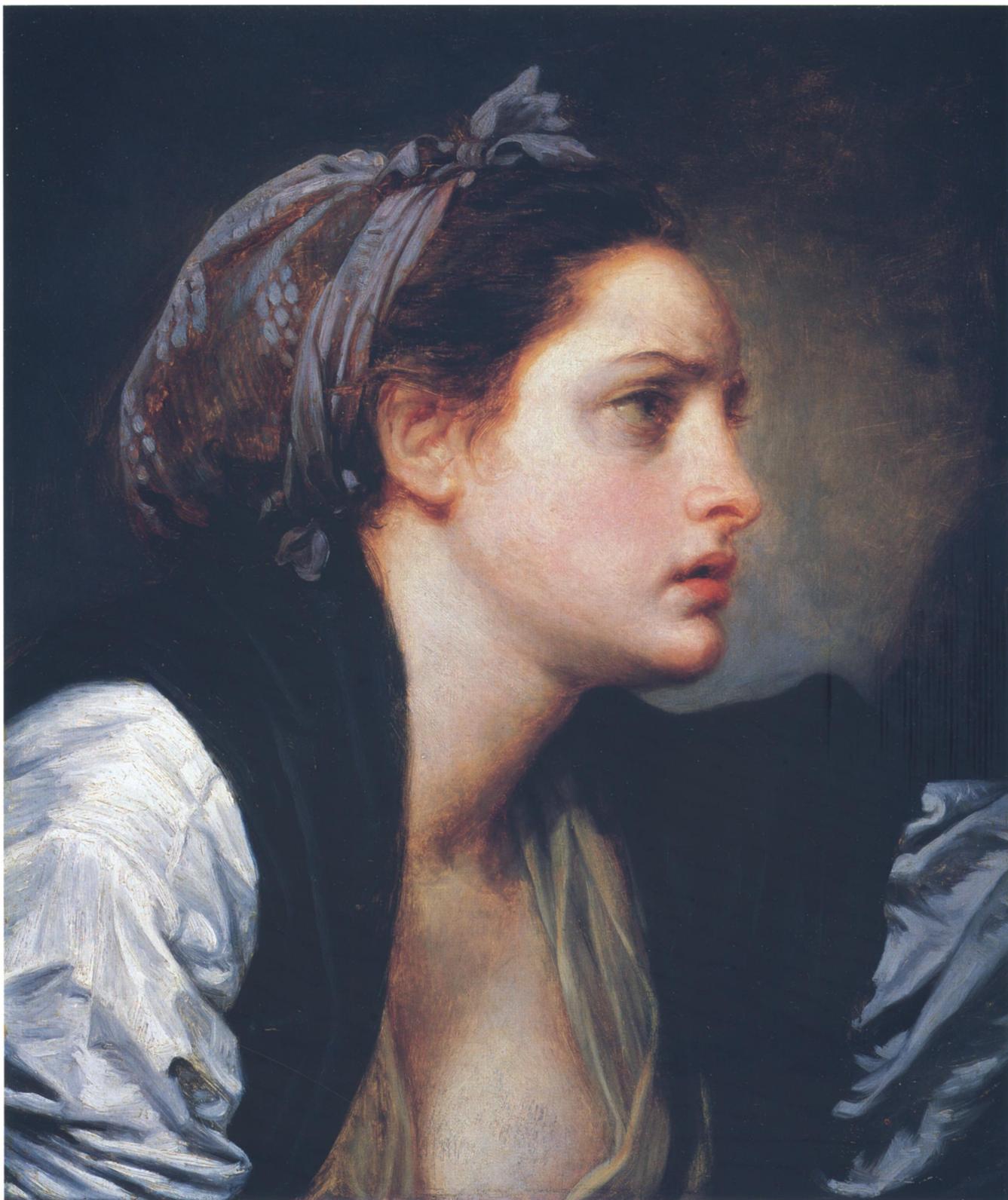
ROGERS FUND, 1949

49.132.3

Return (Portland Art Museum, Oregon) and *The Father's Curse* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), or, with a personality transformation, cast as the aforementioned wicked stepmother (fig. 19). Such adaptability suggests she was employed as an all-purpose “walk-on” when needed. Her eyes are intently focused, her nostrils flared, her mouth open in an expression of anticipation or concern. The eccentric light

source catches her face and left breast. Her clothes are mainly black and white, with some heavy impasto on her blouse and face; her rich reddish-brown hair is gathered in a spotted damson scarf.

Greuze's achievement as a portraitist in the mid-1760s is reflected in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, which includes some distinctive depictions of major figures from



22

Head of a Woman

OIL ON WOOD, 18½ × 16 IN. (47 × 40.6 CM)

PURCHASE, 1871

71.91



23

*Charles-Claude de Flabaut de La Billarderie, (1730–1809)
comte d'Angiviller*

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1763

OIL ON CANVAS, 25¼ × 21¼ IN. (64.2 × 54 CM)

GIFT OF EDITH C. BLUM (ET AL.) EXECUTORS IN MEMORY
OF MR. AND MRS. ALBERT BLUM, 1966

66.28.1

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

the contemporary French art world: Charles-Claude de Flahaut de La Billarderie, comte d'Angiviller (fig. 23), and the noted sculptor Jean-Jacques Caffieri (fig. 24). Greuze's portrait of the comte d'Angiviller was exhibited in the 1763 Salon. At that time D'Angiviller looked after the Dauphin's sons, potential heirs to the throne. Upon the accession of Louis XVI little more than a decade after this portrait, D'Angiviller was appointed director-general of the King's Buildings, a powerful position of artistic patronage from which he decisively affected the course of French art, particularly with some large paintings and sculptures he commissioned to illustrate the history of France. D'Angiviller must have been pleased with Greuze's portrait, since he was responsible for the Louvre's acquisition of *The Village Marriage* in 1782 and had ordered the Gobelins to weave small tapestries after the painter's designs five years before.

In Greuze's portrait D'Angiviller is richly attired, reflecting, perhaps, not only an enthusiasm of the sitter but also of the artist, who was described by the Goncourts as "fond of personal adornment and flashy clothes." Most stunning is D'Angiviller's magnificent jacket, the color of clover blossom, with its braided button-loops and lining of brown fur. Greuze has left a few thin strokes of strong red on the right sleeve and front to heighten its splendor. The jacket opens on an equally opulent waistcoat, lined with white fur and covered in gold brocade and embroidered roses. Pinned on the left side of his jacket, like an extra-large rose, is the red ribbon suspending the Order of Saint Louis, won during a brilliant early military career. Spilling out at the top of D'Angiviller's waistcoat is a delicate lace jabot. Reflecting the dominant color of his jacket is his own ruddy complexion. His wig is tied in the back with a gray ribbon, and his eyes are pale blue. The lips, slightly parted, as if he is about to speak, are a curiously tentative, thoughtful feature in such a commanding figure, making the painting much more than a mere image of aristocratic power, luxury, and excess.

