



Jean Honoré Fragonard  
French, 1732 - 1806

## *The Swing*

c. 1775/1780

oil on canvas

overall: 215.9 x 185.5 cm (85 x 73 1/16 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.17

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### ENTRY

The monumental canvases of *Blindman's Buff* [fig. 1] and *The Swing*, which must be counted among the greatest achievements in eighteenth-century French landscape painting, have been associated since their rediscovery in the early nineteenth century. Nearly identical in height, they present similar views of vast and fecund picturesque gardens, peopled with elegantly dressed men, women, and children playing games, conversing, promenading, and dining in an exuberant natural environment. The myriad details in each—bubbling fountains, shadowy sculptures, overgrown flower beds, rushing cascades, soaring trees, and towering cloud-filled skies—put the viewer's eye in constant motion in, around, and between the two compositions. *Blindman's Buff* was intended to hang to the left of *The Swing*, as indicated by the trellises covered with red and pink flowers that appear in the lower right and lower left corners of each composition. When seen side by side the paintings can be appreciated as one panoramic composition, centered on a great mound surmounted by a geyser and flanked by dramatic vistas to either side. Laboratory analysis has dispelled the notion, first advanced by Pierre de Nolhac, that the pictures were originally a single canvas that has been cut in two. [1] *The Swing*, which is slightly narrower than *Blindman's Buff*, shows indications of having been cropped along its left edge, so that originally the two canvases must have been precisely the same size. [2]

Landscape—particularly gardens—formed a significant aspect of Fragonard's oeuvre. While little documentation or contemporaneous commentary have survived, such works were admired and appreciated during his lifetime and shortly thereafter, as his early biographer, Charles Le Carpentier, indicated:



When this artist wished to be true to himself, he created delicious landscapes where one always finds the memory and the image of nature. They are remarkable above all by their astonishing effect of light and the beautiful forms of their terracing. His trees are treated with taste....Could anyone better understand the magic of the skies he paints so exquisitely, and seize the beautiful effects that nature reveals only after a storm, or when a cloudy and nebulous sky lets a few sunrays dart to the ground. [3]

Le Carpentier's comment that such paintings evoked a "memory" of nature was astute, for *Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing* are replete with reminders of the fabulous gardens that Fragonard first depicted when he was a student at the Académie de France in Rome from 1756 to 1761. Fragonard's experience of Italy had sparked his interest in landscape drawing and painting, an inclination he developed on numerous drawing excursions throughout Rome and the Italian countryside. The most remarkable results of these efforts are the extraordinary red chalk drawings of the gardens of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli, where the artist stayed for several weeks in the summer of 1760 as the guest of the Abbé de Saint-Non [fig. 2]. The towering cypresses and overgrown bowers, lively fountains, and stunning vistas that characterized the d'Este gardens reappear in *Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing*, even if the works are in no way topographical. While it has proved impossible to find specific garden sources for the paintings, certain motifs—such as the sculpture—can be linked with known prototypes. [4] Fragonard's method in his garden paintings was not to record a site precisely but to re-create imaginatively a sense of the character of a place he and his patrons may have visited. Attempting to identify the garden scenes in these two paintings would be fruitless and alien to the artist's method and purpose. [5]

*Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing* were produced long after Fragonard's initial trip to Italy. The artist's technique in these works is free and expansive, with little of the precise brushwork and devotion to detail that characterize the smaller landscapes he produced in Italy and shortly after his return to Paris in 1761. [6] The paint was applied thinly—some passages are nearly transparent washes of color—with only discrete areas of impasto in some of the brushwork defining clothing and foliage. This fluid technique recalls the fresh and confident ink wash drawings that Fragonard made for his patron, Pierre Jacques Onésyme Bergeret de Grancourt (1715–1785), on a second trip to Italy in 1773–1774. [7] The example illustrated here [fig. 3], representing an unidentified park probably in the vicinity of Rome,



demonstrates the artist's brilliance at capturing a sense of light and atmosphere and conveys the spontaneity and transience of nature more convincingly than the red chalk drawings made at Tivoli in the previous decade. [8] The drawing's complex composition, with its artful massing of trees and combination of views peopled with a variety of figures, anticipates the style and imagery of *Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing*, which the artist executed in Paris shortly after the second trip to Italy. It is probable that they date from the last years of the 1770s. [9]

