

*Madame Bergeret*

possibly 1766

oil on canvas, 143.5 × 105.4 (56½ × 41½)

Samuel H. Kress Collection

*Inscription*

Center left in black paint: F. Boucher / 1746

*Distinguishing Marks and Labels*On stretcher: two NGA labels; label, encapsulated in mylar, "5578"; written, "11558<sup>F</sup>"

*Technical Notes:* The support consists of a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with strips sewn to the top and right edges. The top strip is 8–9 cm wide, while the vertical strip is 5–6.5 cm wide. The painting was lined and secured to a new stretcher by Stephen Pichetto in 1943. Stretcher creases indicate that there was a previous stretcher with a single horizontal crossbar 4.5 cm wide. There are no tacking margins. The cusping on all four edges of the main section of fabric does not match the cusping on the top strip, suggesting that the strips were added after the main section was primed. The X-radiographs show that a stiff-bristle brush was used to prime the main section and top strip, but a palette knife was used for the vertical strip. Through interstices in the paint craquelure, however, a white ground layer covered by a pale beige layer is found over the entire support. The continuation of the craquelure over the strips and the double ground over the surface confirm that the strips were added before Boucher began to paint. Boucher applied fluid layers of more opaque paint, over which he added transparent glazes. There is low impasto in the flowers. There are hot red highlights on Madame Bergeret's fingers and in the rose petals and leaves and gold highlights on the borders of her dress. The signature and date are not original because they have been painted over an old tear in the fabric support.

The painting is in good condition with a few exceptions. The tear over which the signature was painted measures 30 cm long and extends from the left edge through the sitter's dress. Another tear, 8 cm long, is located to the right of the first tear. A series of vertical scratches is located in the lower left corner. The vertical added strip has been damaged more than the rest of the painting, as it bears multiple small losses to the paint and ground layers. During the last treatment in 1943, Stephen Pichetto relined the painting, removed a discolored varnish, and restored it. The heavy varnish applied during the treatment has become cloudy and discolored.

*Provenance:* Pierre Jacques Onésyme Bergeret de Grancourt [1715–1785], husband of the sitter, Paris; by inheritance to his elder son, Pierre Jacques Bergeret de Grancourt [1742–1807], Cassan; by inheritance to his stepson (the son of his wife, Catherine Julie Xavier Poisson de la Chabeaussière, by her first marriage), Ange Philibert de la Girennerie, Cassan; by inheritance to his aunt (a sister of his

mother), Barbe Françoise Victoire Poisson de la Chabeaussière Cotillon de Torcy; by inheritance to her daughter, Françoise Julie Cotillon de Torcy Le Bos de Sainte Croix; by inheritance to her daughter, Angélique Le Bos de Sainte Croix, comtesse Fontaine de Resbecq; by inheritance to the Resbecq family; sold by 1920 to (Wildenstein & Co., Inc., Paris, New York, and London); sold 1942 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York.<sup>1</sup>

*Exhibited:* *Recent Additions to the Kress Collection*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1946, no. 768. *François Boucher in North American Collections: One Hundred Drawings*, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Art Institute of Chicago, 1973–1974, unnumbered brochure (shown only in Washington). *François Boucher*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum; Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art, 1982, no. 41. *François Boucher: 1703–1770*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Detroit Institute of Arts; Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 1986–1987, no. 52, as *Portrait of Mme Bergeret(?)*.





Cat. 6. François Boucher, *Madame Bergeret*



This magnificent portrait, first published in 1942 by Georges Wildenstein,<sup>2</sup> generally has been thought to represent Marguerite Josèphe Richard, the first wife of Pierre Jacques Onésyme Bergeret (later called Bergeret de Grancourt) (1715–1785), one of François Boucher's most enthusiastic patrons and the first recorded owner of the painting.<sup>3</sup> It depicts a young woman, resplendent in a full-length gray satin gown, standing in an intimate corner of a garden. A bright bow is tied to her bodice, a spray of flowers is pinned to her sleeve, and a simple straw hat hangs at her side, held by a ribbon tied to her elbow. Her powdered hair, neatly pulled back, is adorned with more flowers; a delicate lace ruff highlights her neck, and her sole piece of jewelry is a pearl bracelet with a cameo portrait. Despite its splendor, her costume is meant to suggest the informal wear of a country girl or shepherdess.<sup>4</sup> The setting reinforces the countrified air of the sitter: she stands in a corner of an overgrown bower or garden, the rampant foliage providing shelter and shade. A wooden bench, visible at the left edge of the composition, is

