

## Notes

1. Georges Wildenstein wrote to Fern Rusk Shapley that his father had purchased the paintings from the marquis des Isnards, whose unwritten family tradition was that they had owned the pair since they were painted (letter of June 21, 1948, NGA curatorial files). The “CA” numbers on the stretchers of both paintings, and the corresponding prospectus for the pair (in NGA curatorial files) indicate that they were on consignment with M. Knoedler & Co. at some time during the Simpsons’ ownership.
2. “[D]es plus agréables,” Leroy de Senneville sale, Desmarest, Paris, April 5, 1780, no. 56; quoted in Rosenberg 1989, 127 (Wildenstein 1960, 271).
3. See Rosenberg 1989, 103.
4. Wildenstein 1960, 19.
5. See Cuzin 1987–1988, nos. 249–251; Rosenberg 1989, nos. 157–160.
6. Wildenstein 1960, 271. For the gouaches (Ananoff 1961–1970, 2: nos. 1000, 1001), which belonged to the important collector marshal de Saincy (his sale, Paris, April 29, 1789, and days following, lot 79), see Grasse 1995, 32–33. Of the extant paintings, Janinet’s prints are closest to the Simpson versions, although they do not reproduce them exactly. A print after *Love the Sentinel* was also made by Simon Charles Miger in 1779; all three prints are reproduced in Rosenberg 1989, 102, nos. 284a, 284b, 285a.
7. “Sur buisson / Le papillon / Voit-il la rose, / Il s’y repose. / Est-il heureux / Amant frivole / Soudain il vole / A d’autres jeux” (Portalis 1889, 102, 197–198). The lines are from “Eclogue,” in *Oeuvres choisies de Parny* (Paris, 1826), 306–310. These works also reminded the Goncourts of the poetry of Parny (Goncourt 1880–1884, 2:326).

## References

- 1880–1884 Goncourt, 2:326.  
 1889 Portalis: 62, 102, 270.  
 1906 Nolhac: 156.  
 1907 Dayot and Vaillat: possibly 14, no. 108, repro. (*Love as Folly*).  
 1948 New York: 4.  
 1956 Réau: 146 (*Love as Folly*).  
 1960 Wildenstein: 270–271, nos. 319, 320, figs. 142, 143.  
 1965b NGA: 51.  
 1968 NGA: 44, repro.  
 1972 Wildenstein and Mandel: nos. 338, 344.  
 1975 NGA: 132, repro.  
 1985 NGA: 158, repro.  
 1987–1988 Cuzin: 308, nos. 254, 255.  
 1989 Rosenberg: 102, nos. 286, 287.

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1960.6.12

## The Happy Family

c. 1775

oil on canvas, oval, 53.9 × 65.1 (21 ¼ × 25 ⅞)

Timken Collection

### Distinguishing Marks and Labels

On stretcher: two NGA labels; label printed with “11517”; label with penciled inscription “63 Fragonard”; double impression of an inked stamp with a “7”

*Technical Notes:* The painting is secured to an eight-member oval stretcher with inset horizontal and vertical crossbars. The stretcher is probably original to the painting. The primary support is a loosely woven, medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. The painting has been lined, and the original tacking margins remain intact. The support was prepared with a double ground consisting of a red layer beneath a gray layer. The paint film is thin, and much of the foreground is painted in dark brown glazes with thin blocks of opaque white colors pulled over them. Opaque paints were also used in the dark architectural background.

The condition of the painting is generally good. In a past restoration prior to its acquisition, the painting was selectively cleaned. The varnish was left on the dark passages but removed from the lighter areas. A subsequent layer of varnish was applied, and all of the varnish on the painting has darkened and yellowed.

*Provenance:* Possibly collection of Monsieur Servat, 1777, or possibly (sale of Comtesse du Barry, Radix de Sainte Foy, La Ferté, et al., Paillet at Hôtel d’Aligre, Paris, February 17, 1777, no. 55); purchased by Aubert. Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt [1747–1827]. Poilleux collection, Paris. Eduardo Guinle, Rio de Janeiro. Nicolas Ambatielos, London. William R. Timken [1866–1949], New York, by 1935; by inheritance to his widow, Lillian Guyer Timken [1881–1959], New York.<sup>1</sup>

*Exhibited:* *Exposition de tableaux anciens principalement de l’école française du XVII<sup>e</sup> et du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Galerie Wildenstein, Paris, 1912, no. 16. *French Painting and Sculpture of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935–1936, no. 49. *Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition*, Cleveland Museum of Art, 1936, no. 59. *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Altes Museum, Berlin, 2003–2004, no. 79.