The grand scale and broad, freely handled technique suggest that the paintings were conceived as decorations to be installed into the paneling on the wall of a salon. [10] As with so much of Fragonard's oeuvre, the early history of these resplendent landscapes is unknown, and no contemporaneous comments about them have been discovered, yet they surely must have been one of the artist's most important commissions, on a par with—in terms of ambition of design and execution, if not of patron—*The Progress of Love* series (New York, Frick Collection) executed in the early 1770s for Madame du Barry. Georges Wildenstein identified the paintings with two works listed in the estate inventory of the Abbé de Saint-Non, drawn up in 1792, which described two landscapes “made in Italy” with figures enjoying the game of *La Main chaude* (hot cockles) and playing on a *Balançoire* (either a swing or a seesaw). [11] Later scholars have rejected this association, however; the National Gallery's paintings were not “done in Italy,” and it is highly unlikely that the game of blindman's buff (in French, *Colin-maillard*) would have been confused with the very different “*la main chaude*” described in the inventory. Moreover, the two landscapes belonging to Saint-Non can be identified with other works by Fragonard. [12] The first confirmed record of the Washington paintings was made in 1845, when they were described in the collection of the marquis de Cypierre.

A clue to the paintings' original purpose may be found in their relationship to another of Fragonard's masterpieces of garden painting, the so-called *Fête at Saint-Cloud*, also datable to the late 1770s [fig. 4]. This large canvas, which is precisely the same height as *Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing*, also depicts a panoramic view of a garden or parkland populated by numerous figures engaged in varied activities amid fountains, sculptures, and lush foliage. The traditional provenance of *Fête at Saint-Cloud*—that it was commissioned by the duc de Penthièvre for the Hôtel de Toulouse in Paris (now the Banque de France, where the painting still hangs)—is uncertain, and the possibility exists, as Pierre Rosenberg first observed, that it was part of a larger decorative scheme that



included *Blindman's Buff*, *The Swing*, and perhaps two other garden scenes in the National Gallery of Art, *A Game of Horse and Rider* [fig. 5] and *A Game of Hot Cockles* [fig. 6]. [13] Although their later provenances are different, the similarities in scale, style, and subject matter suggest that these five pictures were conceived as a series and, like the Frick *Progress of Love*, cannot be understood fully unless treated together as a decorative program. [14]

Sets of landscapes often served for interior decoration in the eighteenth century. In the 1770s and 1780s Hubert Robert (French, 1733 - 1808) was among the most prolific such decorators, creating suites of landscapes and ruin paintings for the interiors of his patrons' *hôtels particuliers* and *maisons de plaisance*. [15] Fragonard is known to have painted many decorative pictures, often in pairs or series, but no ensemble survives intact in its original location. [16] Regarding the five garden paintings now divided between the National Gallery and the Banque de France, Paris, Rosenberg has proposed that they may originate from the collection of Marchal de Saincy, whose 1789 sale catalogue describes a group of landscapes as follows:

H. Fragonard [*sic*]. Five large pictures by this artist, designed and executed to decorate the walls of a salon; they represent diverse landscape subjects with varied and graceful sites, and are embellished with interesting figures. [17]

While the identification must remain speculative, the circumstantial evidence assembled by Rosenberg is provocative. [18] The consignor of the 1789 sale, Louis René Marchal de Saincy, had acquired much of his collection in 1782 from his father, Louis Pierre Sébastien Marchal de Saincy, along with the family's primary residence in the rue des Fossés-Montmartre in Paris. Louis Pierre fits the profile of the sort of connoisseur who was purchasing works by Fragonard in the 1760s and 1770s. A noted collector, he was governor of Abbeville, *maître d'hôtel du roi*, and *econome general du clergé*, a title inherited by his only son Louis René. The son's own immense wealth was increased when he married into a family of *fermiers généraux* in 1779. [19] Yet both Louis Pierre's and Louis René's fortunes reversed precipitously in the wake of financial reforms initiated by Charles Alexandre Calonne, the king's controller-general of finance, forcing father and son to sell their property and leave Paris in 1788. The subsequent sale of the collection in 1789 revealed their particular interest in large-scale paintings by contemporary French



artists (along with smaller easel pictures by French, Italian, and Dutch masters), including numerous works that were clearly meant to be integrated into the architectural framework of the house. Among these are four overdoors by François Boucher (French, 1703 - 1770), two more of ruins by Robert, and three large scenes from the hunt, “made for the decoration of a salon,” by Francesco Casanova (Italian, c. 1732/1733 - 1803). [20] The five Fragonard landscapes were also described as having this purpose, although it is unclear whether they were designed specifically for the Sainscy residence or whether they had been purchased from another collection. The varying shapes and sizes of the Washington and Paris paintings (beyond the current reduced dimensions of *The Swing*, *Hot Cocks*, and *Horse and Rider*) make better sense if imagined surrounded by boiseries, windows, and doorways. Given that the Fragonard paintings can be dated on stylistic grounds to the late 1770s, the father, Louis Pierre, most likely acquired them from the artist. Rosenberg has suggested that the paintings do not appear in an inventory drawn up in 1782 on the sale of the house and collection from Louis Pierre to his son Louis René simply because, being mural decorations, they would not have been noted as separate property by the auditors. [21] The three Casanova scenes from the hunt, which are similar in scale and shape to the Fragonards and therefore may have been part of a complementary decoration scheme, went similarly uninventoried. [22] In the end, neither the large Casanovas nor the five Fragonards found buyers in the 1789 sale, possibly because of their scale (they were likely unframed) and the necessity of hanging them as a pair. The fate of the Washington canvases is unknown until they appeared at auction in Paris in 1845. *Fête at Saint-Cloud* may have remained at rue des Fossés-Montmartre (the site of the 1789 sale) and transferred to the Hôtel de Toulouse when the Banque de France acquired the Sainscy house in 1806.