Greuze's portrait of his artistic contemporary Caffieri was probably exhibited in the Salon of 1765, the same year that Caffieri was accorded lodgings in the Louvre, an enviable studio location. Six years later, sporting a jacket quite similar to that worn by D'Angiviller in the preceding portrait, a likeness of Caffieri, painted by another of the period's distinguished portraitists, Joseph-Siffred Duplessis, appeared in the Salon. Among Caffieri's own works perhaps the most noteworthy are his life-size marble statues of the great play-

wrights Molière and Corneille, commissioned by the crown. A reduced version of the second statue appears in the background of a later Caffieri portrait by Albert Werthemüller, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Caffieri also sculpted a bust of Benjamin Franklin in 1777, the year of Greuze's pastel portrait (fig. 45).

After the flamboyant colors of *D'Angiviller*, Greuze's portrait of Caffieri appears quite muted. In the shadowy edge of his open velvet jacket can be dimly glimpsed large cloth-covered buttons. His gold-embroidered waistcoat is decorated with a few tiny roses, red and green touches that are exceptional color accents. The tightly wrapped cravat accentuates a nascent double chin. His soft brown eyes are set in the glow of a healthy complexion, his pink lips surrounded by the pale gray of a growth so profuse it has defeated the closest shave. The painting is concerned far more with subtle illumination than with color, and thus can be grouped among some of Greuze's finer likenesses that reflect the influence of Rembrandt.

YET even as Greuze's exceptional portraits and innovative genre pictures were earning him great critical and public success, a potential storm was brewing over his incorrect approach to academic procedures. His unusually early admission to the Academy as an associate member, in 1755, should routinely have been followed within an interval of about six months by his "reception piece"; instead the willful artist kept the Academy waiting *fourteen years*, responding to their polite penultimate request with a letter Diderot described as "a model of vanity and impertinence." Furthermore, Greuze took the unprecedented step of offering as his submission a history painting (a large representation of a subject from ancient history, mythology, or the Bible), even though he had never previously exhibited that sort of work, and no one would have suspected he might.

Since the formation of the French Academy in the mid-seventeenth century, there had been a codification of the relative importance of different types of paintings. André Félibien, friend and biographer of the premier French painter Nicolas Poussin, had in 1666 ranked them thus: 1. History, 2. Human Portraits, 3. Animals, 4. Landscapes, 5. Still Lifes. A notable omission on this list is the category in which Greuze excelled—genre, or typical scenes representing everyday life. When in 1717 Antoine Watteau had submitted as his reception piece (also somewhat late) the



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The Sculptor Jean-Jacques Caffieri (1725–1792)

PROBABLY EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1765
OIL ON CANVAS, 25¼ × 20¼ IN. (64.8 × 52.7 CM)
BEQUEST OF ETHEL TOD HUMPHRYS, 1956

56.55.3

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

extraordinary *Embarkation for Cythera*, an appreciative Academy accommodated his work by creating the new category of *fête galante* (elegant party). By Greuze's day genre was recognized and respectable, but not nearly so important as history painting. Although our modern impulse is to rate works on their quality and intensity of execution, irrespective of their dimensions, subject matter, or type, the eighteenth century thought quite differently, and there were good, commonsense reasons for so thinking. Such grand-size productions were universally regarded as more important, partly because they were seen as morally elevating but also because they were known by the practitioners to be more difficult to bring off successfully. In the first place, it is much harder for a painter to maintain correct proportions and compositional coherence on a large scale. Furthermore, a history picture often must demonstrate mastery of the other painting types, such as background landscape or foreground still life, in addition to establishing the credible dramatic animation and interrelationship of figures, one of the most difficult tasks of the painter's art and one that most clearly demonstrates the prized power of imagination. Chardin, whose modest-size still lifes many modern viewers would rank ahead of all the century's enormous action scenes, wanted his son to be a history painter because he thought it a more elevated occupation.

And so for Greuze to submit as his belated reception piece a completely unexpected history painting was a gesture that demonstrated great daring as an artist but the same mixture of insensitivity and aggression as an art politician that was to make his career so stormy. "The Greuze Affair," as it has been dubbed in an excellent account by Jean Seznec, also marked the end of the painter's close association with Diderot. What happened, in short, was that the Academy rejected Greuze's historical *Septimius Severus Reproaching His Son Caracalla* (fig. 25) as unworthy of the artist, yet accepted Greuze into the Academy as a painter of genre, waiving the need for a reception piece on the basis of his previous celebrated works. The confusing way in which they made known their intentions temporarily misled the artist into thinking that his painting had actually triumphed. Only later, when their rejection of his picture and of his suit to be considered a history painter became clear, did Greuze, in a predictably hurt and angry response, suspend his Salon participation for over thirty years, showing and selling pictures with considerable initial success from his own studio.

In hindsight, aesthetics were probably less important than politics in the Academy's negative decision. If *Septimius Severus* does uncomfortably mix Rococo textural detail (noticeably in the luxurious, intricate folds of the bedclothes and in the vibrant surface of the emperor's naked trunk) with the compositional elevation and austerity of Poussin, and if the extended arms and raised leg of Septimius Severus demonstrate anatomical uncertainties offensive to more practiced figure draftsmen, it is only fair to add that Greuze's composition was as effective a recapitulation of *poussiniste* style (one of the things Diderot as a critic had most avidly sought) as had yet been seen in the eighteenth century, and remained one of the most impressive until Jacques-Louis David's sensational debut twelve years later with his Poussin-inspired *Belisarius*. Even apart from *Septimius Severus*, Greuze served as a crucial figure in the transmission of Poussin's organizational structure to the generation of David through the compositional principles of his genre scenes, which often follow those of the founding father of French history painting.

Diderot's written critical rejection of Greuze's picture equally seems to have been as much personal as aesthetic, since he had already emphatically endorsed an early sketch that was not drastically different from the finished work. In the same letter in which he praised the sketch, he articulated his reservations about Greuze's difficult personality. Writing to the sculptor Étienne-Maurice Falconet, the critic declared that he would not be sending Greuze to Russia, where Diderot was a *confidant* of Catherine the Great and where Greuze's widespread popularity would have gained the painter many prosperous commissions: "He is an excellent artist, but a totally impossible person. One should collect his drawings and paintings and leave the man alone."