Fig. 1. François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, c. 1750, oil on canvas, Paris, Musée du Louvre



balanced at the right by a stone urn, on which the woman gently rests a hand, her fingers grasping a rose.

There seems little reason to doubt the traditional identification of the sitter as Madame Bergeret. As Colin Eisler astutely observed, the sitter's rustic, if elegant, costume should be understood as a witty pun on the woman's name, which is close to the French word for shepherdess, *bergère*.<sup>5</sup> There is also the provenance of the painting, which can be traced through Bergeret de Grancourt's heirs until it was sold to Wildenstein around 1920. An inventory of Bergeret de Grancourt's possessions, drawn up at his death in 1785, included several portraits of Madame Bergeret by or after Boucher and other artists. Wildenstein identified this painting as that listed under no. 22, recorded hanging in a small gallery just off the salon. As was customary for family portraits, the presence of the work was noted but not appraised.<sup>6</sup> Although the inventory did not specify which Madame Bergeret was represented (Bergeret had remarried twice after the death of his first wife), the date visible at the lower left of the painting, 1746, logically suggested to Wildenstein that the sitter had to be the first Madame Bergeret, Marguerite Josèphe Richard, whom Bergeret de Grancourt had married in 1741.<sup>7</sup> The portrait was inherited by their first son, Pierre Jacques Bergeret de Grancourt (1742–1807).

The identification and dating of the National Gallery of Art's portrait was accepted until 1986, when Alastair Laing raised doubts.<sup>8</sup> He pointed out that the portrait was not listed in an inventory dated 1751, compiled on the death of the purported sitter,<sup>9</sup> nor was she identified as *feu* (the late) in her husband's inventory of 1785, which suggests that the sitter was still alive.<sup>10</sup> This statement must have been an oversight, however, for the portrait could not have been of the third, still-living Madame Bergeret, Jeanne Vignier, since Bergeret had married her in 1777, seven years after Boucher's death (Bergeret's second wife, Louise Mélanie de Lévy, died in 1773).<sup>11</sup> Yet, as Laing noted, the date of 1746 inscribed on the portrait seems improbably early given Boucher's relationship with Bergeret, who did not become a major patron until the 1750s.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, a date of 1746 would make *Madame Bergeret* Boucher's first full-length portrait and thus a remarkably accomplished effort for an artist who was not wholly at ease in the genre.<sup>13</sup> Such an early date is all the more problematic given the close relationship of this portrait to several of Boucher's representations of his favorite sitter, the marquise de Pompadour.

Boucher painted some nine portraits of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson (1721–1764), marquise de Pompadour and mistress of Louis xv, in a variety of settings and attitudes. The portrait of Madame Bergeret relates to several of these in different ways. Its pose and glance—though not its outdoor setting—are similar to those in an oil sketch of Pompadour (fig. 1), which has been connected to a large finished portrait (location unknown) commissioned in 1750.<sup>14</sup> In both paintings the distinctive doll-like presentations of the sitter are remarkably alike: her head perched on a delicate lace ruff, the corsage pinned to her shoulder, one hand grasping the folds of a voluminous dress and the other unconsciously feeling for an object (in the case of Pompadour, the keys of a harpsichord).<sup>15</sup> The garden setting, in contrast, closely resembles those appearing in two other portraits of Pompadour. The first is

a small, finished portrait dated 1758, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 2), where the marquise is represented seated in an overgrown bower, looking up from her reading toward the left of the composition, much as Madame Bergeret glances out of her garden retreat;<sup>16</sup> and the second is a slightly larger 1759 portrait in the Wallace Collection, London (fig. 3), in which Pompadour appears in a similar though more elaborate costume standing in an equally sylvan setting, with abundant foliage surrounding her and roses strewn about. The green bench at the left edge of the second portrait is comparable to, if not an exact duplicate of, the one that appears in the National Gallery's painting.<sup>17</sup>