When seen together, Fragonard’s five paintings share a vision of the garden and park as a commodious setting for all sorts of festivities and amusements as well as amorous dalliance. The various games and entertainments incorporated into Fragonard’s garden paintings were relatively common features of landscape painting in the middle and late eighteenth century. [23] They are part of a tradition made popular by Antoine Watteau (French, 1684 - 1721) and Nicolas Lancret (French, 1690 - 1743), who frequently included figures playing games and socializing in gardens or parklands. Lancret’s pendants at the Château de Sans-Souci, Berlin [fig. 7] [fig. 8], although much smaller than Fragonard’s grand landscapes, combine similar amusements—blindman’s buff, dining in the outdoors, and swinging—in a fecund garden decorated with terraces, sculptures, and



fountains. [24] Fragonard himself treated the games depicted in *Blindman's Buff* and *The Swing* numerous times, especially in small cabinet pictures like the famous *Swing* in the Wallace Collection, London. [25]

While such amusements undoubtedly were enjoyed in eighteenth-century France, modern scholarship has focused on the symbolic meanings that they must have conveyed to viewers of paintings. Fragonard's juxtaposition of the games of *Blindman's Buff* and swinging was pointed, for both activities have been interpreted as alluding to the progress of love. *Blindman's Buff*—with its blind protagonist awkwardly seeking a mate—corresponded to the difficulties of courtship, while the rhythmic motion of *The Swing*—propelled by a companion who pulls on ropes—suggests the culminating act of love. [26] The lush, picturesque gardens, with their overripe blossoms, spurting fountains, and provocative sculptures, underscore the amorous associations of the games. The sculptures that Watteau frequently incorporated into his *fêtes galante* have been interpreted as commenting on the scenes of flirtation and love. [27] Fragonard may have intended much the same meaning: the fountain to the left in *Blindman's Buff* has been described as representing Vestal Virgins, calculated to contrast with the folly of love, embodied in the blindfolded player who spins aimlessly. [28] The enchanting detail of the woman looking through a telescope in *The Swing* suggested to Eisler a contrast between “idle curiosity for what is beyond her with her oblivion to what surrounds her.” [29]

Nevertheless, the small size of the figures and their lack of detail might make them ill-suited as bearers of complex meaning, and it is possible that they were included to add visual interest to the landscapes themselves. These works occasionally have been described as characteristic of the sublime in nature, as almost protoromantic in sensibility: “What set out to be a topical scene [*Fête at Saint-Cloud*]...has become a wild poem about the strength of natural forces and puny man.” [30] Fragonard's figures do indeed appear small, but they are fully integrated into their hospitable surroundings, and one could claim just as persuasively that his garden settings, far from posing a threat, encourage the pursuit of a host of idle pleasures, both public and private: carnival sideshows, swinging, aristocratic parlor games (hot cockles and blindman's buff), rough children's play (horse and rider), puppet shows, and picnicking. These paintings are foremost images of people enjoying the outdoors; that, after all, was the purpose of gardens and parks that, unlike wild nature, were to be accommodating to the promenader. Louis Carogis de Carmontelle, in his explication of the Parc Monceau, designed in the late 1770s



for the duc de Chartres, insisted that “despite the charms offered by the countryside, it is only in the garden where one finds good living—the hunt, games, concerts, entertainments; that is what we desire and that is what we praise.”

[31] Jennifer Milam has argued that the National Gallery versions of blindman’s buff and swinging, in which the landscapes dominate, should be understood less in conventional overt erotic terms and more as playful re-creations of the exhilarating amusements they represent. “The swing becomes a vehicle of physical and mental transport, serving to move the figure and the viewer into the alternative playlands of leisure and art.” [32] Leisure activities, whether playing games, promenading through a picturesque garden, or a combination of both, had come to define aristocratic culture in the late eighteenth century.