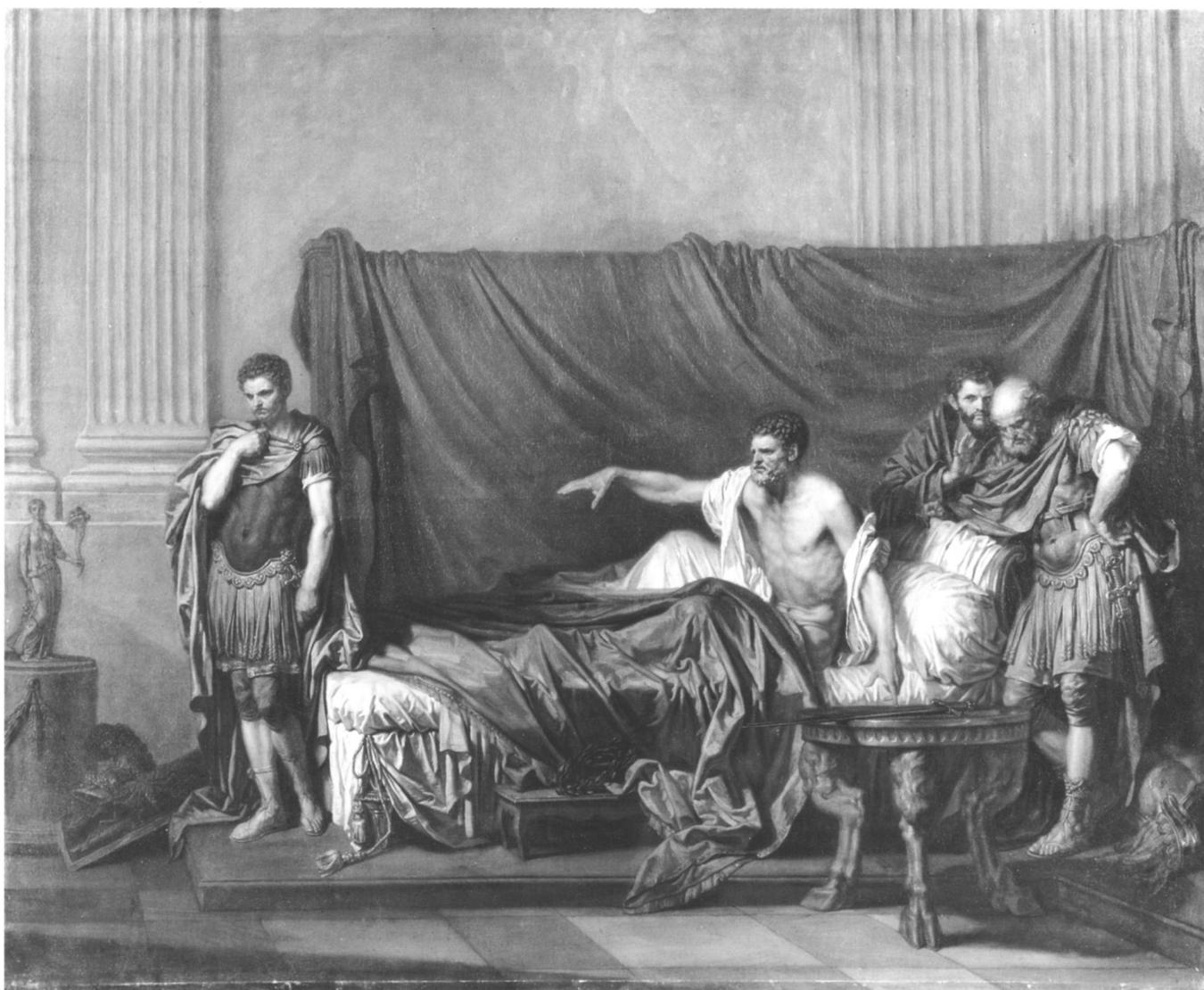
In the same Salon of 1769 where he showed the ill-fated *Septimius Severus*, Greuze also exhibited *A Young Girl Praying at the Base of the Altar of Love* (Wallace Collection, London). A handsome red-chalk drawing in the Metropolitan Museum, *Reclining River God* (fig. 26), has a pose remarkably similar to one of the sculpted relief figures on Love's altar. Whereas in the relief the river god interacts with the drama of Pan and Syrinx, in the drawing he is depicted in solitary majesty, describing a graceful, curving diagonal. Parallel to the picture plane, its muscles delineated in contour hatching and shading, his elegant back appears a bit long; his legs, with knees foreshortened inward toward the phallic oar and

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*Septimius Severus Reproaching His Son Caracalla with
Having Wished to Assassinate
Him in the Wilds of Scotland, Saying to Him:
“If you Desire My Death, Order Papinian to Execute It
with this Sword”*

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1769

OIL ON CANVAS, 48 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 63 $\frac{1}{16}$ IN. (124 × 160 CM)
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS





26

Reclining River God

RED CHALK, 18½ × 25¼ IN. (47 × 63.4 CM)

PURCHASE, JOSEPH PULITZER BEQUEST, 1961

61.1.2

tree trunk, somewhat short. Overall, he resembles more a posing model than a mythological being. Nevertheless the drawing certainly demonstrates an impressive artistic mastery of human anatomy, a skill in which the Academy found Greuze notably deficient during the reception fiasco.

JMPPLICITLY accepting the Academy's emphatic dismissal of Greuze's aspirations as a history painter, art historians have tended to confine all the painter's other efforts in that vein to a chronological slot just before the 1769 disaster. Such a conclusion may well underestimate Greuze's stubbornness (he defended himself publicly in a written reply to the harsh critic of the *Avant-Coureur*) or the independent prosperity he continued to achieve outside the Salon. The Metropolitan's major unfinished composition, *Aegina Visited by Jupiter* (fig. 27), has been connected with a desire Greuze expressed to Diderot in 1767—"I would really like to paint a woman completely nude, without offending modesty"—and it has also been speculatively

described as an abandoned attempt at his reception piece for 1769. Yet it could have been begun later as an effort by Greuze to vindicate himself and disprove the Academy's harsh judgment.

Like the date, the subject of the Metropolitan's picture presents problems. The previous and in some ways more convincing Museum title for the painting was *Danaë*. Shut in by her father with only a maid for company, Danaë was seduced by Jupiter in the form of a shower of gold, whereas the principal deity visited Aegina as fire and later carried her off in the guise of an eagle. The presence of the maid argues in favor of Danaë; the golden shower is not visible, as it is in Greuze's small painted sketch in the Louvre, but in one of the most famous versions of the subject, by Rembrandt (now in the Hermitage, Leningrad, and then accessible to Greuze in the Crozat collection, Paris), the gold is represented purely in terms of light. The presence of the eagle in the picture connects with the Aegina story (in which there is no maid), and there is even a third possibility: the story of Semele, who was persuaded by the



27

Aegina Visited by Jupiter

OIL ON CANVAS, 57 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 77 $\frac{1}{8}$ IN. (146.7 × 195.9 CM)

GIFT OF HARRY N. ABRAMS AND PURCHASE JOSEPH PULITZER BEQUEST, PFEIFFER, FLETCHER, AND ROGERS FUNDS, 1970

1970.295

jealous Juno, disguised as an elderly servant, to request that Jupiter reveal himself in his full glory, a sight of such awesome power that Semele was destroyed. Of the three narratives this one perhaps best encompasses the mixture of fear and anticipation that plays across the face of the heroine, the revelation of whose own heart-stopping magnificence is the major point of the work.

