

To Rossella

*'Mon naturel me contraint de chercher les
choses bien ordonnées, fuyant la confusion,
qui m'est aussi contraire et ennemie comme
est la lumière des obscures ténèbres'.*

Poussin

Le Classicisme Français

MASTERPIECES OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PAINTING

A LOAN EXHIBITION FROM THE LOUVRE
AND FRENCH REGIONAL MUSEUMS AT
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND
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Though Le Brun dominated his epoch, this was not solely due to his position as leader – the head of the Académie and all artistic enterprises of the reign of Louis XIV, the monarch whose glory seemed indissociable from his own: these responsibilities and privileges dedicated the genius and talent for organisation of an exceptional artist, towards whom posterity has showed itself somewhat unjust.

The son of a sculptor and very precocious, Le Brun was a pupil of François Perrier at thirteen. A short while later he entered the studio of Vouet and copied the King's Raphaels at Fontainebleau. As early as 1641 he painted a picture for Richelieu (Hercules and Diomedes, Nottingham). Admitted to the Corporation des Peintres in 1642 – of which he later became a fierce adversary – he painted for them a Martyrdom of St. John (Paris, Church of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonneret; reproduced in colour by Thuillier, 1964, p. 96), a work, rich in the skills learned from his first masters, which also reveals an adventurous spirit. The Chancellor Séguier, who was his protector for ten years, sent him to Rome in 1642. He accompanied Poussin (who had left Paris for good) on the journey there and frequented his studio during his sojourn in Rome, sometimes imitating the master (no. 18). In Rome he also made the acquaintance of Dufresnoy and Mignard, his future rival. His admiration, as much for the antique, Raphael and Annibale Carracci, as for contemporaries such as Pietro da Cortona and Andrea Sacchi, confirmed and enriched the lessons of Poussin, which he made the basis of his doctrine, which in turn became that of the Académie.

Having learned all that he could in Rome, of which his Presentation in the Temple, painted in 1645 for the Hôtel-Dieu at Lyons (Detroit) sums up contemporary tendencies, he cut short his stay and returned to France in 1646, passing through Lyons on the way, where he painted The Death of Cato (Arras), a strikingly Caravaggesque creation.

His Parisian career started brilliantly with the Mays de Notre-Dame of 1647 and 1651 (The Martyrdom of St. Andrew and The Martyrdom of St. Stephen, in situ) and the founding of the Académie of which he was the first among the 'anciens' (1648) – though he was later ousted for a number of years by Charles Errard towards 1655. There soon followed a series of decorative projects for private dwellings: the Hôtel Nouveau, Hôtel La Rivière (1653) and above all the Hôtel Lambert, for which, in 1649, he painted the Galerie d'Hercule. Nicolas Fouquet, the powerful Superintendent of Finance commissioned him to decorate his château at Vaux (1658-1661), where his role was not limited solely to painting but also to supervising the sculpture, tapestries and festivities, a role he was to repeat later at Versailles.

Passing into the service of Louis XIV he began the decoration of the Galerie d'Apollon in the Louvre (1661). In 1663 he became Chancellor of the Académie and Director of the Gobelins Tapestry Factory, and was established as 'Premier peintre du Roi' in 1664.

For more than twenty years he reigned over the arts in France, directing numerous teams of artists and workers, seeing no lessening of his influence until 1683, which saw the death of Colbert, his principal supporter. Colbert's successor, Louvois, supported his rival Mignard, who had returned from Italy and had allied himself with the painters of the Corporation against those of the Académie.

