32
1970.17.111

Love as Folly
c. 1773/1776

oil on canvas, oval, 56.2 × 47.3 (22⅛ × 18⅝)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

Inscriptions
At lower center in brown paint: frago

Distinguishing Marks and Labels
On stretcher: two NGA labels; small label with inscriptions in red pencil, "No. 25533 / PICTURE / 56399"; small red-bordered label, "C8840, A W Mellon." Attached to backing board: two NGA labels; label, "S.L. No. 2477.3 / THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM / OF ART / SPECIAL LOAN EXHIBITION / OF / FRENCH / XVIII CENT. PAINTINGS & SCULPTURE / Title *La Folie* / Artist *Fragonard* / Owner *Andrew W. Mellon* / Address *1787 Mass. Ave.* / Return Address *Washington, D.C.*"

Technical Notes: Both paintings were executed on medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. The original tacking margins have been removed and the paintings have been lined, but cusping indicates that they retain their original dimensions. The X-radiographs reveal a line of missing paint approximately 1 cm from the edge along the bottom of each painting, the left side of the top half of *Love as Folly* and the right side of the top half of *Love the Sentinel,* which suggests that the supports were folded over to accommodate smaller stretchers at one time. Both supports were prepared with a moderately thick white layer followed by two thin layers of red and then a thin layer of gray. Some large particles, probably sand or coarse pigments, were mixed with the ground to give the paintings grainy, pebbly surfaces. The paint was applied with a fluid consistency. There are appreciable brushmarks in the highlights of the clouds, the birds, and the flesh tones of the putti. Fragonard created these highlights by dragging his brush through the paint and revealing the paint underneath. The leaves and stems of the rosebushes have been delineated with red-brown glazes.

The condition of both paintings is good. *Love as Folly* has a moderate amount of inpainting, mostly around the edges and along a horizontal band that goes through the center of the painting. In *Love the Sentinel,* there is inpainting around the perimeter of the painting, but it is hidden by the frame. There are a few small areas of inpaint in the center of the sky, in the right-hand bushes, in the sky above the birds, and below the arrow quiver. The varnish on both paintings remains clear, but the inpainting of *Love the Sentinel* has discolored.

Provenance: Possibly (Dennoor sale, Le Brun, Paris, April 5–7, 1797, no. 73). Rothschild collections, probably Paris and London. Andrew W. Mellon [1855–1937], Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., by 1934;[1] by inheritance to his daughter, Ailsa Mellon Bruce [1901–1969], New York.

Exhibited: Exhibition of French Painting from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 1934, no. 28. *French Painting and Sculpture of the XVIII Century,* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935–1936, no. 48. *Fragonard and His Friends: Changing Ideals in Eighteenth-Century Art,* Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1982–1983, no. 21.

Cat. 32. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Love as Folly*

Cat. 33. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Love the Sentinel*

33
1970.17.112

Love the Sentinel
c. 1773/1776

oil on canvas, oval, 56.2 × 47.3 (22⅛ × 18⅝)
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection

Inscriptions
At lower center in black glazed paint, the "ra" reinforced in brown glazed paint: frag

Distinguishing Marks and Labels
On stretcher: two NGA labels; small label, "No. 56398 / B PICTURE"; blue-bordered label, "4127." Attached to backing board: two NGA labels; label, "S.L. No. 2477.2 / THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM / OF ART / SPECIAL LOAN EXHIBITION / OF / FRENCH / XVIII CENT. PAINTINGS & SCULPTURE / Title *La Folie* / Artist *Fragonard* / Owner *Andrew W. Mellon* / Address *1787 Mass. Ave.*/ Return Address *Washington, D.C.*"

Technical Notes: Same as cat. 32.

Provenance: Same as cat. 32.

Exhibited: Exhibition of French Painting from the Fifteenth Century to the Present Day, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 1934, no. 29. *French Painting and Sculpture of the XVIII Century,* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935–1936, no. 47. *Fragonard and His Friends: Changing Ideals in Eighteenth-Century Art,* Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1982–1983, no. 22.