For whatever indefinite form the painter was about to give the deity, the young woman, who reclines on a gentle central diagonal, is unquestionably the star of the picture. Her lustrous flesh glows against the gray-white background of her sheet like a pearl in its shell. Real pearls also abound in the picture: pearls held in the fair beauty's hair by a

pale blue ribbon she is loosing with her left hand; a second strand, tied with a similar ribbon, already abandoned on the bedside tripod table; and a third small pearl band, which secures the old maid's head scarf like a turban. Much of the picture's compositional activity is concerned with draperies being gathered and let go, whether the purple drapes bunched in the upper left, the rumpled sheet on the bed, or the covering sheet pulled away from the yielding right fingers of the transfixed young woman by the bird's claws and the old woman's active left hand (whose motion is accentuated by *pentimenti*). Greuze was not an animal artist, except for the occasional charming dog, and his stiff eagle might have been borrowed from a medieval lectern.

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

But he was a peerless painter of human skin, and the delicate white-on-white gradations (the lightest areas receiving the thickest impasto), the tonal variations in flesh and soft sheets, provide the painting with its most magical passages. Greuze's sensuous depiction of a mythological (albeit mortal) beauty recalls a strange story of the painter's prurient behavior, later told to the artist David d'Angers by a Greuze intimate named Walckenaer:

I learned through a close friend of the celebrated painter Greuze that he often went to visit prostitutes. He loved to lavish upon them the most beautiful and urbane titles: one became Diana, another Venus. And he always found the name of a pagan divinity, depending on his inspiration at the time; these nicknames greatly astonished those poor girls from Champagne, Normandy and the Faubourg Saint-Marceau, those unfortunate creatures wrenched by vice from all the corners of France. Such an evocation of ancient Greece was most unexpected, coming from a man who devoted his life to the real and factual nature of the daily-life dramas of

his own time. Such a habit could indicate that he felt the need to poeticize the pleasure of the senses, pushing them towards idealization.

If true, the anecdote demonstrates not only that Greuze might have been less than the totally injured party in his marital difficulties but, more important, how intertwined his ideal conceptions and elevated moralities could be with errant, earthier experience.

*O*F all Greuze's history paintings the one that provides perhaps the most profound psychological insight into the artist is the small *Lot and His Daughters* (fig. 28), one of his rare religious works. If the conjunction of Greuze's own punishment by the parent Academy and Septimius Severus's tongue-lashing reproach of his wicked son is coincidentally ironic, the Bible's most celebrated story

28

Lot and His Daughters

OIL ON CANVAS, 28 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ IN. (71.6 × 80 CM)

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DÉPARTEMENT DES PEINTURES,
DONATION KAUFMANN ET SCHLAGETER





29

Meditation

ABOUT 1780

OIL ON CANVAS, 53 × 42 IN. (134.6 × 106.7 CM)

THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART, SARASOTA, FLORIDA

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

of incest unconsciously inspired the artist to expose some of the erotic tensions that play through his more famous moral tableaux and dark family scenes. To tell the biblical tale, Greuze cast a trio consisting of a patriarch and two women, one barely postpubescent, the other more mature; but instead of the didactic drama and clothed conflict that are the usual stuff of his compositions, here the protagonists are depicted half-naked, in the exhausted aftermath of forbidden sexual activity. In this atypical scene Greuze explicitly extended, on one level at least, some suggestive overtones of his more conventional representations.

Another way of demonstrating the intensely erotic subtext in Greuze's work is to pair a large oval painting of a young girl in the Ringling Museum (fig. 29) with the original drawing of an undressed figure in the Rhode Island School of Design Museum (fig. 30). The painting, known as

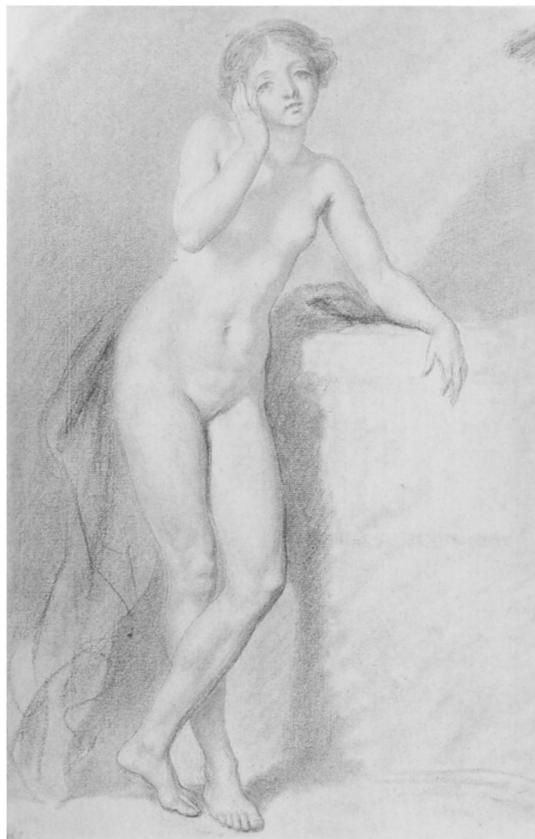
Meditation, has expressive unfinished brushwork and blond tonalities that parallel the Metropolitan's *Aegina* (fig. 27), while the nude study makes obvious the truly exaggerated proportions of the girl's long body—eight times the length of her head—as well as the sensuous curves of hips, face, breasts, and limbs, which in the painting resonate within the surrounding oval. The drawing also explicitly diagrams the architecture or substructure of Greuze's eroticism, a sinuous elegance that looks back to Mannerism and forward to Ingres, and that finds its most effective expressive vehicle in the “virginal voluptuousness” of young women's bodies.

Perhaps the most eloquent and insightful description of the contradictory qualities embodied in the typical Greuze girls and their collapsing clothes was penned by the Goncourt brothers in their *French XVIII Century Painters*:

30

Study of a Nude Girl

RED CHALK AND CHARCOAL, 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ IN. (56.2 × 36.2 CM)
MUSEUM OF ART, RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN, PROVIDENCE
GIFT OF MRS. GUSTAV RADEKE



JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

The peculiar subtlety of this art is in its transformation of the simplicity and heedlessness of a young girl into something sensually inviting. It bestows a mischievous coquetry, a thousand tantalizing creases upon the most virginal attire and yet contrives that it should be still suggestive of chastity. And white, the color dedicated to youth, to the candor of women and the radiant modesty of their dress, becomes, in these pictures, an irritating stimulus, a delicate excitation to licence, an allurements. . . . Consider thoroughly this *ingénue* who was the source of the artist's success, of his fame, and it will strike you that the painter introduced her to an aging world, offered her to the exhausted appetites of the eighteenth century, as a perverted child might be offered to an old man to reawaken his senses.

