Ceres, or Summer, originally formed part of a set of four oval paintings representing the Four Seasons, “painted for the dining room of M. Crozat,” [1] Jean Antoine Watteau’s great patron. It was engraved [fig. 1], along with its companions, for the Recueil Jullienne (the compendium of prints after Watteau’s work): [2] Spring [fig. 2] was destroyed by fire in 1966; Autumn [fig. 3] has been lost for more than two centuries; Winter [fig. 4] has been lost for more than a century. [3] The Seasons most likely served as overdoors for the dining room of Pierre Crozat’s Paris hôtel on rue de Richelieu, where Watteau was living from about 1715, and certainly by the likely time of the commission, 1717. Cordélia Hattori has shown that they formed part of a larger decorative scheme in the dining room, consisting of eight or nine paintings by several artists, including an oval painting by Michel
Corneille (most likely Michel Corneille the Younger, 1642–1708) and a circular painting by Giovanni Paolo Panini (Roman, 1691 - 1765), which was perhaps the ninth, added at a later date. The eight paintings are mentioned in an inventory of the house following Crozat's death in 1740, while nine are mentioned in a description by Louis Petit de Bachaumont, who noted the works by Corneille and Panini. [4]

Crozat (1665–1740) was one of the greatest collectors at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Louis Torterat Clément de Ris characterized his collection, with paintings alone numbering 400, as “the richest and most varied that a private citizen ever possessed.” [5] Crozat had begun collecting in 1683 in Toulouse, his birthplace, and continued to collect during the years that he and his brother Antoine served as treasurers in the Languedoc. By the time of their arrival in Paris around 1703 or 1704, both brothers had amassed so many artworks that each felt it necessary to construct a grand hôtel particulier. Sylvain Cartaud was the architect of Pierre’s hôtel. When the building was completed, around 1707, Crozat commissioned interior decorations from Charles de La Fosse (1636–1716), including a painting of The Birth of Minerva for the ceiling of the large gallery of the house. [6]

The conceptual and compositional challenges of depicting a large-scale mythological figure in an oval frame were unprecedented for Watteau. The comte de Caylus was only the most strident of a number of critics who felt that “this deficiency in the practice of drawing put it beyond his reach to paint or compose anything heroic or allegorical, much less render large-scale figures....[T]his refined and light touch, which works so well on a small scale, loses all its merit and becomes unbearable when it is used in this larger expanse.” [7] However, in Ceres Watteau adopted a broader handling that befits the painting’s function as part of a larger decorative scheme. Unlike cabinet pictures, the Seasons were never intended to be viewed at close range. The surface of the painting was somewhat abraded and in places overpainted before it entered the National Gallery of Art’s collection, and the general effect of discoloration did not help its appearance, which led to criticism in the past. [8] But removal in 2001 of the old yellowed varnish and numerous repaints—and sensitive inpainting of the damaged areas, as described in the Technical Notes—have restored much of Ceres’s light-filled palette and brilliancy of touch. Watteau’s pale-toned underpainting again plays its key role in the general luminosity and airiness of the overall conception of the cloud-borne goddess.
Hattori has shown that for the representations of the other Seasons, Watteau turned to specific prototypes in the work of various old masters. Ceres’s head, shoulders, and upper torso derive from a drawing from life of one of Watteau’s favorite models: the figure at lower center in a sheet of studies in the Louvre [fig. 5], but reversed as if Watteau employed a counterproof. [9] No doubt there were other drawings, long since lost, to which Watteau turned for models and ideas; several drawings related to other Seasons survive. [10]

Watteau’s painterly style here is indebted to the work of Charles de La Fosse (French, 1636 - 1716), who was the leading Rubensian colorist at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By Caylus’s account, Watteau executed the paintings “after the sketches by M. de la Fosse,” [11] who lived in Crozat’s hôtel with his wife and niece from 1708 until his death in December 1716. [12] Drawings in an oval format by La Fosse exploring the theme of Zephyr and Flora (for example, [fig. 6]) certainly seem to have been preparatory for a similar decorative scheme: their entwined gestures look forward to Watteau’s Spring (see fig. 2). Moreover, Watteau was to perfect a drawing style in black, white, and red chalk, which La Fosse in turn had adapted from Sir Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577 - 1640). Drawings long attributed to Watteau are now given to La Fosse, such as two studies of a man in the British Museum. [13] The lion in Ceres is adapted from the lion in La Fosse’s painting God the Father (Dunkirk, Musée des Beaux-Arts). [14] Watteau had come to La Fosse’s notice when he competed for the Prix de Rome in 1712, whereupon the older artist became one of Watteau’s first sponsors for membership in the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture. [15] La Fosse was a friend of Roger de Piles (1635–1709) and took an active part on the side of the Rubénistes, or proponents of color over line, in the debates of the Académie. [16] There is little doubt that La Fosse introduced Watteau to Crozat and that by 1715 Watteau, too, was working for and lodging with the great collector. [17] In an inventory made after La Fosse’s death, Hattori has found mention of four oval paintings, the property of Crozat and destined for his dining room. [18] This discovery seems to bear out Caylus’s statement that the decoration was conceived by La Fosse but completed by Watteau. It is most likely that Crozat commissioned Watteau to execute his versions of the decoration after the death of La Fosse, and—as Hattori has proposed—about the time he was received into the Académie in 1717.