Fragonard repeated the compositions of the small pendant paintings known as *Love as Folly* and *Love the Sentinel* numerous times during his career; a second pair also belongs to the National Gallery of Art (cats. 34, 35).[2] In *Love the Sentinel* a chubby Cupid stands before a flowering rosebush at what appears to be the edge of a garden or park (a balustrade marking its outer limits is visible in the left and right middle ground). He looks out at the viewer, proffering an arrow in his right hand while holding his left hand to his lips; a quiver lies at his feet, and two doves fly away against a cloud-filled sky. *Love as Folly* shows a matching figure in a similar setting, although he flies jauntily through the air, raising aloft a stick topped by a fool's cap; his action seems to frighten away a flock of doves, several more of which are visible on the ground. The paintings clearly were intended as a pair: they are of similar size, the subjects and scale of the figures are compatible, and the compositions balance nicely. The earthbound, stable putto in one complements the more active flying boy in the other. In all likelihood *Love the Sentinel* was intended to be hung to the left of *Love as Folly,* so that the figures are turned toward each other.

Scholars usually have dated the various versions of the compositions to the early 1770s on the basis of style. Their light color scheme, rapid brushwork, and lighthearted subjects are similar to numerous small paintings, often in oval format, that Fragonard produced in the years around 1770.[3] During this period he was at work on his most celebrated cycle of decorative paintings, the large canvases called *The Progress of Love,* painted around 1771–1772 at the request of Madame du Barry for her pleasure pavilion at Louveciennes outside Paris and now in the Frick Collection, New York.[4] The present works related closely to two of four overdoors associated with this commission (figs. 1, 2), although there are minor differences in details (such as the position of the putto's legs in *Love as Folly*) and the Frick canvases are considerably larger and are rectangular rather than oval. More significantly, the compositions of the overdoors are in reverse of the small ovals.

The precise relationship between the various versions of *Love as Folly* and *Love the Sentinel* and the Frick's overdoors is difficult to determine. It is not certain when Fragonard painted the latter pictures, which are not usually thought to have been part of the original commission for Madame du Barry in the early 1770s. After the main panels of *The Progress of Love* were rejected by their patron, Fragonard purportedly kept them rolled in his studio until he returned to his native Grasse in 1790. There he installed the cycle in the house of his cousin, Alexandre Maubert. At that time he added several new paintings to the series, including a fifth large panel, a group of narrow canvases representing hollyhocks, and a chimneypiece, *Love Triumphant,* showing a group of putti rising — appropriately enough — through clouds of smoke, the top figure holding two flaming torches.[5] It has generally been assumed that the four overdoors also date to this later period of 1790–1791.[6] Therefore, they would have been produced long after the small oval canvases, versions of which were engraved by Jean François Janinet (1752–1814) in 1777.[7] René Gimpel even suggests that when painting the overdoors in Grasse, Fragonard relied on these engravings, accounting for the reversal of the compositions.[8] Pierre Rosenberg has argued, however, that the Frick overdoors were part of the original commission from du Barry, placing their execution date to the same period of the small oval canvases.[9]

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Fig. 1. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Love the Jester,* 1790 (?), oil on canvas, New York, The Frick Collection

Fig. 2. Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Love the Sentinel,* 1790 (?), oil on canvas, New York, The Frick Collection

Notes

1. Given the numerous versions of these compositions, it is difficult to establish their early provenances. Although Wildenstein (1960, 271) listed the Simpson versions (cats. 34, 35) as appearing in the Véri sale in 1785, Portalis (1889, 270) associated the present canvases with that sale. The identity of the Rothschild collection that included the pair is also uncertain. Portalis (1889, 270) cites Alphonse de Rothschild (probably Mayer Alphonse de Rothschild, 1827–1905) at the Château de Boulogne-sur-Seine; de Nolhac (1906, 156) cites Alphonse without a location; and Wildenstein (1960, 271) cites Alphonse at the Château de Boulogne and Arthur de Rothschild in London. The Rothschild Archive in London kindly searched Alphonse's records for the paintings without success and also noted that the Château de Boulogne was the residence not of Alphonse, but of his brother, Edmond James de Rothschild (1845–1934) (Melanie Aspey, e-mail message, March 3, 2006, and Barbra Ruperto, e-mail message, August 21, 2007, both to Anne Halpern, NGA curatorial files). Pauline Marcilhacy, whose expertise is the Rothschild collections in France, kindly checked the available records for the Château de Boulogne but did not find the National Gallery's paintings (e-mail message to Anne Halpern, September 5, 2007, NGA curatorial files). The "C" number that appears on a label on the reverse of *Love as Folly* (see Distinguishing Marks and Labels) likely indicates that the painting was in the hands of M. Knoedler & Co., whose stock numbers for objects on consignment took this form. Mellon could well have purchased the painting from this dealer (by 1934 when he lent it to a San Francisco exhibition), or at some point during his ownership he may have attempted unsuccessfully to sell it through Knoedler's.
2. For other examples, see Rosenberg 1989, nos. 288, 292a. According to an account of 1807, Fragonard repeated the compositions no less than twelve times (see Cuzin 1987–1988, 308).
3. Rosenberg 1989, nos. 154–160, 235–243.
4. See Posner 1972, 526–534.
5. See Cuzin 1987–1988, 233; Wildenstein 1960, 31; *Love Triumphant* is catalogued by Rosenberg 1989, no. 445.
6. The traditional dating of 1790–1791 for the overdoors is followed by Portalis 1889, 102, 239; Wildenstein 1960, 268, 320; Cuzin 1987–1988, 335–336.
7. A version of *Love the Sentinel* appeared in the marquis d'Arcambal sale, February 22, 1776, lot 27 (cited in Rosenberg 1989, 124).
8. New York 1914, 8–9. Portalis (1889, 102) implied as much.
9. Paris and New York 1987–1988, 322–323. Rosenberg (1989, 22) notes that Fragonard was paid