The five paintings are a summation of Fragonard’s lifelong exploration of the theme of the garden. Grand in scale, they are complex and elaborate visualizations of “unadorned” nature in which the compositions, chiaroscuro, brushwork, and activities of the figures re-create the infinite variety of motifs and range of effects that characterized the picturesque garden in eighteenth-century France. In these works Fragonard brought together a diversity of garden types, including a French public park in *Fête at Saint-Cloud*, a vast estate inspired by the gardens of Italy in *Blindman’s Buff* and *The Swing*, and two intimate corners of private gardens, one picturesque, one formal, in *A Game of Horse and Rider* and *A Game of Hot Cockles*.

Fragonard’s innovative compositions reflect a remarkable sensitivity toward the character of the picturesque, or “English,” garden that was gaining popularity in France during these years. [33] The panoramic breadth of *Blindman’s Buff* and *The Swing* allows for the inclusion of a variety of distinct areas of visual interest, from the exhilarating vista, to a distant peak at the right, to the equally long view into the further reaches of the garden at the left, where a tiny group of strollers—captured in a beam of sunlight—parades among the trees (recalling the background boaters in *Horse and Rider*). In between, Fragonard has arranged a series of disparate focal points that the viewer is encouraged to examine as the canvases are surveyed: a game of blindman’s buff, lovers reclining in bushes, a group finishing a meal, a man and woman washing a dog in a fountain, a woman on a swing observed by companions, one with a telescope. Such visually arresting details are not centered on the figures alone. As in the other works in the series, Fragonard employed the vocabulary of the garden designer—trees, bushes, lawns, flowers, pathways, fountains, and sculptures—to draw the spectator’s attention, frame



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views, and lead the eye around the composition. With their multiple views, lack of visual unity, and range of brushwork, Fragonard's gardenscapes present an image of the park that embodies the ever-shifting experience of the promenader in nature. Like his or her counterpart in actual gardens, the viewer of these paintings must "explore" the composition, forever changing direction, making visual connections, and taking delight at a series of seemingly unrelated details. As in the picturesque garden itself, unity and resolution is not imposed upon the scenes by the artist, but is left to the imagination and vicarious eye of the spectator.

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Collection data may have been updated since the publication of the print volume. Additional light adaptations have been made for the presentation of this text online.

Richard Rand

January 1, 2009

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES





**fig. 1** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Blindman's Buff*, c. 1775/1780, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961.9.16



**fig. 2** Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Cypresses at the Villa d'Este, Tivoli*, 1760, red chalk, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie, Besançon, France





**fig. 3** Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *A Garden Near Rome*, c. 1773–1774, ink wash over black chalk, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, France. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. Photo: Bulloz



**fig. 4** Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Fête at Saint-Cloud*, c. 1775–1780, oil on canvas, Banque de France, Paris, France. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. Photo: Gérard Blot





**fig. 5** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *A Game of Horse and Rider*, c. 1775/1780, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1946.7.5



**fig. 6** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *A Game of Hot Cockles*, c. 1775/1780, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1946.7.6





**fig. 7** Nicolas Lancret, *Blindman's Buff*, before 1738, oil on canvas, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg. bpk Bildagentur / Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg / Wolfgang Pfauder / Art Resource, NY



**fig. 8** Nicolas Lancret, *The Italian Meal*, before 1738, oil on canvas, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg. bpk Bildagentur / Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg / Wolfgang Pfauder / Art Resource, NY

## NOTES

- [1] Pierre de Nolhac, *J.-H. Fragonard (1732–1806)* (Paris, 1906), 69. Nolhac's hypothesis was echoed more recently by Cuzin (Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* [New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987], 202–203), who later retracted the idea (Jean-Pierre Cuzin, "Fragonard: un nouvel examen," *Revue d'Art* 80 [1988]: 83–87).
- [2] The X-radiographs show that, while *The Swing* may have been slightly cut at the left edge, *Blindman's Buff* probably retains its original proportions (there is cusping along all four edges). Similarly, the X-radiographs of *A Game of Hot Cockles* and *A Game of Horse and Rider* show no evidence of cusping at the top and left edges, indicating that these works may have been cut down at the tops, as Cuzin thought (Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* [New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987], 203), and possibly along the left sides as well. I am grateful to Elizabeth Walmsley, conservator of paintings at the National Gallery of Art, for her help in studying the X-radiographs.
- [3] "Mais quand cet artiste a voulu être lui-même, il a créé des paysages délicieux où l'on retrouve toujours le souvenir et l'image de la nature. Ils sont recommandables sur-tout par l'effet surprenant de la lumière, et la



belle forme des terrasses. Ses arbres sont touchés avec goût....Peut-on mieux entendre la magie des ciels qu'il peignait d'une manière exquise, et saisir les beaux effets que la nature ne présente qu'après les orages, ou quand le ciel couvert et nébuleux laisser darder quelques rayons de soleil sur la terre" (Charles le Carpentier, *Galerie des peintres célèbres, avec des remarques sur le genre de chaque maître* [Paris, 1821], 281).