In contemporary French fiction the contrast, conflict, and confusion between innocence and corruption, between youth and advanced maturity, was racily explored by Choderlos de Laclos in his novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (first published in 1782), a work cited by the Goncourt brothers at the beginning of their chapter on Greuze.

An intriguing and suggestive drawing in the Metropolitan Museum (fig. 31) shows a large number of young women parading children before an old man. This gray-and-brown wash composition is partly structured by echoing ges-

tures: the old man's left arm embracing the child and the woman's left arm on the sill above, or the interlocked right arms of the two young women who gaze upon the sunlit, naked infant being presented just to the left of center. Light, represented by the pure white of the page, streams in from the right window and is also cast raking in the barrel vault to the left rear. Such a foreground frieze of figures and a receding architectural motif were characteristic of Poussin's compositional style, particularly as demonstrated in his widely influential *Death of Germanicus* (Minneapolis Institute of Arts). The finished painting by Greuze in which the subject matter most closely resembles that of this drawing is a curious late work entitled *The Hermit or The Distributor of Rosaries* (fig. 32). In this picture a stern seated old Franciscan friar encircles the left hand of a reverent young woman in white with the first from a chest full of red rosaries. Brightly lit and standing in the center of the composition, she is the culminating cross in a living rosary of girls linked by limbs enacting extravagant expressions of emotion and affection. To enrich the contrast of male and female, youth and age, Greuze has added an epicene assistant holding the chest for the hoary-headed monk. That novice is as pretty as the young women from whom his pure and modest gaze is wholly averted.

31

Domestic Scene

PEN AND BROWN INK, BROWN AND GRAY WASH, OVER TRACES OF BLACK CHALK; 13 × 20 IN. (33 × 50.8 CM)

HARRIS BRISBANE DICK FUND, 1972

1972.224.3





32

The Hermit or The Distributor of Rosaries

ABOUT 1780

OIL ON CANVAS, 44½ × 58 IN. (113 × 147 CM)

PRIVATE COLLECTION, NEW YORK

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

Greuze's depictions of innocence can be analyzed as containing seeds of lust and corruption, but they could also be described as ideal escapes from the rotten realities of his own homelife. As mentioned before, his marriage, marked by Mme Greuze's dissolute behavior and profligate squandering of the large sums he earned from his art, rapidly became unbearable, and his devotion to his two daughters, whom she appears to have neglected, only underlined his ongoing marital misery. *The Angry Wife* in the Metropolitan's collection (fig. 33) is probably the most autobiographical of his domestic dramas; Edgar Munhall has even suggested that it is an accurate recording of the Greuze family interior, connecting the clock, chair, and

mirror with a 1793 inventory of the artist's possessions. This finished drawing, done for an engraving, was executed in black and gray wash over graphite, whose sheen, viewed in a raking light, reveals the ruled lines with which the artist constructed the architecture of the room.

In the drawing, two groups of three figures are disposed on either side of a central axis consisting of chair, table, smoking dish, clock, and mirror. The group on the left, more tightly knit than the Three Graces, comprises the father and, apparently, two daughters. The girls surround him like protective parentheses, and their embracing hands almost appear to provide him with three extra limbs. The opposing trio are totally disjointed. A third young woman,

33

The Angry Wife

BRUSH, BLACK AND GRAY WASH, HEIGHTENED WITH WHITE, OVER TRACES OF GRAPHITE; 20¼ × 24⅞ IN. (51.5 × 63.4 CM)

PURCHASE, JOSEPH PULITZER BEQUEST, 1961

61.1.1





34

Marriage à la Mode, Plate 2

BY WILLIAM HOGARTH
 SECOND STATE, ENGRAVED BY BERNARD BARTON; 14 × 17¾ IN. (35.5 × 44.2 CM)
 HARRIS BRISBANE DICK FUND, 1932

32.35 (9)

possibly the serving girl, wrings her hands behind the table in the gesture of a grieving Magdalen, her shawl rather than her hair spilling down onto an empty plate. Next to her is the crucial perpetrator of the picture's action, the angry wife. Her billowing robes aflutter, she is wide-eyed and well armed; her left hand makes a threatening fist, her right dangerously wields a bottle. Behind her in the thin rectangular opening of the door can be glimpsed the diagonal disposition of a concerned boy and a staircase; its wavy balusters epitomize the upsetting uncertainty that this group gives to the composition as a whole. Whereas the dog under the table in *Domestic Scene* (fig. 31) reflected the heavy burden of age borne by the seated patriarch, in this drawing, it echoes (and also opposes) the anger of the avenging virago. Although the implied narrative is not absolutely clear, the burned food may well have precipitated the wife's anger, causing her to overturn a chair and break a bottle before launching her current offensive. Her phallic glass weapon unconsciously echoes Mme Greuze's most potent punishment against her husband: her recurrent predatory infidelities, often with his young male students. In his divorce petition, Greuze gives an account of an unprovoked attack that bears certain similarities to the woman's crazed assault in the drawing:

We were still sleeping in the same bedroom, when I awoke one night with a start and, by the glow of the night-light, caught sight of Madame Greuze, about to batter my head with a chamber pot. As you can imagine, I remonstrated violently. "If you continue arguing," she said, "I shall scream at the window for the police and tell them you're trying to murder me."

An interesting, if calmer, parallel composition is part of a major work by the man who was England's most celebrated eighteenth-century genre painter, William Hogarth. Like Greuze's *Angry Wife*, the second scene of Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode* series (which the French painter would have known through engravings, fig. 34) also features an overturned chair, and a wife whose arm is cocked—but in languor rather than in anger—holding a small looking glass rather than a large glass bottle. The pose of the accountant, invoking heaven's displeasure on the extravagant young couple, more closely anticipates that of Greuze's wild assailant. Hogarth's use of the series to tell a tale was clearly important to Greuze, whose stories were most frequently set out in pairs of pictures, although he once outlined an ambitious project to paint a kind of visual novel, a complex narrative in twenty-six images (one for each letter of the alphabet). However, the tone Greuze took in that scenario and in his opposing pairs was far removed from the



35

The Dancing Doll

ABOUT 1760

PEN AND INK WITH WASH, HEIGHTENED WITH COLOR OVER BLACK CHALK
ALBERTINA, VIENNA

humorous irony of Hogarth and comes much closer to Rousseau, or to the emotional excesses of English writers like Samuel Richardson in his famous *Clarissa* (1748).

