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Jean Honoré Fragonard Exhibition Unites Fantasy Figures and Newly Discovered Drawing at National Gallery of Art, October 8–December 3, 2017



Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Young Girl Reading*, c. 1769, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Mellon Bruce in memory of her father, Andrew W. Mellon

Washington, DC—Combining art, fashion, science, and conservation, the revelatory exhibition ***Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*** brings together—for the first time—a newly discovered drawing by Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) and some 14 of his paintings that have been identified with it including the Gallery's own *Young Girl Reading* (c. 1769). Fragonard is considered among the most characteristic and important French painters of his era, and this series casts light on the development of his career, the identity of his sitters and patrons, and the significance of his innovative imagery. ***Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*** and the fully illustrated catalog that accompanies it not only present new art-historical and scientific research into this series but also examine the 18th-century Parisian world in which these paintings were created. The exhibition may be seen only at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in the West Building, from October 8 through December 3, 2017.

Covered with 18 thumbnail-sized sketches and apparently annotated in the rococo artist's own hand, the drawing now known as *Sketches of Portraits* emerged at a Paris auction in 2012 and upended several long-held assumptions about the fantasy figures—a series of rapidly executed, brightly colored paintings of lavishly costumed individuals.

"The first exhibition to unite the fantasy figures with the recently discovered drawing focuses on this aspect of Fragonard's production in a powerful and intimate way," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "We are grateful to the public and private collections, both here and abroad, that have generously lent to this exhibition, as well as to Lionel and Ariane Sauvage whose gift supported the catalog's publication."

#### Organization and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

#### Exhibition Highlights

***Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*** explores the many interpretations of this series in the context of the artist's career. Fragonard strove to create a specific portrait type that showcased the painterly skill for which he was renowned. The fantasy figures also enabled him to experiment and to refine his ideas of artistic reference and emulation. Created within the competitive atmosphere of the Parisian art world, these works were influenced by a range of events, artworks, and visitors to his studio.

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The fantasy figures depict men and women posed at leisure or employed in various pursuits, such as acting, reading, writing, playing instruments, or singing. Wearing extravagant attire, these figures are dressed in what was known in 18th-century France as *à l'espagnole* (Spanish style)—plumed hats, slashed sleeves, ribbons, rosettes, ruffs, capes, and accents of red and black. Shaped by artistic imagination, these paintings pushed the boundaries of accepted figure painting at the time.

Exhibited for the first time is the newly discovered *Sketches of Portraits* (c. 1769), a thin sheet of paper with three rows of 18 small sketches—all but one are annotated with a name, 14 have been identified with one of Fragonard's painted fantasy figures, and four remain unknown. The emergence of *Sketches of Portraits* prompted a two-year investigation of *Young Girl Reading*, conducted as a collaborative effort by the Gallery's Yuriko Jackall, assistant curator of French paintings, John K. Delaney, senior imaging scientist, and Michael Swicklik, senior conservator of paintings. Published in the April 2015 issue of *Burlington Magazine*, the findings established *Young Girl Reading* as a part of the fantasy figure series and shed light upon Fragonard's approach to the ensemble as a whole.

Other works in the exhibition include the rarely lent, privately held portraits of the Harcourt brothers *François-Henri, duc d'Harcourt* (c. 1770) and *Anne-François d'Harcourt, duc de Beuvron* (c. 1770)—which are on view together for the first time since the 1987 exhibition *Fragonard* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Musée du Louvre—as well as *The Vestal* (c. 1769–1771), *The Actor* (c. 1769), and *The Singer* (c. 1769). Also on view is the Louvre's *M. de La Bretèche* (c. 1769), which depicts the wealthy brother of one of Fragonard's most devoted patrons, Jean-Claude Richard, abbé de Saint-Non.

### Curator, Catalog, and Related Activities

The exhibition is curated by Yuriko Jackall, assistant curator, department of French paintings, National Gallery of Art.

The 176-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalog includes an overview and technical examination by Yuriko Jackall with John K. Delaney and Michael Swicklik, all at the National Gallery of Art, and essays by Carole Blumenfeld, research associate at the Palais Fesch-Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ajaccio; Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, fashion historian; Jean-Pierre Cuzin, former director of the department of paintings at the Musée du Louvre, Paris; Elodie Kong, an art historian specializing in the collecting habits of financiers in 18th-century Paris; and Satish Padiyar, senior lecturer in 19th-century European art at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. The hardcover catalog is available for purchase in the Gallery Shops at [shop.nga.gov](http://shop.nga.gov); (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002 (phone); (202) 789-3047 (fax); or [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### Lecture and Book Signing

*An Introduction to the Exhibition—Fragonard: The Fantasy Figures*

October 8, 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Yuriko Jackall, assistant curator, department of French paintings, National Gallery of Art

### Lecture

*Fashion à la Figaro: Spanish Style on the French Stage*

November 26, 2:00 p.m.

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, fashion historian

### Concert

New York Opera Society

November 26, 3:30 p.m.

West Building, East Garden Court

New York Opera Society performs *The Three Lives of Rosina Almaviva*

### Press Contact:

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### General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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