18,000 *livres* for the du Barry commission, while Jean Marie Vien, the artist who painted the replacements, was paid 16,000; he plausibly suggests that Fragonard's commission was higher because he painted overdoors to go with the four main panels. He does not exclude the possibility that one of the overdoors, *Love the Avenger,* was repainted in Grasse. On the dating of the overdoors, see also Massengale 1993, 44.

References

1960 Wildenstein: 271–272, nos. 321–322, fig. 144, pl. 63.
1972 Wildenstein and Mandel: 339, 345.
1975 NGA: 134, repro.
1985 NGA: 160, repro.
1987–1988 Cuzin: 308–309, nos. 256–257, repro.
1989 Rosenberg: 102, nos. 284–285, repro.

34

1947.2.1

Love as Folly

c. 1773/1776

oil on canvas, oval, 55.9 × 46.4 (22 × 18¼)
In memory of Kate Seney Simpson

Distinguishing Marks and Labels

On stretcher: "No. 9981 / PICTURE" and "No. 34358 / PICTURE"; in blue pencil, "CA1877"

Technical Notes: The paintings were executed on medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. Both paintings are oval-shaped, and though they have been lined and the original tacking margins have been removed, cusping indicates that they retain their original dimensions. The ground consists of three layers: a moderately thick white layer, a thin red layer, and a thin gray layer. Large particles, possibly sand or coarse pigments, were mixed into the ground to produce a subtle surface texture. The paint was applied in multiple opaque and glazed layers. Glazes were used to create the flowers and to delineate stems in the bushes. In *Love the Sentinel,* there is low impasto in the flowers and brushmarkings in the pale colors of the putto, the foreground, and some of the clouds. There are fewer brushmarkings and no impasto in *Love as Folly.*

The structural condition of the paintings is good, but the visual condition is rather poor. The impastoed brushstrokes have been slightly flattened, and the tops of them are dark with surface grime. There are sigmoid cracks in the sky of *Love as Folly,* and there is a significant amount of inpainting in this area. Both paintings have inpainting along the perimeters; it has discolored significantly, but it is hidden by the frames. The varnish has yellowed significantly, and although it appears to have been thinned, it remains disfiguring, with numerous areas of discolored residues.

Provenance: Possibly Jean François Leroy de Senneville [1715–1784], Paris; possibly (his sale, Chariot and Paillet at Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, April 5–11, 1780, no. 56); possibly purchased by Verrier. possibly Marquis de Véri; possibly (his sale, Paillet, Paris, December 12, 1785, no. 39); possibly purchased by Millin. possibly Folliot; possibly (Folliot sale, Regnault, Paris, April 15, 1793, no. 50). Marquis des Isnards; (Wildenstein & Co., Inc., Paris, New York, and London); probably held jointly with (Ernest Gimpel, New York); sold 1905/1906 to John Woodruff Simpson [1850–1920], New York; by inheritance to his widow, Katherine Seney Simpson [d. 1943], New York; by inheritance to her daughter, Jean W. Simpson [1897–1980], New York.[1]

Exhibited: Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Fragonard, Gimpel and Wildenstein, New York, 1914, nos. 2, 3.