GREUZE'S genre scenes were also distant from the domestic interiors of his distinguished French contemporary Chardin, as one of Greuze's finest drawings indirectly reveals. In *The Dancing Doll* (fig. 35), usually dated early, Greuze has set up a visual contrast worthy of Goya. A crowd of housewives and their children are transfixed by the perfect beauty and magic of a moving doll, manipulated by her dashing master; the doll herself is like a little strayed figure from Chardin, standing stiff and ladylike amidst the waves of Greuze's excited, informal poses. Chardin's detached domestic scenes are redolent of tranquillity and composure, restrained qualities that have dated less dramatically than Greuze's impassioned, over-

blown melodrama. Chardin's women and children are also tightly laced up, and it is to Chardin that the Goncourts contrast Greuze in analyzing how the loosened clothes of his figures constitute a sensual invitation:

The poses are facile, abandoned; the necks project invitingly from the nestling bodies. The dress, the whole attire reinforces the effect by adding to the voluptuous softness of its texture the amorous appeal of its color. Between *Woman*, as represented by Greuze, and *Desire*, there subsists no longer that barrier—the rigid bodice, the sober *fichu*, the stiff, solid, almost conventual dress—which protects the housewives of Chardin; everything floats and flutters, all is cloud-like, capricious, freely flowing about the limbs; the linen seems to frolic with the very charms it is assumed to hide, and Greuze drapes it about his female models so that it titillates them at the small of the arm, at the top of the breasts; and it is no longer the rough household linen, newly washed from the farm laundry and faintly buff in color: it is the linen of amorous undress prompt to fall into folds and creases, the linen of the kind of cap that easily drops off, of those lappets which tremble against the tips of blushing ears, the linen of gauze *fichus* which reveal the

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pink of the skin and palpitate in time with a beating heart, veils designed to be undone with a breath! The lacing of the corsets and brassières, tied with floss silk, is slack; it is a loose kind of attire, unresistant, unattached and ready to float to the floor at first provocation.

So while Chardin's women obtain our approval, it is Greuze's who catch our eye. Can there be a more engaging eighteenth-century portrait than his *Sophie Arnould* (fig. 36)? And lest the creator of this quintessential embodiment of seductive femininity be accused of having turned his subject into a "sex object," let it be said that Mme Arnould,

famed in her own day at least as much for her singing and wit as for her beauty, survives so appealingly because Greuze has also successfully suggested intelligence and experience (qualities notably absent in so many of his wide-eyed female heads) as well as good looks.

Intelligence is perhaps the dominant quality displayed in two more Metropolitan Museum portraits, those of Mme Nicolet (fig. 38) and Princess Gagarine (fig. 39), although it is hard to imagine that the painter depicted either woman at anything less than her "best." Greuze's final female portrait in the collection, of Mlle Montredon (fig. 41), is a pure paean to physical charms.

36

Sophie Arnould

ABOUT 1786

OIL ON CANVAS, 24 × 20 IN. (61 × 51 CM)

REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE TRUSTEES,
THE WALLACE COLLECTION, LONDON





37

Marquise d'Orvilliers

BY JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID

SIGNED AND DATED (LOWER LEFT): L. DAVID 1790

OIL ON CANVAS, 51 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 38 $\frac{3}{8}$ IN. (131.1 × 98.1 CM)

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS

Mme Jean-Baptiste Nicolet got started as an actress playing *ingénue* parts in a theater troupe famed for the audacity and novelty of its varied productions. She later married the director and, after progressing to character roles, became the company manager, a position she held at the time of this portrait. Mme Nicolet, who was painted by Greuze on several occasions, is shown seated, turning the page of a leather-bound book that may well be a sequential mate to either the Rousseau or Molière volumes standing against the wall on her marble-topped desk. Her ample figure—she was well into her forties when this picture was done—fits snugly into her black satin dress. Her face is painted in the looser, suggestive style that Greuze evolved for his late work, and her clothing and hairstyle, particularly when compared with those in a famous portrait by the rising artist Jacques-Louis David (fig. 37), situate this

work in the Revolutionary Period. David has disposed his much younger sitter with grace, but his realism makes no concessions to her plumpness and can be contrasted to the flattering soft focus Greuze applied to the older woman. Greuze's relationship with the Revolution has not been much studied. On the one hand, his humble background and antagonism toward the Academy enabled him to adapt to radical politics without great difficulty; on the other, his own success as a portrait and subject painter was tied to the privileged classes, and serious undermining of their financial well-being necessarily affected his own.

Princess Varvara Nikolaevna Gagarine died at forty and was about half that age when Greuze painted her, probably as a marriage portrait about 1780. She was known for her beauty, and Greuze made his picture a study in softness: gentle waves of golden-brown hair (nearly the same color



38

*Madame Jean-Baptiste Nicolet (Anne Antoinette
Desmoulins, 1743–1817)*

ABOUT 1790

OIL ON WOOD, 25¼ × 21 IN. (64.2 × 53.4 CM)

INSCRIBED (ON BOOKS): OEUVRE/DE/MOLIERE/TOME/III/; OEUVRE/DE/ROUSSEAU

GIFT OF COLONEL AND MRS. JACQUES BALSAN, 1955

55.205.2



39

Princess Varvara Nikolaevna Gagarine
(1762–1802)

ABOUT 1780

OIL ON CANVAS, 31½ × 25 IN. (80 × 63.5 CM)

SIGNED (LOWER CENTER): J. B. GREUZE

GIFT OF MRS. WILLIAM M. HAUPT, FROM THE COLLECTION OF
MRS. JAMES B. HAGGIN, 1965

65.242.3

as her hazel eyes), her superb skin, the ruffled fabric of her dress, delicate roses on the plinth, the tighter curls of her small dog's coat. The corsage of three roses, one in bud, is perhaps a symbol of her fully achieved but still evolving handsome appearance, or even a comment, if the picture is as late as 1793, on her three children, one of whom died

in infancy. Yet for all the attention Greuze paid to her physical attractiveness, the evocation of her inner qualities of alert and perceptive self-possession, expressed in the way her calm, upright carriage bisects the oval that contains her, represents the portraitist's real triumph. Princess Gagarine appears truly, in the French phrase, *bien dans sa peau* (literally,





41

Mademoiselle Montredon

ABOUT 1780

OIL ON CANVAS, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ IN. (61.6 × 51.1 CM)

GIFT OF MRS. WILLIAM M. HAUPT, FROM THE COLLECTION OF
MRS. JAMES B. HAGGIN, 1965

65.242.4

“good in her skin,” that is, happy with herself)—and, one hastens to add, what wonderful skin it is!