- [4] For example, the imposing statue atop the cascade in *Blindman's Buff* is similar to the one on the *Fountain of Rome* at the Villa d'Este (see David R. Coffin, *The Villa d'Este at Tivoli* [Princeton, 1960], fig. 25).
- [5] One might also recall a nineteenth-century account by A. de Launay, *Salons de Paris*, April 10, 1859, that Fragonard "had himself decorated [his] studio in a theatrical manner; at the back hung a curtain on which his imagination had created vegetation of a richness unknown to our climate with, in the foreground, bushes, creepers, climbing plants, imitation rocks, and flowers, the whole arranged so as to produce the most surprising effects; in the corner stood a child's swing...on which he used to pose his models" (see Georges Wildenstein, *The Paintings of Fragonard: Complete Edition* [New York, 1960], 24 n. 3).
- [6] For example, Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), nos. 80–84, 120.
- [7] Georges Wildenstein, "Un amateur de Boucher et de Fragonard: Jacques-Onésyme Bergeret, 1715–1785," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 6, 58 (July–Aug. 1961): 39–84; Jacques Wilhelm, *Bergeret de Grancourt, voyage d'Italie 1773–1774, avec les dessins de Fragonard* (Paris, 1948).
- [8] Alexandre Ananoff, *L'oeuvre dessiné de Jean-Honoré Fragonard*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1961–1970), 3: no. 2151, fig. 585; José-Luis de los Llanos, *Fragonard et le dessin français au XVIIIe siècle dans les collections du Petit Palais* (Paris, 1992), 84–85, no. 39.
- [9] Most scholars date the paintings to 1775–1780, although Rosenberg tentatively suggested a slightly earlier date, before the trip to Italy (Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* [Paris, 1987], 342). He later changed his mind (Pierre Rosenberg, "Les mystères d'une fête," *L'Objet d'art* 1 [Nov. 1987]: 62–67).
- [10] Eisler proposed that an architectural element such as a pilaster separated the two canvases and that the paintings may have been placed on curved walls, providing "an almost stereoscopic trompe l'oeil effect" (Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* [Oxford, 1977], 330).
- [11] "Premièrement, un tableau peint sur toile dans son cadre doré, représentant une étude de paysage fait en Italie par Fragonard avec figures, sujet de la Main chaude; un autre tableau sur toile, par le même, représentant aussi un paysage d'Italie avec figures, sujet d'une Balançoire, prises ensemble cent



livres" (cited in Georges Wildenstein, "L'abbé de Saint-Non artiste et mécène," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 6, 54 [Nov. 1959]: 238–242).

- [12] Richard Rand, "Two Fragonard Landscapes from Saint-Non's Collection," *Burlington Magazine* 133, no. 1057 (Apr. 1991): 246–248.
- [13] Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* (Paris, 1987), 344–345, nos. 162–165; see also Pierre Rosenberg, "Fragonard, *La Fête à Saint-Cloud*, Louis-Pierre Marchal de Saincy, et la Banque de France," in *Place des Victoires: histoire, architecture, société*, ed. Isabelle Dubois et al. (Paris, 2004), 246–257. Although it is one of the artist's largest canvases, *Fête at Saint-Cloud* came to light only in 1862, when an inventory of the Banque de France was compiled. In his monograph, Portalis—the first to publish the painting—noted that the identity of the person who commissioned it was unknown (Roger Portalis, *Honoré Fragonard: sa vie et son oeuvre* [Paris, 1889], 1:82–83). Nolhac (Pierre de Nolhac, *J.-H. Fragonard (1732–1806)* [Paris, 1906], 69) first suggested that it was "perhaps executed for the duc de Penthièvre" ("peut-être exécuté pour le duc de Penthièvre"). Because the bank had been the Hôtel de Toulouse, the Paris residence of Louis Bourbon, the duc de Penthièvre, it has generally been assumed that the duc—the last legitimate male descendant of Louis XIV—commissioned the work from Fragonard. (In 1769 Penthièvre's daughter had married the duc de Chartres, who owned the land that encompassed the Parc de Saint-Cloud; see Joseph Baillio, "La *Fête de Saint-Cloud* de Fragonard," *L'Oeil* 399 [Oct. 1988]: 40–47, whose interpretation of the painting is based on the patronage of the duc.) Despite the attraction of this idea, there is no supporting documentation to confirm it. None of the guidebooks from the period describe the painting, even when giving detailed accounts of the residence, and the two inventories of the Hôtel de Toulouse, compiled in 1794 and 1795 during the revolutionary seizures, fail to mention it. Moreover, an unpublished study of the archives of the Banque de France in 1972 by Jean de Cayeux (in the archives of Galerie Cailleux, Paris) found no trace of the painting before the late nineteenth century. The painting is first recorded in an appraisal of 1862, when it is listed with several works—by Boucher and others—whose provenances are equally mysterious. The Hôtel de Toulouse apparently was pillaged during the revolution, and Cayeux suggests that the Fragonard and other eighteenth-century works might have been acquired by the bank in the early nineteenth century to decorate the rooms in an appropriate style. An earlier unpublished report, written when Cayeux appraised the *Fête at Saint-Cloud* for the bank in 1946, already had raised doubts about the duc de Penthièvre's commission of the painting. I wish to thank Marianne Roland Michel for allowing me to study these revealing documents. Nevertheless, until recently most scholars have repeatedly claimed that the duc de Penthièvre commissioned the work from Fragonard.