Cat. 36. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Happy Family*



*The Happy Family* must have been one of Fragonard's more popular compositions, for it is known in numerous variants and was engraved twice.<sup>2</sup> As is often the case when more than one version of a picture exists, the early provenance of any one is difficult to establish. The dimensions of the example in the National Gallery of Art are very close to those of a painting that appeared in a 1777 sale, which combined the collections of the comtesse du Barry and Radix de Sainte-Foy, among others.<sup>3</sup> Another version, however, now in the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (fig. 1), is of similar size and has equal claim to being that painting. Complicating the matter, the version reproduced in Nicolas Delaunay's (1739–1792) engraving, issued in 1777, belonged — according to the inscription on the print — to a “Monsieur Servat.”<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Fragonard's two paintings are identical enough in composition and details — although very different in tone and color — that it is impossible to determine which one was the model for the engraving. It is conceivable that a third, smaller, version (Palm Beach, Florida, Palm Beach Atlantic University), served this purpose.<sup>5</sup> The resplendent watercolor in the Musée Cognacq-Jay in Paris (fig. 2), sometimes claimed to be Delaunay's source, is probably a replica made by the painter as a work of art in its own right, a practice that was not uncommon for Fragonard.<sup>6</sup>

The expert in charge of the du Barry et al. sale, Alexandre Joseph Paillet, described the painting as “handled with much verve and of excellent effect; it represents an interior of a room in which there is a woman and several children; a man, who appears to surprise them, is seen at the casement window.”<sup>7</sup>

This man is usually taken to be the father, who leans through the window to gaze adoringly at his bountiful family; the title of Delaunay's print was *L'Heureuse fécondité* (blissful fecundity). The mother is surrounded by four children — a large number given the high infant mortality rate, especially in the provinces, during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. One child plays with a dog, while another feeds hay to the donkey.<sup>8</sup> In the background, obscured in deep shadow, an older woman, perhaps a maid, leans into the scene; a fifth child cowers behind her, as if shying away from the fire that burns behind a stone column base. Fragonard emphasized the family's poverty with the meager assortment of leeks at the right (a reminder that he began his career in the studio of Jean Siméon Chardin [1699–1779, cats. 11–18]); the apples that have been gathered in a hat in the foreground; and the classical architecture, which suggests that the family has set up house in an abandoned ruin. Despite such material destitution, the family is rich in love and emotional feeling, finding joy in the mere sight of one another.

As pointed out, the subject and general composition of *The Happy Family* recall the small genre scenes that Fragonard painted during his first trip to Italy, from 1756 to 1761, while he was a pensioner at the Académie de France in Rome.<sup>9</sup> Like his friend Hubert Robert (1733–1808, cat. 86), with whom he sometimes worked, Fragonard seemed fascinated by the picturesque life in and around Rome, and he produced a series of paintings as well as innumerable drawings inspired by what he saw. Some of these scenes — women laundering clothes at public fountains, rustic kitchens, barn interiors, and

Fig. 1. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Happy Family*, c. 1775, oil on canvas, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum Collection



Fig. 2. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Happy Family*, c. 1775, watercolor, Paris, Musée Cognacq-Jay



landscapes — were undoubtedly based on reality, while others were clearly the product of his imagination.<sup>10</sup> In *The Happy Family*, the rectilinear composition, with its planes of forms receding in an architectural interior, and the focus on the mother and child in the center of the scene are reminiscent of such Roman period works as *The Happy Mother* (fig. 3), dated by most scholars to around 1760.<sup>11</sup> When painting *The Happy Family*, Fragonard must have remembered this early work, for he borrowed such motifs as the antique column base or altar decorated by a sculpted garland and ram's head and topped by an urn; the playful dog; and the looming columns in the background. Like the crowded family in *The Happy Mother*, the humble folk in *The Happy Family* have evidently found shelter in an ancient ruin, adapting to their present needs what must originally have served as a pagan temple. The Goncourt brothers aptly characterized these scenes: "The ruin plays with foliage; the antique tomb enlivens the landscape; the archeology no longer recognizes its relics; the monuments become decor."<sup>12</sup>