To this period belong the great creations, including the Queens of Persia (1661,

Versailles), a magisterial illustration of his researches into the expression of the passions, a subject he wished to codify scientifically and which was the source of Louis XIV's personal admiration for the artist. Louis in fact watched him paint this particular work. Also included are the four immense canvases depicting the Story of Alexander (from the 1670's, Louvre) together with projects for the Chapel at Versailles (unrealised), L'Escalier des Ambassadeurs (1674-1678, destroyed), and finally the Galerie des Glaces (1679-1684) for the same location. These enterprises did not absorb all of Le Brun's energies and he also continued to paint pictures for churches and convents (The Resurrection 1674-1676, Lyons; The Descent from the Cross c. 1679, Rennes) as well as portraits (The Entry of Chancellor Séguier, Louvre), as well as providing drawings for engravings and tapestries and the organisation of festivities. . . . His prodigious activity can only be compared to that of a Raphael or a Rubens.

Overshadowed by the growing influence of Mignard, who was already attracting the more important commissions, the last years of Le Brun saw a return to the production of easel pictures which included The Story of Moses (1687, Modena), and the series showing The Life of Christ, painted for the King (1683-1689, Louvre, Troyes, Saint-Etienne) which led to the moving Adoration of the Shepherds (1690, Louvre) which he painted for his wife, his last work, a homage to Poussin.

If Vouet was the chief influence in the greatest Parisian Atelier of his day, then Le Brun, as David was later to become, was the head of a 'school' and that at a time when France held the most eminent position in Europe. The Art of Versailles ruled over the courts of Europe, which were then already attempting to attract French artists and whose academies were modelled on those of Paris. The Académie itself, in 1666 established the Académie de France at Rome, where virtually all the great French artists, from Antoine Coypel to David and Ingres, finished their studies. This shows the importance of the aesthetic choices of this painter, who being both at the head of the great institutions as well as leading in the creation of the most important artistic projects of his day, knew how to be, at the same time, the follower and inheritor of both Vouet and Poussin, and who, while defending the primacy of drawing over colour, could also see fit to encourage artists such as La Fosse who claimed to draw on Rubens.

18. Allegory of the Tiber

53.5 x 64.5 cm.

Beauvais, Musée départemental de l'Oise.

HISTORY: Painted in Rome between 1643 and 1645 with figures by Le Brun and landscapes by Dughet (Nivelon, circa 1700). Passed through a sale in the nineteenth century under the name of Poussin (?). Acquired at a sale in Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 13th July 1944, for 1,500 francs, by the artist Maurice Boudot-Lamotte (1878-1958). Presented by his daughter, Marie-Josèphe Boudot-Lamotte, to the Musée de Beauvais in 1979.

EXHIBITION: 1979-1980, Beauvais, no. 39, reproduced p. 46 and a detail on the cover.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Claude Nivelon, *Vir de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages*, manuscript (circa 1700), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 12.987, p. 22; H. Jouin, *Charles Le Brun et les arts sous Louis XIV*, 1889, pp. 52, 54, 515; J. Thuillier, exhibition catalogue *Charles Le Brun*, 1963, Versailles, pp. XXXXVI (sic) and 15, under no. 5 ('perdu'); J. Thuillier, introduction to exhibition catalogue, 1979-1980, Beauvais, pp. 10-11; M.-M. Aubrun, entry on the painting, same catalogue, p. 47, no. 39; 'Chronique des Arts', supplement to G.B.A., 1981-I, March, p. 4, no. 21, reproduced p. 5; Museum Guide, 1981, p. 47, reproduced.

Having arrived in Rome at the end of 1642, accompanied by Poussin, Le Brun became very friendly with the latter's brother-in-law, the landscapist Gaspard Dughet. This painting, recently identified and given to the Musée de Beauvais, is a precious testimony to their

collaboration, which Nivelon, Le Brun's confidant and biographer, specifically confirms was painted 'dans le même goût fier de M. le Poussin, et dont le Guaspre voulut par amitié peindre le paysage' ('In the same proud way of M. Le Poussin, and in which le Guaspre [Dughet] wanted, out of friendship, to paint the landscape'). The strong influence of Poussin is also evidenced — combined in this case with Perrier's influence — in a *Deification of Aeneas* (Montreal; exhibition 1963, Versailles, no. 5, reproduced) where a river god, quite similar to this one, is also seen.