- [14] That the paintings were a series was particularly apparent at the Fragonard



exhibition in 1987–1988, when they were displayed together in public for the first time (Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* [Paris, 1987]). Apart from their differing states of preservation, it was clear that the pictures were closely related in style, color, subject, and proportions of the figures.

- [15] See Jean de Cayeux, *Hubert Robert et les jardins* (Paris, 1987); John D. Bandiera, “Form and Meaning in Hubert Robert’s *Ruin Caprices*: Four Paintings of Fictive Ruins for the Château at Méréville,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 15, no. 1 (1989): 21–37; Paula Rea Radisich, “‘La chose publique’: Hubert Robert’s Decorations for the ‘petit salon’ at Méréville,” in *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London and New York, 1995), 401–415.
- [16] *The Progress of Love* is a rare instance in which the pictures and intended setting can be plausibly reconstructed. Part of Fragonard’s decoration for the Hôtel Matignon in Paris, four overdoors of the seasons, remains in situ, although the salon apparently was redecorated in the nineteenth century. At that time, one of the panels, *Winter*, was sold and is now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; see Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Fragonard, Life and Work* (New York, 1988; French ed. Paris, 1987), 269, nos. 50–53. First proposed in Pierre Rosenberg, “Les mystères d’une fête,” *L’Objet d’art* 1 (Nov. 1987): 62–67, and elaborated in Pierre Rosenberg, “Fragonard, *La Fête à Saint-Cloud*, Louis-Pierre Marchal de Saincy, et la Banque de France,” in *Place des Victoires: histoire, architecture, société*, ed. Isabelle Dubois et al. (Paris, 2004), 246–257.
- [17] “Cinq grands Tableaux de cet Artiste, composés et executés pour former la tenture d’un Sallon; ils representent divers sujets de Paysages de sites variés et gracieux, et sont ornés de figures interresantes. T[oile].” *Catalogue d’une collection choisie de tableaux de differens maîtres...qui composoient le cabinet de M.[.]*, Paris, April 29, 1789, no. 41. See Pierre Rosenberg, “Les mystères d’une fête,” *L’Objet d’art* 1 (Nov. 1987): 62–67.
- [18] Pierre Rosenberg, “Fragonard, *La Fête à Saint-Cloud*, Louis-Pierre Marchal de Saincy, et la Banque de France,” in *Place des Victoires: histoire, architecture, société*, ed. Isabelle Dubois et al. (Paris, 2004), 246–257.
- [19] Marianne Roland Michel, “À Propos de portraits de famille: quelques nouvelles attributions,” *Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 1000 (July 1986): 546–552, reproduces a drawing by Carmontelle portraying the Saincy family, including Louis René and his tutor, the Abbé Fleury (fig. 122).
- [20] Among his French paintings were twelve Bouchers, including the celebrated *Rising and Setting of the Sun*, painted as tapestry cartoons for the marquise de Pompadour, which Louis Pierre had purchased at the Pompadour sale in 1766 (see John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Pictures* [London, 1989], 3: nos. P485, P486, 77–78; Alexandre Ananoff with Daniel



Wildenstein, *François Boucher* [Lausanne and Paris, 1976], 2:109–115, nos. 422 and 423); landscapes by Claude-Joseph Vernet (French, 1714 - 1789) and Hubert Robert (French, 1733 - 1808); and fifteen paintings by Francesco Casanova (Italian, c. 1732/1733 - 1803). In addition, he possessed landscapes by David Teniers the Younger (Flemish, 1610 - 1690), Cornelis van Poelenburch (Dutch, 1594/1595 - 1667), Bartholomeus Breenbergh (Dutch, 1598 - 1657), and Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, c. 1628/1629 - 1682) (see Pierre Rosenberg, “Fragonard, *La Fête à Saint-Cloud*, Louis-Pierre Marchal de Saincy, et la Banque de France,” in *Place des Victoires: histoire, architecture, société*, ed. Isabelle Dubois et al. [Paris, 2004], 250).