The figure of Ceres derives generically from the fair-skinned beauties of Titian and Veronese, who were among the Venetian painters Crozat most admired. Venetian
influences suffuse Ceres, which Michael Levey characterized as "virtually Veronese but Veronese as seen through the eyes of Rubens." [19] Crozat brought back examples of Venetian art, including Veronese drawings, from his Italian journey of November 1714–October 1715, and it is easy to see how Watteau’s luminous tonalities and brushy manner would have gratified his patron’s Venetian taste. [20] Although most of Crozat’s Veronese paintings were not acquired until 1721, when he was negotiating the purchase of the art collection of Queen Christina of Sweden, Watteau would have had several spectacular works by Veronese available to him in Paris in 1715, such as The Supper at Emmaus in the royal collection (Paris, Musée du Louvre) or Rachel at the Well in the comte Léon de Lassay’s collection.

The artistic links between Venice and Paris were close early in the eighteenth century. Crozat was the nexus connecting Watteau and Pierre Jean Mariette (1694–1774) with Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757), Antonio Pellegrini (1675–1741), and Sebastiano Ricci (bapt. 1659–1734), for example. [21] Ceres is a pivotal surviving work that signals the increased impact of Venetian art on Watteau’s later style and on Parisian decorative painting in the second decade of the century. That the influence was reciprocal can be seen in a Ceres ( Allegory of Summer ) by Pellegrini (location unknown), painted, according to Pierre Rosenberg, during his 1720 visit to Paris, [22] or in the pendants of Ceres and Flora (Venice, Giustiniani-Recanati Collection), which were likely part of another Seasons cycle. [23]

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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.

Philip Conisbee
January 1, 2009

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

Ceres (Summer)
© National Gallery of Art, Washington
NOTES


[8] For example, Antoine Seilern, Paintings and Drawings of Continental Schools Other than Flemish and Italian at 56 Princes Gate London SW7, Text III (London, 1961), 79.


[20] In Seilern’s view, Crozat’s Venetian treasures provided Watteau with “fresh inspiration” for the Seasons (Antoine Seilern, *Paintings and Drawings of Continental Schools Other than Flemish and Italian at 56 Princes Gate London SW7, Text III* [London, 1961], 79).


[22] Margaret Morgan Grasselli and Pierre Rosenberg, *Watteau 1684–1721*
TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support consists of a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric. There are two horizontal seams running across the painting, one approximately 11 cm from the top edge and the other 9.5 cm from the bottom edge. The painting has been lined, and the tacking margins have been removed. Cusping is present along all four edges, indicating that the painting probably has not been reduced in size. The support was prepared with an off-white or light gray ground. On top of the ground in the areas of the design elements, Watteau applied an underpainting of various tones ranging from peach to dark gray. The paint was applied using a variety of techniques. Watteau built up the forms using thin scumbles over the underpainting, progressing into thick highlights with visible brushmarking. Over this, he applied glazes to form the shadows and Ceres’s features and hair.

The painting was seriously damaged both by harsh cleaning and from a complex tear in the center of the canvas, which resulted in rather large areas of paint loss. Both of these conditions happened sometime prior to acquisition. As a result of the tear, the upper half of Ceres’s left torso is missing. There are also wide losses associated with three diagonal branches of the tear running to the right of the figure into the clouds, into the head of one of the twins, and through the sickle in the hand of Ceres. The tear has been mended, probably when the painting was lined, and the losses have been inpainted. Additional inpainting exists to compensate for gaps at the edges of the picture, which occurred because the painting is attached to a stretcher that is slightly larger than the original support fabric. The painting was treated in 2001, and discolored varnish and inpaint were removed. The varnish and inpainting applied at that time have not discolored.

PROVENANCE

Commissioned by Pierre Crozat [1665-1740] for the dining room of his hôtel on rue de Richelieu, Paris; by inheritance with the hôtel to his nephew, Louis François Crozat, marquis du Châtel [1691-1750], Paris; by inheritance with the hôtel to his...

[1] Annotated copies of the sale catalogue give the name variously as "Rebes," "Mr. le president Rebe," and "de Rebes." See the extended description of this sale in the sale catalogues portion of the Getty Provenance Index Database, J. Paul Getty Trust (photocopy in NGA curatorial files), which includes the comment: "It is not known from which legislative body his title of president is taken, nor has his full name been found."


[3] According to the 1895 Sedelmeyer catalogue and the catalogue of the 1935 Copenhagen exhibition, and repeated in William E. Suida and Fern Rusk Shapley, Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection Acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1951-1956, Washington, D.C., 1956: 204, the painting was supposed to have been in the Hugh A.J. Munro of Novar collection in Ross,
Scotland. However, *Spring*, another painting in the series, was actually in the Munro collection (and sold at Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 1 June 1878, no. 149).


[6] The painting was lent by Wildenstein to a 1935 exhibition in Copenhagen.

[7] The bill of sale (copy in NGA curatorial files, see also The Kress Collection Digital Archive, https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/468) is dated February 10, 1954, and was for a total of fourteen paintings; payments by the Foundation continued to March 1957.

**EXHIBITION HISTORY**


1935 Exposition de L'art français au XVIIIe siècle, Palais de Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 1935, no. 262.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


as Allegory of Summer (Ceres).