These portraits of the marquise de Pompadour, all painted in the 1750s and bearing similarities of pose and setting to the portrait of Madame Bergeret, present a problem to the traditional reading of the National Gallery's portrait. As Laing was the first to point out, although Boucher frequently reused figures and motifs in his compositions, it seems unlikely that he would have reemployed the pose, format, and setting of a portrait of Madame Bergeret, first created in 1746, for several representations of the king's mistress,

Boucher's most important patron. Laing notes that it would have been doubly insulting to the marquise, since Madame Bergeret was the wife of a prominent financier, a class from which Pompadour had come but sought to distance herself.<sup>18</sup> One is left with the unlikely scenario that in 1746, years before his association with Boucher, Bergeret de Grancourt commissioned a portrait of his wife, which the artist, despite his complete inexperience in full-length portraiture at that time, accomplished with singular success; and furthermore, that he then adapted this design (still feeling it necessary to work out the composition in oil sketches<sup>19</sup>) to several portraits of the marquise de Pompadour.

The answer to this riddle likely lies in the date inscribed on the portrait. Again, it was Laing who first speculated that the date at the center left edge—1746—was spurious, an observation confirmed by technical analysis.<sup>20</sup> To judge from craquelure patterns and overpainting, it is clear that both the date and the signature are later additions, probably strengthening an original inscription that had been damaged by a tear in the canvas. This leaves open the possibility that the painting was produced later than

Fig. 2. François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1758, oil on canvas, London, Victoria and Albert Museum



Fig. 3. François Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*, 1759, oil on canvas, London, Wallace Collection





has generally been recognized, perhaps after the first portrait of Madame de Pompadour of 1750, now known only through oil sketches (fig. 1). It might have been produced around 1751, shortly before the first Madame Bergeret died at the age of thirty, an age not at all incompatible with the young woman in the portrait.

Yet despite its clear relationship to the 1750 portrait of Pompadour, the National Gallery's portrait is closer still — in costume, garden setting, and handling of brushwork, particularly in the facture of the draperies and foliage — to the portraits of the marquise produced in the late 1750s (figs. 2, 3). Nor is its style inconsistent with even later works, leaving open the possibility that it could have been painted as late as the mid-1760s.<sup>21</sup> Assigning a date in the 1760s would solve several problems: during that decade, unlike the 1740s, Bergeret de Grancourt was actively patronizing Boucher, and this close relationship might have helped in convincing the painter to work in a genre that was not his custom. One might even specify a particular year, 1766, the date of Bergeret's marriage to his second wife, Louise Mélanie de Lévy (d. 1773).<sup>22</sup> It seems more than plausible that the current date visible on the portrait, 1746, was based on a misreading of a damaged authentic date of 1766 than one of 1750 or 1751.<sup>23</sup> As Laing first proposed, the prominent and exquisitely painted roses — symbols of love and popular in marriage portraits — suggest that the painting may have been commissioned on the occasion of the Bergerets' wedding in 1766.<sup>24</sup> With this hypothesis in mind, it is less surprising that Boucher would have adapted a pose used in his 1750 portrait of Madame de Pompadour — a composition for which, it should be noted, he needed to make two oil studies (see fig. 1) — for his portrayal of Madame Bergeret rather than the other way around. Pompadour died in 1764, so there would have been nothing to keep Boucher from reusing the pose and setting of his earlier portraits of her.