Despite its resemblance to earlier works, however, *The Happy Family* and its variants are usually dated to the mid-1770s, after Fragonard's second trip to Italy in 1773–1774. Most of the genre scenes painted in the earlier period are characterized by a very free handling that gives the works the feeling of oil sketches, quickly dashed off with the energy one would expect from a youthful artist's first response to the stimulating environment of Rome.<sup>13</sup> *The Happy Family*, by contrast, was painted with a desire to create solid forms in a readable space. The pyramidal composition is much more clearly arranged than in such works as *The Happy Mother*, and the brushstrokes are fluid yet in complete control. Moreover, the sophisticated orchestration of light and shade — in which the brightly lit mother and child stand starkly against a dark background, while the shadowed face of the father forms a striking silhouette against warm sunlight — are signs that the work dates from the artist's full maturity. The National Gallery's painting recalls the various versions of *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (fig. 4), which date to the mid- or late 1770s.<sup>14</sup> The general placement of the figures in the oval format, the use of a rectilinear stone element to establish the foreground plane, and the theatrical lighting of the central figures are similar in both paintings. We can be fairly certain that *The Happy Family* and its variants were painted sometime between Fragonard's return from his second visit to Rome in 1774 and the production of Delaunay's engraving in 1777.

The formal relationships between *The Happy Family* and *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt* reinforce the sense in which Fragonard has invested *The Happy Family* with spiritual feeling, if not outright religiosity. The subject of the National Gallery's painting is undoubtedly secular, but the artist has clearly sought to remind the viewer of the Holy Family, living in their humble shed yet brilliantly illuminated by a heavenly light. Fragonard frequently made this allusion, repeating it in *The Visit to the Nursery* (cat. 37), in which the attitudes of the figures and organization of the composition recall many familiar adoration scenes from religious painting. The tumble-down ancient building in *The Happy Family* recalls the tradition of representing the Nativity in a ruined classical structure to suggest the passing of the pagan world. If Fragonard's painting does not actually represent a religious subject, it nevertheless preaches the secular gospel of Jean Jacques



Fig. 3. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Happy Mother*, c. 1760, oil on canvas, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1946

Fig. 4. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c. 1778, oil on canvas, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Lent by the Barker Welfare Foundation, in memory of Catherine Barker and Charles V. Hickox, B.A. 1911







Fig. 5. Jean Baptiste Greuze, *The Beloved Mother*, 1769, oil on canvas, Madrid, private collection

Rousseau (1712–1778), whose ode to the ideal family in *Émile* (1762) could serve as a description of the present work: “The attraction of domestic life is the best counterpoison for bad morals. The bother of children, which is believed to be an importunity, becomes pleasant. It makes the father and mother more necessary, dearer to one another; it tightens the conjugal bond between them. When the family is lively and animated, the domestic cares constitute the dearest occupation of the wife and the sweetest enjoyment of the husband.”<sup>15</sup>

Like other genre scenes painted by Fragonard in the 1760s and 1770s, *The Happy Family* bears the unmistakable influence of Jean Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805, cats. 54–56), the most innovative genre painter of the second half of the eighteenth century. Fragonard had met Greuze during his first trip to Italy, probably in 1756,<sup>16</sup> and the genre paintings that he produced shortly after his return to France—such as *The Parents’ Absence Turned to Account* (St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum), exhibited at the Salon of 1765, where Denis Diderot admired it—were clearly attempts to match Greuze at his specialty.<sup>17</sup> Images of family life—particularly dramatic subjects that seemed to participate in contemporaneous debates about conjugal love, gender roles, and child rearing—were especially popular in the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>18</sup> In conceiving *The Happy Family* Fragonard may have drawn inspiration from such paeans to family bliss as Greuze’s *The Beloved Mother* (fig. 5), completed in 1769 (Madrid, private collection). When Diderot saw a study for *The Beloved Mother* at the Salon of 1765 he remarked, “this preaches population, and depicts very movingly the happiness and inestimable prize of domestic peace,” a comment that could just as easily be made about Fragonard’s *Happy Family*.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, one should be wary of interpreting Fragonard’s family scenes as overtly moralistic or even entirely sincere. This was an artist who was, after all, equally if not more comfortable representing libertine subjects. Fragonard’s primary audience was a somewhat closed circle of sophisticated connoisseurs who would have delighted in a painting like *The Happy Family* more for its technical skill and beautiful pictorial effects than from any keen identification with the subject.<sup>20</sup>