Mlle Montredon shares little more than her hairstyle with Princess Gagarine, whose elaborate ruffles appear positively demure alongside Mlle Montredon’s *décolletage*. The flimsy, halfhearted knot around her small, perfectly formed bust just begs to be untied; her silver satin bonnet with its color-coordinated ostrich feather provides an irregular, ironic halo for this fallen angel. Beneath her plucked brows are gray eyes, and her mouth makes a perfect Cupid’s bow. Apart from the creamy expanse of her face, neck, and chest, the strongest sunlight is caught in the sheen of the sleeves covering her arms, which function less as useful appendages than as compositional anchors to the curve of the portrait’s oval. The regular shape of her face is gently and rhythmically tilted backward against the shape of the picture, in contrast to Princess Gagarine’s perfect central, symmetrical diminution of her embracing oval.

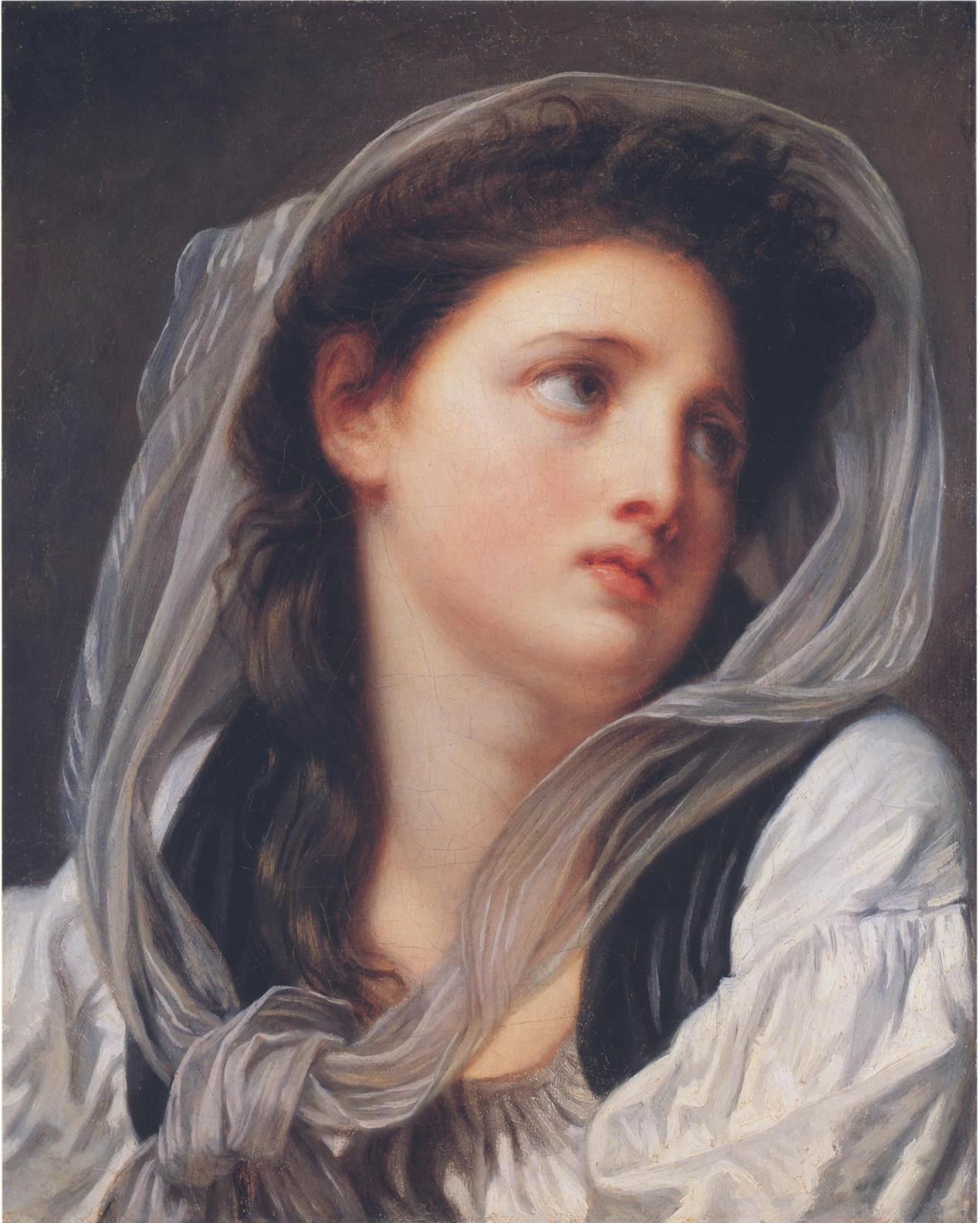
ALTHOUGH oval-shape paintings had existed in earlier art, they enjoyed their greatest vogue in the eighteenth century, particularly in the period 1761–89, which corresponds to the heart of Greuze’s career. He showed an oval portrait in the Salon of 1757 and in all his subsequent appearances before he suspended exhibiting. Two of his most famous works in the Louvre are ovals (see fig. 46), and in the Metropolitan Museum one of his two male portraits and two of his three female portraits are ovals. The reasons for the oval’s special popularity in this period involve a complex association with Rococo decoration and architecture, but on a simple artistic level two important points can be made: first, that, as has already been suggested, the oval is particularly appropriate for portraiture because it is echoed by the shape of the human face contained within; and second, that, like the circle, which was so popular in the Renaissance, the oval denies the artist the mathematical connections and reflections that a rectangle’s corners and flat sides provide for geometrical lines of compositional structure. Therefore the artist is forced to demonstrate his or her virtuosity in an instinctive, felicitous inner sequence of curves and countercurves that must relate in an occult balance to the outer shape of the picture.

In *Contemplation* (fig. 42) Greuze employed a rectangular canvas, but created an interior diagonal oval of his own with

the billowing head scarf of the raven-haired beauty. So lively is the motion of this veil-like covering that it might have knotted itself. The young woman’s wide eyes and soft mouth are part of a sequence of curls and curves that include her ears, neck, throat, dark tresses, and folds of clothing as well as the encircling scarf. Her small shoulders, which just squeeze into the vertical confines of the composition, are covered by a linen blouse given greater substance through impasto. Greuze enlivened the shadow of her right nostril with a touch of bright orange, a coloristic insight he may have taken from Rubens. The painter often bestowed allegorical titles on his pictures of women (see also fig. 29), although this one may have been added later; if the woman’s gaze is rapt, the orchestrated activity of her appearance does not suggest thoughtful tranquillity.