The identification of the sitter in the National Gallery's portrait as the second Madame Bergeret must remain speculative. No representations of her have been found with which to compare Boucher's painting (which very likely was somewhat idealized). A portrait of such scale, beauty, and intimacy suggests a woman who was well loved and provided for. Little is known about Bergeret's relationship with his second wife, although in 1770 (the year of Boucher's death) he fathered a daughter with the family governess, Jeanne Vignier, whom he would later marry.<sup>25</sup> If this portrait was indeed commissioned in celebration of Bergeret de Grancourt's second wedding, it was clearly a time when he still had eyes only for his wife.

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## Notes

1. For further clarification, see the discussion by Alastair Laing in New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 229–233.
2. Wildenstein n.d. [1942], 1–4, repro.
3. See Wildenstein 1961, 2; Darras 1933, 79–81. See also L'Isle-Adam and Grasse 2001–2002, 14.
4. For similar costumes see Los Angeles 1983, no. 14, pl. 16; no. 45, pl. 9.
5. Eisler 1977, 320.
6. “A l'égard du portrait de Madame Bergeret par Boucher, il n'en a été fait aucune prisee comme portrait de famille, pourquoy Mémoire” (Regarding the portrait of Madame Bergeret by Boucher, since it is a family portrait it is mentioned for posterity but not given any value). Wildenstein 1961, 66.
7. Marguerite Joséphe Richard came from prominent families. Her grandfather was Louis de Boullongne (1654–1733), a prominent artist who had been named *première peintre du roi* in 1725; her stepfather was Jean Pierre Richard, *receveur-général* of finance and a lawyer to Louis xv. Moreover, her brother was the celebrated dilettante-priest and *amateur* Jean Claude Richard, abbé de Saint-Non (1727–1791), who would become an important patron of the arts himself (see Wildenstein 1969). She would have been approximately twenty-six at the time Boucher supposedly painted her. She bore two sons and two daughters who did not survive childhood, and she died in 1751 (see Wildenstein n.d. [1942], 2; Wildenstein 1961, 40, 43; Darras 1933, 79, who does not mention the daughters). The inventory mentions five other portraits of Madame Bergeret by Boucher and other artists (nos. 12, 19, 22, 30, 40), but in only one case (no. 12, by an unnamed artist) is the sitter specifically identified as one of the three Bergeret wives (“*première épouse dudit feu sieur Bergeret*”). Probably it was so indicated in this case to avoid confusion with the third Madame Bergeret, in whose bedroom the portrait hung (Wildenstein 1961, 62).
8. New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 229–233, no. 52.
9. For a description of this inventory, see Wildenstein 1961, 41, 42, and especially 43.
10. New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 231.
11. On Bergeret's three wives, see Darras 1933, 79–81.
12. On this point, see Wildenstein 1961, 43.
13. Although Boucher was an enthusiastic and successful painter of all genres (except still life), he was not a prolific portraitist. Alexandre Ananoff (1976a) catalogues fewer than twenty, of which fifteen are of women, in an oeuvre that numbers more than seven hundred pictures.
14. Uncatalogued by Ananoff 1976a; for a full discussion, see Laing, in New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, no. 59; Wine, in Versailles, Munich, and London 2002–2003, 144–145, no. 25.
15. Another version of the sketch, also by Boucher (Waddesdon Manor, England, Rothschild Collection), depicts Pompadour, like Madame Bergeret, holding a straw hat in her right hand. Ananoff 1976a, 2: no. 520; Laing, in New York, Detroit,