The Tiber stands for both Rome and Antiquity. The celebrated statue of the divine River, once in the Vatican, in the courtyard of the Belvedere and in the Louvre since 1803 (Haskell and Penny, 1982, no. 79), directly inspired Le Brun who has here slightly modified its pose and has added an urn under the right arm. This classical group had been engraved by his master François Perrier — whom he met again in Rome — in 1638 (*Segmenta* ..., pl. 92).

Romulus and Remus are here seen suckled by the she-wolf under the left leg of the God; a trophy is attached to a tree. To these symbols of the origin and prosperity of Rome, taken from the Antique, Le Brun adds a few new ideas which Nivelon develops: the trophy alludes to the 'ancient glory of Rome', while Victory and Fame with the two trumpets are reclining signs of 'la langueur et léthargie où elle est présentement' ('the languor and lethargy of her [Rome] present state').

Le Brun, who copied Raphael and Guido Reni for his protector, the Chancellor Séguier, was only in Rome for six months when he urged the latter to allow him return to Paris. He repeated his demand on many occasions from July 1643, mentioning the difficulties which the French had at Rome and the small glory he would get from this stay. He ended by returning to France without Séguier's consent. Could this painting, with its anxious Tiber of fixed expression (no longer directed to infinity, as in the statue) and the allusions to idleness and to dormant glory, be a reflection of the personal distress of the young artist impatient to succeed on another stage.

19. Moses striking the Rock

114 × 153 cm.

Paris, Musée du Louvre (inv. RF 1947-2; Catalogue 1974, no. 436, reproduced).

HISTORY: Perhaps the 'Moïse touchant le Rocher' of Le Brun valued at 800 livres by P. Mignard in the posthumous inventory of Hugues de Lionne in 1671 (Jouin, 1889, p. 746). Seen by Grautoff in 1912 at the Galerie Barbazanges, who offered it in vain to the Minneapolis Museum in 1924, and then sold it to Charles Pearson, as by Poussin (Bertin-Mouro, 1947, p. 56, note 1). Presented by Mme. Pearson, 1947 (attributed to Poussin).

EXHIBITIONS: 1960, Paris: *Reserves*, no. 313; 1960-1961, Recklinghausen, no. D. 68, reproduced; 1961, Rouen: no. 44, pl. 25 ('Lebrun?'); 1963, Versailles, exhibited but not entered in the catalogue; 1965, Jerusalem, no. 36.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: C. Nivelon, *Vie de Charles Le Brun et description détaillée de ses ouvrages*, manuscript, (circa 1700), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 12.987, p. 40; Dézallier d'Argenville, *Abrégé* ..., 2nd ed., 1762, vol. IV, p. 126; H. Jouin, *Charles Le Brun et les arts sous Louis XIV*, 1889, pp. 97 (note),

464, 746 (*addenda*); Th. Bertin-Mouro, 'Moïse frappant le rocher', *Bulletin de la Société Poussin*, 1st cahier, 1947, pp. 56-65; S. Ernst, 'Deux dessins de Poussin pour Moïse frappant le rocher', *Bulletin de la Société Poussin*, 3rd cahier, 1950, p. 86; Th. Bertin-Mouro, *Poussin Inconnu*, (*Bulletin de la Société Poussin*) 1957, pp. 2-3, reproduced; A. Schnapper, 'De Nicolas Loir à Jean Jouvenet', *R.L.*, 1962, no. 3, p. 121 note 21; J. Montagu, 'The unknown Charles Le Brun. Some newly attributed drawings', *Master Drawings*, vol. I, no. 2, 1963, pp. 40-47, cf. pp. 43 and 46, note 19; A. Blunt, *The Paintings of N. Poussin. A Critical catalogue*, London, 1966, p. 170, no. R 13 ('certainly by Lebrun'); J. Thuillier, *Tout l'oeuvre peint de Poussin*, 1974, p. 118, no. R 15 (Lebrun, before 1650).