There was little peaceful calm in Greuze’s later career, even after he managed to separate from his ferocious wife. Rendered out-of-date by the energetic innovations of the young David, he suffered a fall from fashion. The lack of a happy ending to his life may have inspired Greuze’s attempt to create one in his work, a late picture entitled *The First Furrow or a Tiller Turning Over the Plow to His Son, in the Presence of His Family* (fig. 43), for which the Metropolitan Museum possesses an important study (fig. 44). Exhibited in the Salon of 1801, this painting reflects a metaphorical return by Greuze to his native Saône, represented as a site of pastoral celebration. In the drawing the figures are noticeably elongated, as in the late landscapes of Claude, who may have provided some inspiration for the background. The leaping dog at the lower left is a nursing bitch and possibly serves as a symbol of fecundity. All is light and joy in this crowded procession, which resembles nothing so much as the happy finale of an opera, with musical accompaniment provided by the piper to the left. The drawing is faintly squared on a large scale for its transfer to canvas.

The finished painting shoves the father compromisingly close to his son, adds an extra team of oxen, and aligns the posterior of the woman pointing the way with those of the last two beasts. *The First Furrow* was Greuze’s attempt to recapture one final time the earlier triumphs of his “moral pictures” and, with its expansive setting, represents an enterprising departure for such an aged artist. But even if its sunny, simple patriotism was appropriate to its period, the painting lacks the bite of his less-populated family dramas and serves mainly as a curtain call of the character types he had employed in the past.



42

Contemplation

ABOUT 1790

OIL ON CANVAS, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 12 $\frac{1}{4}$ IN. (41 × 32.4 CM)

BEQUEST OF MISS ADELAIDE MILTON DE GROOT (1876–1967), 1967

67.187.72



43

*The First Furrow or a Tiller Turning Over the Plow to
His Son, in the Presence of His Family*

EXHIBITED AT THE SALON OF 1801

OIL ON CANVAS, 46½ × 58¼ IN. (118 × 148 CM)

PUSHKIN STATE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, MOSCOW



44

Study for The First Furrow

BRUSH AND GRAY WASH OVER GRAPHITE, FAINTLY SQUARED IN GRAPHITE

15½ × 19½ IN. (39.3 × 49.5 CM)

VAN DAY TRUEX FUND, 1983

1983.427



45

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

1777

PASTEL ON PAPER, 31½ × 25½ IN. (80 × 64.1 CM)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
DIPLOMATIC RECEPTIONS ROOMS, WASHINGTON, D.C.

JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

ALL through his career Greuze's gifts as a portraitist remained undiminished, and he was commissioned at different periods to paint two of the most famous faces of his century: Benjamin Franklin (fig. 45) in 1777 and Napoleon Bonaparte in 1800. Although the oval pastel of the septuagenarian Franklin and the full-length painting of Napoleon (Château de Versailles), who looks little more than a boy, cannot be compared in terms of style or date, one common strand that unites the two is Greuze's refusal to represent these famous sitters simply as powerful political presences; he insisted on portraying them as vulnerable and human.

At the time of the Napoleon portrait, Greuze was living in poverty. Requesting an advance on a government commission in 1801, the painter wrote plaintively: "I have lost everything, except talent and courage." Napoleon himself apparently did not know of Greuze's indigence, if an

apocryphal anecdote is to be believed. According to this story, Napoleon said, on being informed of the painter's ignominious end: "Dead? Poor and neglected! Why did he not speak? I would gladly have given him a Sèvres jug filled with gold for every copy made of his *Broken Jug*."

Besides remaining his central artistic subject, women also provided Greuze with most of his pupils. What may have begun as a defense against Mme Greuze's untoward behavior with his male students became almost an atelier tradition. Among the notable women who trained under Greuze were Jeanne-Philiberte Ledoux, daughter of the famous architect, and Constance Mayer, mistress and collaborator of Pierre-Paul Prud'hon; the celebrated painter Marie Vigée-Lebrun also profited from Greuze's wise counsel.

Louis Béroud's wonderfully deft painting of copyists at the Louvre (fig. 46) testifies to the enduring appeal Greuze's work held for women. Over a hundred years after the death

46

The Louvre Museum: The Copyists

BY LOUIS BÉROUD, 1909

OIL ON CANVAS, 28 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ IN. (72.7 × 91.7 CM)

PRIVATE COLLECTION



JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE

of the artist, two Belle Époque students take a break from their learning labors in France's great museum. Three visible oval canvases—two leaning against the wall, the other on the easel of the seated painter—are being employed for copies of two of Greuze's celebrated compositions: *The Broken Jug*, whose numerous imitations Napoleon had remarked upon a century before, and *The Milkmaid*; Greuze's works flank Watteau's masterpiece, *Embarkation for Cythera*, in the Grande Galerie. The costumes of the two painters, who pose with mature aplomb, consist of white long-sleeved blouses, modestly buttoned up to the neck, and floor-length black skirts, thus providing a complete contrast to the provocatively disheveled adolescents suspended in gilded ovals behind.

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PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS

Color photography of Metropolitan Museum of Art works by Malcolm Varon; black and white photography by The Metropolitan Museum of Art Photograph Studio. Other sources: Albertina, fig. 35; Art Resource, fig. 1; Bibliothèque Nationale, fig. 19; Claude O'Sughrue, fig. 6; Frick Collection, fig. 15; John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, fig. 29; Musée Cognacq-Jay, fig. 14; Musée du Louvre, fig. 28; Pierpont Morgan Library, fig. 2; Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, figs. 5, 43; Réunion des musées nationaux, figs. 17, 25, 37; Rhode Island School of Design, fig. 30; Schecter Lee, fig. 20; United States Department of State, fig. 45; Wallace Collection, fig. 36; Worcester Art Museum, fig. 9; and private collections.

NOTES

Unless otherwise stated, quoted material is taken from sources listed in the Selected Bibliography. P. 13: "He is a young man. . . ." *Correspondance des Directeurs de l'Académie de France à Rome*, vol. 11 (1754–63), Paris, 1901, p. 168, no. 5207 (December 22, 1756). P. 33: "I learned through a close friend. . . ." A. Bruel, ed., *Les Carnets de David d'Angers*, Paris, 1958, vol. 1, p. 254 (entry dated February 14, 1847). P. 39: "We were still sleeping. . . ." The artist's account of his marriage in *Archives de l'Art français*, vol. 2, Paris, 1852–53, pp. 153–172.

At almost the same time that Bérourd's picture was executed, Florence Heyward, in a guide to the Louvre's most important paintings, cited these two works by Greuze as possessing "undeniable charm." In our own day a female—or male—painter or critic would be far less inclined to render Greuze enthusiastic praise or the homage of a careful copy. But this artist—deeply tormented, widely influential, always gifted, often inspired—who not long ago was christened by art historian Pierre Rosenberg *le grand Greuze*, reveals in his works complex and contradictory images of considerable historical significance and enduring appeal, which are still worthy of our analysis and appreciation.

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