- and Paris 1986–1987, fig. 170; Wine, in Versailles, Munich, and London 2002–2003, 146–147, no. 26. For recent synthetic accounts of Boucher's portraits of Pompadour, see Goodman 2000; London 2002–2003.
16. Ananoff 1976a, 2: no. 496.
  17. Ananoff 1976a, 2: no. 522.
  18. New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 232–233. Laing raised the possibility that the National Gallery's portrait could represent the young marquise de Pompadour. He speculated that one of its owners, Barbe Françoise Victoire Poisson de la Chabeaussière Cotillon de Torcy, may have been related to Pompadour's descendant, the Poisson de Malvoisin. Furthermore, a small version—perhaps a copy—of the portrait (formerly Paris, Baronne Alexandrine de Rothschild Collection; photograph in NGA curatorial files) was long identified as a portrait of Pompadour. Given the lack of resemblance between *Madame Bergeret* and known portraits of the king's mistress, this seems highly unlikely, and Laing no longer considers it a possibility (letter to the author, April 20, 1997).
  19. Eisler 1977, 320, n. 4, noted a drawing (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, NM Anck. 64) that he considered a copy after a possible study for the painting of Madame Bergeret. This drawing and its original, however, have been connected with Boucher's tapestry cartoons for *The Noble Pastoral*, painted in 1748 (Bjurström 1982, no. 865).
  20. New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 232–233. An examination summary dated November 16, 1990, in NGA conservation files, concludes that “the signature and the date are later additions; they have been painted over an old tear in the fabric support.” This report confirms an earlier analysis by Sarah Fisher (memo, April 22, 1987): “It could be seen under the microscope that paint strokes in the ‘7’ and the ‘4’ of the 1746 go over crackle, suggesting that they were painted after the crackle had formed, and therefore are not original.”
  21. See, for example, *Shepherd and Shepherdess Reposing (The School of Love)*, 1761 (London, Wallace Collection; Ananoff 1976a, 2: no. 543), where there is a similar treatment of the draperies, the straw hat, and the flowers; or the treatment of the background tree and the handling of the roses in *Le bouton de rose* (Ananoff 1976a, 2: no. 602), signed and dated 1765.
  22. The daughter of Michel Jacques de Lévy, grand bailli d'épée du comté de Dourdan and trésorier-payeur des gages des officiers de la Chambre des Comptes de Paris; they were married on February 4, 1766 (see Darras 1933, 80; Wildenstein 1961, 46).
  23. Careful inspection of the date shows that the “7” and the “4” are painted over old craquelure, whereas the “1” and the “6” are not, leaving open the possibility that a restorer misread an original inscription of “1766” as “1746” (see n. 20).
  24. New York, Detroit, and Paris 1986–1987, 233.
  25. Shortly after the death of his second wife in 1773, Bergeret left for an extended voyage to Italy, taking Jeanne with him, along with the painter Jean Honoré Fragonard and his wife (see Darras 1933, 80–81); they married in August 1777.

#### References

- [1942] n.d. Wildenstein: 1–4, repro.
- 1944 *Art Digest*: 5.
- 1944 Cairns and Walker: 116, color repro.
- 1944 *Illustrated London News*: 249, repro.
- 1944 *The Magazine Antiques*: 288, repro.
- 1944a Frankfurter: 78, no. 81.
- 1945 NGA: 164, repro.
- 1948 New York: 4.
- 1956 Einstein: 227–228, 225, repro.
- 1957 Shapley: 34, pl. 95.
- 1959 NGA: 363, repro.
- 1961 Seymour: 185, no. 176
- 1961 Wildenstein: 40, 43, 46, 54, 42, repro.
- 1963 Walker: 317, repro.
- 1964 Walker: 309, repro.
- 1965 Cooke: 71, color repro., 298, repro.
- 1965b NGA: 18.
- 1966 Cairns and Walker: 312, color repro., 313, repro.
- 1968 NGA: 10, repro.
- 1971 Slatkin: 286.
- 1975 Walker: 336, no. 449.
- 1976a Ananoff, 1:410, no. 301.
- 1976b Ananoff: 23.
- 1977 Eisler: 319–320, fig. 284.
- 1979 Watson: 85, pl. 73.
- 1980 Ananoff: no. 312, 110, pl. 28.
- 1982 Tokyo and Kumamoto: 235–236, no. 41.
- 1985 NGA: 58, repro.
- 1986 Brunel: 241–243, fig. 199, pl. 28.
- 1986–87 New York, Detroit, and Paris: 229–233, no. 52.
- 1992 NGA: 169, repro.