

# FRANÇOIS BOUCHER

(Paris 1703 - Paris 1770)

## *Diana and Callisto*

pen and brown ink over black chalk with touches of grey-brown wash, on paper washed pink,  
within brown ink framing lines, with some retouching by a later hand  
28.5 x 41.4 cm (11½ x 16⅓ in)

**T**HE NYMPH CALLISTO WAS A FAVOURITE companion of the virgin goddess Diana. Callisto had vowed to remain chaste and to follow in the ways of Diana and she loyally accompanied Diana hunting as her constant companion. However, once Jupiter had caught a glimpse of the beautiful Callisto, he fell in love with her. Knowing that Diana had warned Callisto of the deceitful ways of men and gods, Jupiter cleverly disguised himself as Diana, *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana and the Nymph Callisto*, also by François Boucher, illustrates this scene (fig. 1). Once disguised, Jupiter then seduced Callisto and consequently she conceived a child. The subject of Diana and Callisto was drawn by Boucher on a number of occasions, but none of the studies appear to be preparatory for a painting or print. An elaborate *Diana and Callisto* in black chalk was sold in London at Christie's, in 1976, and another, executed in a similar technique to the present drawing, was previously in the Veil-Picard collection and sold in Paris, Artcurial, 19 December, 2006. The delicate, and highly distinctive combination of brown pen and wash over a paper washed pink was used by Boucher in a small group of drawings which date from the 1740s to the mid 1760s: see, for example, the *Young Garden Girl*, c.1760-5 in the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, or the *Nativity*, c.1761.

Since the publication in the mid-nineteenth century of Edmund and Jules de Goncourt's famous essays, including *L'art du Dix-Huitième Siècle*, Boucher has been considered by many to be the quintessential painter of eighteenth-century France. His voluptuous mythologies and elegant pastorals have been greatly admired as typical of the Rococo style. Boucher worked successfully in several genres: he treated mythological themes in different ways either with a delicate and very modern eroticism, as in *The Bath of Diana* (1742, Louvre, Paris); or otherwise with robust splendour, as in *The Rising of the Sun* (1753, Wallace Collection, London). He also painted scenes of contemporary fashionable life, including the delightful *La Marchande de odes* (1746, National Museum, Stockholm). He was a stylish portrait painter and his images of his most famous patron Mme de Pompadour are widely considered his best. He also painted landscapes in a sweetened version of seventeenth-century Dutch style. He occasionally painted devotional subjects, among them the graceful *Nativity* painted for Mme de Pompadour's chapel at Bellevue (1750, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon). In all of these modes the predominant atmosphere is one of happy escapism, supported by an easy grace of style, a luscious touch, and shimmering, nacreous colouring.

In a career supported by wealthy private patrons, such as Louis XV and Mme de Pompadour, Boucher produced not only easel paintings but also cartoons for the Beauvais and Gobelins tapestry factories, made designs for Sèvres porcelain, painted decorative schemes for Versailles and Fontainebleau, and designed sets for theatre and opera. By his own reckoning he made more

than 1,000 paintings and oil sketches, many of which are in the Wallace Collection, London. Boucher was granted the title of *Premier Peintre du Roi* on the death of Carle van Loo (1705-1765) (see inventory).

Boucher was born in Paris and trained with the engraver L. Cars, contributing to the scheme to engrave the works of Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), whose art exercised a formative influence. He also worked in the studio of François Lemoyne (1688-1737), one of the chief protagonists of the colouristic, Rubéniste tendency in France. In 1723, Boucher won the Académie Royale's *Grand Prix*, but it was not until 1727 that he left for Rome, at his own expense and in the company of Carle and Louis-Michel van Loo. There he fell under the spell of the decorative painters of the Baroque: Albani (1578-1660), Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669), and Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Returning to Paris in 1731, he was received as a member of the Academy in 1734 on his presentation of *Rinaldo and Armida* (Louvre, Paris). By 1736 his mature style was fully formed, altering little during his long and successful career.



François Boucher, *Jupiter and Callisto*, Pushkin Museum, Moscow (Figure 1)