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# Notes

1. See the 1936 Cleveland exhibition catalogue (no. 59), Wildenstein 1960, no. 368, and n. 4 below. The Wildenstein entry includes a Mesnard de Clesle sale on January 5, 1804, in which the painting was supposedly lot 22 as *Un ménage rustique*. However, Lugt 1938–1964 lists no sales on this date, and although there was a Mesnard de Clesle sale on January 2, 1804 (Lugt no. 6728), it only included a small number of paintings, none of them by Fragonard. The painting did not appear either in an earlier Mesnard de Clesle sale on December 4, 1786, and days following (Lugt no. 4101).
2. All of these compositions are reproduced in Paris and New York 1987–1988, 458. For the watercolor, see 459–460, no. 223, and Burollet 1980, 241–242, no. 132.
3. [Du Barry, Radix de Sainte Foy, La Ferté et al.] sale, Paris, February 17, 1777, lot 55.
4. Hébert and Sjöberg 1973, 12:509–510, no. 159.
5. Oil on paper, affixed to canvas, 19 × 22 cm (Rosenberg 1989, no. 338).
6. See Burollet 1980, 241–242, no. 132, where it is claimed that the watercolor was made as a model for Delaunay's engraving. As Pierre Rosenberg (1989) has shown, however, the engraving was after a painting. Nor does the watercolor have the characteristics of having been made for the print; it is not squared for transfer and is considerably larger than Delaunay's engraving.
7. "Un tableau touché avec beaucoup de feu et d'un effet excellent, il représente l'intérieur d'une chambre dans laquelle est une femme avec plusieurs enfants; on voit paraître à une croisée un homme qui semble les surprendre" (cited in Rosenberg 1989, 125).
8. Roger Portalis, somewhat effusively, referred to the picture's "avalanche de bébés joufflus, grimpant au giron maternel jaloux d'avoir leur part de caresses" (avalanche of chubby babies climbing on their mother's bosom jealously trying to get their share of hugs) (Portalis 1889, 1:115).
9. Cuzin 1987–1988, 189. For examples of these early paintings, see Rosenberg 1989, nos. 51, 60–84.
10. Jean-Pierre Cuzin and Pierre Rosenberg, "Fragonard e Hubert Robert: un percorso romano," in Rome 1990–1991, 21–30.
11. For the Metropolitan Museum of Art's picture, see Rosenberg 1989, no. 79; Rome 1990–1991, no. 38; Massengale 1993, 62.
12. Goncourt 1880–1884, 1:302.
13. A notable exception is the highly finished version of *The Stolen Kiss* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), painted around 1759 for the Bailli de Breteuil; see Rosenberg 1989, no. 63.
14. Rosenberg 1989, no. 367. Cuzin 1987–1988, no. 317, dates the work to c. 1778; Wildenstein 1960, no. 22, is the only specialist to place it earlier, in the 1750s, as a student work. A beautiful watercolor version (Paris, Musée du Louvre; see Paris and New York 1987–1988, no. 229), which is similar in style to the watercolor of *The Happy Family*, was

exhibited at the Salon de la Correspondance in 1781.

15. Rousseau [1762] 1979, 46.
16. Hartford, San Francisco, and Dijon, 1976–1977, 20.
17. Rosenberg 1989, no. 118. For a discussion of Greuze's influence on Fragonard, see Cuzin 1987–1988, 89–92.
18. See Duncan 1973; Sheriff 1991.
19. "Cela prêche la population, et peint très-pathétiquement le bonheur et le prix inestimables de la paix domestique." Sez nec and Adhémar 1957–1967, 2:155.
20. Martin Schieder makes this point in Ottawa, Washington, and Berlin 2003–2004, 282.

# References

- 1889 Portalis: 115, 279, 280.  
 1901 Jozs: 141.  
 1906 Nolhac: 130.  
 1960 Wildenstein: no. 368.  
 1965b NGA: 52.  
 1968 NGA: 44, repro.  
 1972 Wildenstein and Mandel: no. 490, repro.  
 1975 NGA: 132, repro.  
 1984 Walker: 341, no. 461, color repro.  
 1985 NGA: 158, repro.  
 1987–1988 Cuzin: 188–189, 193, fig. 230, 319, no. 311, repro.  
 1987–1988 Paris and New York: 456, 458, fig. 1.  
 1989 Rosenberg: no. 336, repro.  
 1991 Sheriff: 15, 17, 19, fig. 1.1.  
 2003–2004 Ottawa, Washington, and Berlin: 282–283, 370, no. 79.