



Jean Honoré Fragonard
French, 1732 - 1806

Young Girl Reading

c. 1769

oil on canvas

overall: 81.1 x 64.8 cm (31 15/16 x 25 1/2 in.)

framed: 104.9 x 89.5 x 2.2 cm (41 5/16 x 35 1/4 x 7/8 in.)

Gift of Mrs. Mellon Bruce in memory of her father, Andrew W. Mellon 1961.16.1

ENTRY

For a copy of the 2009 entry on this painting from the systematic catalogue *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*, please see the file available for download on this page under "Archived Version(s)."

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a slightly coarse plain-weave fabric. The painting has been lined, and the tacking margins have been removed. Prominent cusping on all four edges suggests that the painting has not been cut down. The support was prepared with two ground layers: a pale-gray layer covered by a fawn-colored layer. The paint was applied vigorously, with impasto in highlights and thin washes that leave the ground partially visible in the shadows. The gray shadowed lines in the girl's collar and fichu were created by incising into the wet white paint with the butt end of the brush to reveal the gray layer beneath. The X-radiograph was originally thought to reveal an earlier painting underneath the current head showing the head of a man wearing a feathered hat. Further analysis (false-color infrared imaging and XRF elemental mapping of both lead white and vermilion) conducted between 2013 and 2015 produced images indicating that the underlying head is actually that of a woman wearing a beaded and feathered headdress, her face turned out to gaze directly at the viewer. Due to an increase in the translucency of the surface paint, the outline, eyes, and feathered headdress of the woman are now slightly visible as pentimenti. Cross-sectional analysis shows that there is no intermediate paint layer between the two heads, nor is there varnish or dirt between them.

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Additionally, it shows that the original paint layer was not disrupted in any way when painted over, suggesting it was dry before the application of the now-visible paint layer. This suggests that Fragonard did not embark on the repainting immediately, as the lower layer would require at least six months to dry to this degree.[1]

Overall, the painting is in good condition. To the right of the girl's neck is a small complex tear. A larger J-shaped tear extends through the pillow and arm of the chair at the bottom right. The paint is slightly abraded in the thinly painted folds and shadows of the dress and in the darks along the bottom of the painting. In 1985 a discolored varnish was removed, and the two distorted tears were realigned and inpainted. The sitter's head from the previous painting, which had become distractingly visible, was also inpainted at that time. In 1986 a slightly toned varnish was applied. The inpainting of the larger tear has discolored slightly, but the remainder of the inpainting and the varnish have not.

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] Analysis was performed by the NGA scientific research department, May 9, 1985. The cross-sections also confirmed the presence of the two ground layers. New analysis was performed between December 2012 and January 2015.

PROVENANCE

Verrier;^[1] (his sale, Paillet at Hôtel d'Aligre, Paris, 11 March 1776 and days following, no. 80); purchased by Mailly or Neuilly [*sic*]. (sale, Paillet at Hôtel d'Aligre, Paris, 7 February 1777, no. 15). Jean François Leroy de Sennéville [1715-1784], Paris; (his sale, Chariot and Paillet at Hôtel de Bullion, Paris, 5-11 April 1780, no. 59); purchased by Duquesnoy, Paris; (his sale, at his residence by Regnault, Paris, 1-3 March 1803, no. 19). (sale, Alliance des Arts, Paris, 26 April 1844, no. 14). Casimir Perrin, marquis de Cypierre [1783-1844], Paris; (his estate sale, at his residence by Thoré, Paris, 10 March 1845 and days following, no. 55). Comte Pierre de Kergorlay [1847-1919], by 1889.^[2] (Gimpel and Wildenstein, Paris); sold 1899 to Ernest Cronier [1840-1905], Paris; (his estate sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 4-5 December 1905, 1st day, no. 8); purchased by Ducrey. Dr. Théodore Tuffier [1859-1929], Paris,

by 1910 [or possibly purchased 1905 at Cronier sale through Ducrey], until at least 1928. (Wildenstein & Co., Inc., Paris, New York, and London); Alfred W. Erickson [1876-1936], New York, by 1930;^[3] by inheritance to his wife, Anna Edith McCann Erickson [d. 1961], New York; (her sale, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 15 November 1961, no. 16); purchased by NGA with funds provided by Ailsa Mellon Bruce [1901-1969], New York.