- [21] “Mais nous n’avons rien pu découvrir sur les circonstances exactes de la commande à Fragonard d’une série de paysages décoratifs pour son hotel de la rue des Fossés-Montmartre, sinon que celle-ci doit être antérieure à 1782 et postérieure au retour de l’artiste du second voyage d’Italie (1773–1774)” (But we have not been able to discover anything about the specific circumstances of the commission to Fragonard for a series of decorative landscapes for his townhouse in the rue des Fossés-Montmartre, other than it must have been before 1782 and after the return of the artist from his second voyage to Italy [1773–1774]). Pierre Rosenberg, “Fragonard, *La Fête à Saint-Cloud*, Louis-Pierre Marchal de Saincy, et la Banque de France,” in *Place des Victoires: histoire, architecture, société*, ed. Isabelle Dubois et al. (Paris, 2004), 257.
- [22] Unfortunately, the house at 3, rue des Fossés-Montmartre (now 6, rue d’Aboukir), no longer survives, leaving any reconstruction of the original arrangement of Fragonard’s five garden paintings hypothetical.
- [23] The activities depicted in *Fête at Saint-Cloud*, while more unusual, did appear in other works of art, including Boucher’s tapestry, *The Charlatans and the Peep Show*, designed in 1736 as part of the series “Italian Village Scenes” and last woven at Beauvais in 1762. The design was engraved by Cochin in 1740 (see Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* [Paris, 1987], 340, fig. 6; Alastair Laing, *François Boucher (1703–1770)* [New York, 1986], 334–339, no. 86).
- [24] Georges Wildenstein, *Lancret* (Paris, 1924), nos. 77, 226 (figs. 29, 52). In his tapestry designs for the series *Amusements champêtres*, made for Beauvais in the late 1720s (but in production as late as 1761), Jean-Baptiste Oudry (French, 1686 - 1755) introduced many of these activities in garden settings that approached the scale and decorative breadth of Fragonard’s paintings. Hal N. Opperman, *Jean-Baptiste Oudry*, 2 vols. (New York, 1977), 87–89, 396–397, nos. P95–P102.
- [25] Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l’oeuvre peint de Fragonard* (Paris, 1989), no. 177; John Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection: Catalogue of Pictures* (London, 1989), 3:161–165, P430. The small *Preparation for Blindman’s Buff* in the



Musée du Louvre (Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], no. 180) also includes the motif of figures preparing a meal outdoors. The themes of blindman's buff and swinging in Fragonard's art have been explored by Louis Réau, "Les Colin-maillard de Fragonard," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* ser. 5, 15 (March 1927): 148–152; H. Wentzel, "Jean-Honoré Fragonards *Schaukel*," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 26 (1964): 187–218; Donald Posner, "The Swinging Women of Watteau and Fragonard," *Art Bulletin* 64 (March 1982): 75–88; Jennifer Milam, "Fragonard and the Blindman's Game: Interpreting Representations of Blindman's Buff," *Art History* 21, no. 1 (March 1998): 1–25, 161; and Jennifer Milam, "Playful Constructions and Fragonard's Swinging Scenes," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 543–559.

[26] In a similar juxtaposition produced earlier in his career, Fragonard painted a *Blindman's Buff* (Toledo, Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art; Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], no. 41) with a *Seesaw* (Madrid, Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza; Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], no. 42).

[27] Albert Pomme de Mirimonde, "Statures et emblèmes dans l'oeuvre d'Antoine Watteau," *Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France* 12, no. 1 (1962): 11–20.

[28] Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* (Oxford, 1977), 329–330. Sculptures play a similar role in many of Fragonard's other garden scenes. In both the Wallace Collection *Swing* and *A Game of Hot Cockles*, Fragonard included Falconet's *Menacing Cupid*. In the so-called *Little Swing* (private collection; Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Fragonard* [Paris, 1989], no. 178), a sculptural group includes a Cupid shooting his arrow in the direction of the woman on the swing.

[29] Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* (Oxford, 1977), 330.

[30] Michael Levey, *Rococo to Revolution: Major Trends in Eighteenth-Century Painting* (New York, 1966), 119. See also Thomas W. Gaehtgens, "Fragonard: *Fest von Saint-Cloud*," in *Bilder vom irdischen Glück: Giorgione, Tizian, Rubens, Watteau, Fragonard*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens and Karl Ulrich Majer (Berlin, 1983), 32–35; and the interesting discussion by R.G. Saisselin, "The French Garden in the Eighteenth Century: From Belle Nature to the Landscape of Time," *Journal of Garden History* 5, no. 3 (July–Sept. 1985): 291–294.

[31] "Malgré les charmes que la nature peut y offrir, il faut que nous y [le jardin] trouvions la bonne chère, la chasse, le jeu, les concerts, les spectacles; voilà ce qu'on y désire et ce qu'on y vante" (Louis Carogis de Carmontelle, *Jardin de Monceau, près de Paris appartenant à son Altesse Sérénissime*



*Monseigneur le duc de Chartres* [Paris, 1779], 3–4).