RELATED WORKS: Five preparatory drawings in the Musée du Louvre (inv. 27969, 28480 recto and verso, 28484 and 28532; Guiffrey and Marcel, vol. VIII, 1912, no. 8123, 8008 recto and verso, 8091 and 6966). A drawing of this title at the Musée de Chartres (inv. 3449; catalogue

1931, p. 26, no. D. 80). A drawn copy of this title, anonymous, after Le Brun, 'à la plume, lavis d'encre rehaussé de blanc sur papier gris; h. 7 pouces; 1. 6 pouces' in the collection of Paingnon Dijonval (Bernard, *Cabinet de M. Paingnon Dijonval*, 1810, p. 120, under no. 2751).

The group of three figures to the right in the

foreground are identical to those in Le Brun's *Roman Charity*, recently acquired by the Musée de Caen (engraved by L. Desplaces; G.B.A., 1965-II, July-August, p. 27, no. 160, reproduced; already reproduced by Bertin-Mouro, 1947, p. 64).

Jennifer Montagu (1963) has decisively put an end to the uncertainties concerning the authorship of this painting, for a long time wrongfully attributed to Poussin, and which can no longer be seen as the picture painted in the style of Poussin of about 1665-1668 executed by the young Jouvenet (A. Schnapper, *Jean Jouvenet*, 1974, p. 183, no. 1, now lost). Apart from the testimony of the five preparatory drawings now at the Louvre, the work was actually mentioned by Nivelon (circa 1700), who admitted to have only seen 'un petit dessin à la plume qui est très précieux mais beaucoup différent du tableau que l'on m'a dit être peint comme le précédent', ('a small ink drawing which was very precious but very different to the painting which I have been told was like the previous one'). The painting which he refers to before this one is the *Brazen Serpent* (95 × 133 cm., Bristol, City Art Gallery), dated to about 1649 by J. Thuillier (exhibition catalogue, 1963, Versailles, no. 14).

The two paintings, both most probably contemporary and both devoted to episodes from the Life of Moses as related in *Exodus* (17, 5-6), are equally inspired by Poussin, whom Le Brun had often met in Rome beforehand. His model is obviously *The Fall of Manna*, the famous composition painted between 1637 and 1639 for Paul Fréart de Chantelou (Louvre), and which Le Brun could have seen in Paris. Like Poussin, Le Brun analyses the diverse attitudes of humanity (the Hebrew victims of thirst) faced with the manifestation of divine grace (the water bursting forth from the rock under Moses' rod). The expression of the passions, which was to be Le Brun's major interest throughout his career, finds in this youthful work (he was in his thirties) one of its first applications.

20. Apollo taking Leave of Tethys

102 × 132 cm. (surface originally painted in an octagonal form)

Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland (cat. no. 4197; Catalogue 1981, p. 16; reproduced: 'Attributed to Bourdon, *Phaeton*').

HISTORY: Sold at James Adam & Sons, Dublin 1946 or 1947 where purchased by Dr. Françoise Henry by whom presented to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1977.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: J. Montagu, 'Oeuvres de Charles Le Brun', in *La donation Baderou au musée de Rouen*

(*Études de la Revue du Louvre*, no. 1), 1980, pp. 41-44, cf. pp. 42-44, 43 fig. 8; P. Rosenberg, 1981-1982, p. 52, under np. 65, reproduced p. 53.

RELATED WORKS: Drawing of the same composition with variations, 41.6 × 44.7 cm., Rouen, Musée des Beaux-Arts (975.4.647; Montagu, 1980, p. 43, fig. 7; Rosenberg, 1981-1982, no. 65, pl. 27; Exhibition: *Choix de dessins français du XVII^e siècle*, collection du musée, Rouen, 1984, no. 58, reproduced).