[1] The first name in the provenance was published in the 2009 NGA Systematic Catalogue (entry on the painting by Richard Rand, 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, D.C., 2009: no. 31, 160-166) as "Possibly comte du Barry, Paris," based on the provenance for the painting according to Georges Wildenstein, *The Paintings of Fragonard, complete edition*, New York, 1960: no. 391, and repeated throughout the literature. This incorrect identification of the seller at the March 1776 auction has been corrected by The Getty Provenance Index Databases, in their Description of Sale Catalog F-A406. See also Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey, "Fragonard's 'fantasy figures': prelude to a new understanding," *The Burlington Magazine* 157, no. 1345 (April 2015): 242-243. Verrier was also the seller at an auction in November of the same year (originally scheduled for 14 November, but postponed to 18 November 1776); Dupuy-Vachey suggests he might be Robert Charles Verrier, who died 11 May 1776.

[2] Jacques Dumont de Montroy, *Les Kergorlay dans l'Oise et en Normandie*, Beauvais, 2006: 167-170; Roger Portalis, *Honoré Fragonard: sa vie et son oeuvre*, 2 vols., Paris, 1889: 282. Comte Denis de Kergorlay kindly provided a copy of the 2006 book about his family, enabling the identification of the "Comte de Kergorlay" named as the painting's owner in 1889. Pierre de Kergorlay's second wife, Marie de Caulaincourt de Vicence (1859-1902), was through her mother a granddaughter of Casimir Perrin, marquis de Cypierre, who owned the painting in 1844, the year of his death. Although the painting appears to have sold at the marquis' 1845 estate sale, it possibly remained in the family and came to Pierre de Kergorlay through his second marriage in 1880.

[3] An annotated copy of the 1905 sales catalogue in the NGA Library provides Ducrey's name, who was possibly buying for Tuffier. Correspondence between the Paris and New York offices of Duveen Brothers, Inc., in 1927 and 1928 discusses

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the painting and the possibility of purchasing it from Tuffier; Wildenstein is also mentioned as a possible buyer (Duveen Brothers Records, Getty Research Institute Library, Los Angeles, accession no. 960015, reel 97, box 242, folder 16; copies in NGA curatorial files). René Gimpel (*Diary of an Art Dealer*, translated by John Rosenberg, New York, 1966: 398), in a diary entry of 16 February 1930, writes of seeing the painting two days before at the Erickson residence, and describes it as "from the old Crosnier[sic] Collection, bought at his sale by Professor Tuffier..."

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1909 Cent portraits de femme, Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1909, no. 64, repro.

1910 Ausstellung von Weken Französischer Kunst des XVIII. Jarhunderts, Königliche Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1910, no. 138 (no. 51 in French edition of catalogue).

1921 Exposition d'oeuvres de J.-H. Fragonard, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Pavillon de Marsan, Paris, 1921, no. 56.

1933 Three French Reigns (Louis XIV, XV & XVI), Sir Philip Sassoon's Residence, London, 1933, no. 517.

1935 French Painting and Sculpture of the XVII Century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1935-1936, no. 45, repro.

1951 Wildenstein Jubilee Loan Exhibition, 1901-1951: Masterpieces from Museums and Private Collections, Wildenstein & Co., New York, 1951, no. 29, repro.

1969 In Memoriam, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1969, unnumbered checklist.

1980 Fragonard, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo; Kyoto Municipal Museum, 1980, no. 61, repro.

1987 Fragonard, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987-1988, no. 136, repro.

2002 Painting Women: Fragonard to Bouguereau, San Diego Museum of Art, 2002-2003, no cat.

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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, no. 81, repro.

2007 *Inspiring Impressionism: The Impressionists and the Art of the Past*, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Denver Art Museum; Seattle Art Museum, 2007-2008, no. 38, repro.

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- 1966 Boucher, François. *Fragonard*. Paris, 1966: XII, repro.
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- 1971 Cott, Perry B. "The Ailsa Mellon Bruce Gifts." *The Connoisseur* 178 (December 1971): 256-257, repro.
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To cite: Jean Honoré Fragonard/*Young Girl Reading/c. 1769*," *Focus Section – French Paintings of the Eighteenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/46303> (accessed February 20, 2018).