[32] Jennifer Milam, “Playful Constructions and Fragonard’s Swinging Scenes,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000): 554.

[33] On the development of the picturesque garden in France, see Dora Wiebenson, *The Picturesque Garden in France* (Princeton, 1978).

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Both *Blindman’s Buff* and *The Swing* were executed on plain-weave, medium-weight fabric. The support for *The Swing* consists of two pieces of fabric seamed vertically approximately one-third from the right edge, while that of *Blindman’s Buff* is fabricated with a horizontal seam that divides the painting in half. The tacking margins have been removed from both paintings. *Blindman’s Buff* shows fabric cusping along all four edges. Although *The Swing* has cusping on the top, right, and bottom edges, the cusping on the left side is much less pronounced, indicating that *The Swing* may have been cut down on the left side, which would explain the discrepancy in size between the two paintings. Each painting has been lined at least twice and attached to a stretcher whose design differs from the original stretcher. Stretcher bar cracks on both paintings indicate that the original stretchers may have had six members each, including one horizontal and one vertical crossbar. The edges of the original fabric on *The Swing* are ragged and uneven, so they do not reach the edge of the stretcher. Both paintings were prepared with a double ground of a gray layer on top of a red one. The paint was applied thinly, modulated with glazes and scumbles.

Both paintings are in fair condition. *The Swing* has three tears in the fabric; the longest tear runs through the lion fountain in the lower left corner. The other two tears are located in the sky in the upper left quadrant of the painting. *Blindman’s Buff* has a tear through the right arm of the blindfolded woman. The areas of abraded paint in the clouds and trees of *Blindman’s Buff* have been inpainted, as have the edges and the area along the seam. On *The Swing*, the seam has been inpainted, and the area between the ragged edges of the original fabric and the edges of the current stretcher have been filled and inpainted. According to Colin Eisler, the paintings were “last relined in Europe” and had “minor restorations by Mario Modestini in 1959.” [1] The inpainting on both paintings has discolored, though the worst of the discolored inpainting along the seam in *The Swing* was inpainted again in 2002.



## TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* (Oxford, 1977), 329.
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## PROVENANCE

Casimir Perrin, marquis de Cypierre [1783-1844], Paris; (his estate sale, at his residence by Thoré, Paris, 10 March 1845 and days following, no. 52 or 53).[1] possibly marquise de Montesquiou-Fezensac, Paris;[2] Camille Groult [1837-1908], Paris, possibly from 1889, to 1908.[3] (Wildenstein & Co., New York); sold February 1954 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York;[4] gift 1961 to NGA.

[1] This is the first confirmed record of the painting. For discussion of possible earlier provenance now rejected by scholars, see Richard Rand's entry on this painting and its pendant, *Blindman's Buff* (NGA 1961.9.16), in Philip Conisbee, et al., *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue, Washington, 2009: 199, 202 nn. 13, 14.

[2] The pair of paintings were possibly the two Fragonards sold from the Montesquiou-Fezensac collection to Henri Haro, buying for Camille Groult, prior to its 1897 sale at Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 19 March 1897; see Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian*, Oxford, 1977: 331 n. 17.

[3] Groult's ownership was incorrectly given as "until at least 1889" in the provenance for the painting published in the NGA's 2009 catalogue (see note 1). Thanks to correspondence from Olafur Thorvaldsson (e-mail of 27 September 2019, in NGA curatorial files), Groult's ownership can be further clarified.

Groult was given as the owner of the paintings in publications of 1889 (Portalis;



who actually places only NGA 1961.9.16 in Groult's collection, and confuses the provenances of three paintings in his entry), 1906 (Nolhac), 1908 (Flament; kindly sent to NGA by Mr. Thorvaldsson), and 1927 (Reau). If Groult did not acquire the paintings until 1897 (see note 2 about this possibility), the 1889 publication is in error. Since Groult died in 1908, the 1927 publication must have meant he was a former owner, although it is possible the painting was inherited by his son, Jean Groult (1868-1951). The painting was not included in the 21 March 1952 sale of the Groult collection.

[4] The bill of sale (copy in NGA curatorial files, see also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, <https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/2302>) is dated February 10, 1954, and was for a total of fourteen paintings; payments by the Foundation continued to March 1957.

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1961 Art Treasures for America: An Anthology of Paintings & Sculpture in the Samuel H. Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1961-1962, no. 179, repro.

1987 Fragonard, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987-1988, no. 162.

1988 The Pastoral Landscape: The Legacy of Venice, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988-1989, no. 80, fig. 165.

2003 The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Altes Museum, Berlin, 2003-2004, not in cat. (shown only in Washington).

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