Initially attributed to Bourdon by J. White, then to Le Brun by A. Blunt, P. Rosenberg and J. Montagu, this painting is, as the latter has demonstrated, the sketch for a ceiling painted by Le Brun in 1650-1651 for the Hôtel of Jérôme de Nouveau, Lord of Fromont and Fiennes, Superintendent General of Posts (c. 1613-1665), situated in Paris, in the Place Royale (now no. 12, Place des Vosges).

H. Jouin (Charles Le Brun, 1889, pp. 104-107, 676-677) who has published the memoirs of Le Brun relative to this commission, confused this, now lost decoration, executed in 1653, with that of the adjoining mansion belonging to the Abbé La Rivière

(now no. 14, Place des Vosges), which is today preserved in the Musée Carnavalet. J. Wilhelm has since re-established the truth ('Les Decorations de Charles Le Brun à l'hôtel de La Rivière', *Bulletin du Musée Carnavalet*, 2^e Année, no. 2, October 1949, pp. 6-15; 'Les Décorations de l'hôtel de La Rivière Nouveaux Documents', *ibid.*, 16^e Année, no. 2, November 1963, pp. 2-19).

The first of the three documents published by Jouin (which then belonged to Anatole de Montaiglon), is dated 3rd August 1650; it is the 'prix des ouvrages de peinture qui se doivent faire chez Monsieur de Nouveau' ('the price of the paintings which must be done at the home of Monsieur de Nouveau'). It lists first 'le grand tableau rempli d'ouvrages ainsi qu'il est porté dans le devis et selon le dessin que j'en ai montré, le prix de 1,500 livres', ('the large painting filled with works as mentioned in the quotation and described in the drawing which I have shown of it [almost certainly the drawing at Rouen], the price of 1,500 livres'). It is added further on that the painting would measure twenty-two feet long by twenty feet wide (650 × 713 cm.). Further listings follow: 2nd the border to the painting; 3rd the four corners, decorated with golden chariots etc., 4th the cornice and the frieze; 5th the chimney; 6th the panelling, 7th the doors; 8th the shutters. All adding up to 6,900 livres, though this figure is reduced without any reason, in the same document, to 4,650 livres and the delivery date fixed for the end of November 1650. According to the second document, of 24th August, Le Brun undertook to reduce the sum by 600 livres if he had not finished by 15th December, and on the 26th of August he acknowledged the receipt of 1,162 livres and 10 sols, in payment of the first quarter, which indicates that the work had already commenced. Finally, on the 1st of July 1651, he acknowledged the receipt of three other payments of the same amount on the 8th of October and the 15th of December 1650 and the 1st of July 1651. The imposed delays therefore had been more than six months, without, however, the anticipated reduction in price.

It is to be noted that the subject of the 'grand tableau' was not specified (it was to be included in the 'quotation' already cited, though now unfortunately lost), and Jouin takes it upon himself to suggest *Mercury and Hebe*, which is a poor interpretation of the subject of one of the ceilings from the Hôtel La Rivière, representing *Mercury transferring Psyche to Mount Olympus* (cf. Wilhelm, 1949, p. 9, reproduced). While Nivelon, Le Brun's biographer, and all the eighteenth century guides to Paris, give lengthy descriptions of the decorations in this Hôtel, none make any mention of those in the Hôtel de Nouveau. However, Guillet de Saint-Georges (c. 1693, in *Mémoires inédits* ..., 1854, vol. I, p. 12) writes of the latter 'M. Le Brun y peignit dans un plafond le Soleil levant, avec toutes les circonstances dont l'histoire poétique embellit ce sujet. Les chûtes des gorges du plafond sont aussi ornées de bas-reliefs feints, où il a représenté un Triomphe de Thétis, un Enlèvement de Proserpine et la Métamorphose du jeune Stellion, changé en lézard', (M. Le Brun has there painted, on the ceiling, the rising sun, embellished with all the circumstances with which the poetic account endows it. The base of the corner mouldings of the ceiling are decorated with fictive bas-reliefs, in which are represented the Triumph of Thetis, the Rape of Proserpine and the Metamorphosis of the young Stellion changed into a lizard').

The subject of the ceiling (which was octagonal, like the drawing and sketch, as is also testified by the reference to the 'four corners' in the contract), is therefore, as shown by J. Montagu (1980), Apollo taking leave of Tethys. She, a Titanide, a woman of the Ocean, was represented as an old woman, but the resemblance of her name with that of the Nereid Thetis, like her, a deity of the sea, though the wife of Peleus and mother to Achilles, very quickly gave rise to confusion which artists exploited, to portray Apollo rejoining in the evening and then leaving in the morning, a young and beautiful deity. Tethys is here shown reclining in the foreground, protecting her eyes from the rays of the rising sun. A Nereid appears to pick something invisible from her hair (both in the sketch

and the drawing), though it must be the branches of coral which she gathers in her left hand. One of her companions draped in a large veil, seems to arouse herself, while another two carry, one a small shrub planted in a vase, the other a cockle shell full of pearls and coral, symbolizing the riches of the earth and the sea. The bearded god covered with a dark cloak, shown resting and leaning on a staff, appears to be Nereus, the old man of the sea and father to the Nereids. In the background, the chariot of the sun is hitched to four horses who have just been fed by the three, winged Hours.

Such a subject was appropriate, not to the glorification of Louis XIV, who was not yet the Sun King in 1650, but to the charge of Jérôme de Nouveau, 'Surintendant des Postes et Relais' (Jouin had noted in this respect the chariots depicted in the corners). This important personage was, on the contrary, connected to the party of the Fronde and to Fouquet, and thought poorly of by Colbert and Mazzarin, whose correspondence he instructed to be opened (cf. E. Vaillé, *Histoire générale des postes françaises*, pp. 38-53).

The Dublin sketch, with its clear tones, gives some idea of the effect produced by the lost ceiling. Its composition should thus correspond to the drawing at Rouen. J. Montagu, who has studied both works (1980), has observed that on the one hand, the proportions of the ceiling and drawing correspond to each other and that they are of a squarer format than those of the sketch, and that on the other hand, the drawing displays a more advanced stage of the composition, more elegant, eliminating certain elements such as the Nereids to the left. It must therefore be deduced that the sketch was painted before Le Brun knew the dimensions given to the ceiling by the architect.

This sketch, nonetheless, remains the most potent memory of one of the first great civil decorations of Le Brun, contemporary with the *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* painted for Notre-Dame, and most probably with the Galerie d'Hercule in the Hôtel Lambert, which seems to have been painted around 1650. As in the two ceilings at the Hôtel La Rivière (in one of which Le Brun again took up the theme of the *Rising Sun*), the vault of the Hôtel Lambert develops a more ambitious decorative plan, in which the flying figures play with the fictive architecture. But Le Brun remains faithful to a moderated system of perspective, rejecting the total illusionism dear to mannerism and to baroque Italy (cf. J. Montagu, 'The early ceiling decorations of Charles Le Brun', *B.M.*, September 1963, pp. 395-408); a single drawing, depicting lions, is mentioned in connection with the Hôtel de Nouveau).

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1. ETIENNE ALLEGRAIN 1644-1736 Landscape with a River
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- 1964, Bordeaux, Galerie des Beaux-Arts: *Le femme et l'artiste de Bellini à Picasso*.
- 1964, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland: *1864-1964: Dublin Centenary Exhibition*.
- 1964, London, Hayward Gallery: *The Art of Claude Lorraine*.
- 1964, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Laing Art Gallery: *The Art of Claude Lorraine*.
- 1964-1965, Dijon, Lyons, Rennes: *Peinture classique du XVII^e siècle français et italien du Musée du Louvre*.
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20 CHARLES LE BRUN 1619-1690 **Apollo taking Leave of Tethys**
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21 JEAN LEMAIRE called LEMAIRE-POUSSIN or LE GROS LEMAIRE 1598-1659 **The Childhood of Bacchus also called The Childhood of Romulus**
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin