

(1825–1905)

## WILLIAM ADOLPHE BOUGUEREAU

### 22. ORESTES PURSUED BY THE FURIES (*Les remords d'Oreste*)

9. Baetjer, ed., 1981, p. 414.  
10. Strahan, 1881, p. 88; see also Atlanta, 1983,  
p. 120.

Oil on canvas, 89½" × 109⅞"  
Signed and dated lower right:  
W~BOUGUEREAU~1862

#### COLLECTIONS:

The artist, 1862–1870; sold by the artist, Nov. 4, 1870, to George Lucas for Samuel Avery; Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Philadelphia; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia; Giovanni Castano, Boston; Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, 1971.

#### EXHIBITIONS:

Salon, Paris, 1863, no. 227; Dayton, 1960, no. 43; Atlanta, 1983, no. 6; Louise d'Argencourt *et al.*, *William Bouguereau 1825–1905*, Petit Palais, Paris, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Feb. 9, 1984—Jan. 13, 1985, no. 29.

#### REFERENCES:

P. Mantz, "Salon de 1863," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1863, p. 488; T. Gautier, "Salon de 1863," *Le Moniteur Universel*, June 20, 1863, p. 1; C. de Sault, *Essais de critique d'art: Salon de 1863*, Paris, 1863, p. 39; J. Girard de Rialle, *A travers le Salon de 1863*, Paris, 1863, pp. 67–68; W. Strahan, *The Art Treasures of America*, Philadelphia, 1881, II, p. 104; Bellier and Auvray, *Dictionnaire Général des artistes de l'école française*, Paris, 1882, I, p. 135; L. Baschet, *Catalogue illustré des oeuvres de W. Bouguereau*, Paris, 1885, pp. 24–26; *Descriptive Catalogue*, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1892, p. 19, no. 401; M. Vachon, *W. Bouguereau*, Paris, 1900, p. 147; H. Henderson, *The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*, Boston, 1911, pp. 164–165, ill.; *Apollo*, 1978, pp. 22, 18, fig. 4; *The Diary of George A. Lucas*, L. Randall, ed., Princeton, 1979, II, pp. 320, 322–323, 332; W. Hauptman, "Charles Gleyre: Tradition and Innovation," *Charles Gleyre 1806–1874*, exhib. cat., Grey Art Gallery, New York, etc., 1980, p. 50, fig. 63; J. House, "Pompier Politics: Bouguereau's Art," *Art in America*, 72 (1984), pp. 142–143, ill. cover.

The son of a wine merchant from La Rochelle, Bouguereau became one of the most powerful members of France's later-nineteenth-century art establishment, a conservative *grand maître* whose academic paintings help set the style of official French art in the decades between 1850 and 1900. Bouguereau's artistic interests were first fostered by a sympathetic uncle, who sent the youth to Pons in 1838 to learn drawing from the painter Louis Sage, a disciple of Ingres. To continue the boy's Latin studies, he also enrolled him in the

Collège de Pons. There and in Sage's studio Bouguereau developed a love of antiquity and the classical tradition that would serve as the philosophical foundation of his mature art.

After additional study in Bordeaux, he arrived in Paris in 1846 to perfect his craft under the tutelage of the Neoclassicist François Picot at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. In 1850 he captured the *Prix de Rome* with his *ZENOBIA FOUND BY SHEPHERDS ON THE SHORES OF THE ARAXES* (Ecole national des Beaux-Arts, Paris). During the next four years he studied and traveled widely in Italy, where he was most impressed by the paintings of Giotto and other Trecento masters and by the High Renaissance art of Raphael.

Resettling in Paris, he quickly won recognition as a history painter, portraitist, and decorator of fashionable Paris townhouses, garnering a second-class medal at the Exposition Universelle of 1855, first prize at the 1857 Salon, and in 1856 an important state commission to paint *NAPOLEON III VISITING THE FLOOD VICTIMS OF TARASCON* (Hôtel de Ville, Tarascon). His career thereafter was a dazzling succession of professional triumphs and increasingly prestigious awards. In 1858 he was named *chevalier* of the Legion of Honor, in 1875 professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and from 1876 he served as a leading member of the all-powerful Institut de France. After 1859 he began a series of immensely popular genre pictures—sentimental images of peasant children and devoted mothers rendered in a flawlessly realistic academic style—and by the mid-1860s his paintings fetched the highest prices from wealthy collectors in France, England, and America.

A pure product of the Ecole and its rigorous academic regimen, Bouguereau throughout his life stressed the superiority of the classical ideal. As a teacher he preached the importance of precise draftsmanship and a tight, craftsmanly painting technique. Those avant-garde artists who ignored such traditional concerns—chief among them, the Impressionists—he dismissed with scorn:



Fig. 26. William Adolphe Bouguereau, *A FURY*, present location unknown.

... Nowadays painters go much too far . . . they say they have exhausted the formula and that one ought to seek something new . . . they want to succeed too fast, this is how they go about inventing new aesthetics, pointillism, *pipisme!* All this is just to make noise . . . One has to seek Beauty and Truth . . . There is only one kind of painting. It is the painting that presents the eye with perfection, the kind of beautiful and impeccable enamel you find in Veronese and Titian.<sup>1</sup>

The avant-garde had its revenge soon enough. Indeed, with the triumph of Modernism after World War I, Bouguereau's art rapidly fell out of fashion. Only recently has his work attracted once again the critical attention it so richly deserves and his name begun to regain its former luster.

*ORESTES PURSUED BY THE FURIES* is based on the *Orestia* by Aeschylus, in which Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, kills his mother Clytemnestra to avenge her murder of his father. Orestes is then set upon by the Furies, or Eumenides, the three spirits of retributive justice, who relentlessly pursue him as he seeks to purge his guilt at Delphi and in Athens. In Bouguereau's splendid painting of 1862, the Furies Tisiphone, Alecto, and Megaera, their hair swarming with snakes, confront Orestes with his crime, pointing

(1796–1875)

## JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT

### 23. LANDSCAPE IN A THUNDERSTORM (*Campagne Romaine, vallée rocheuse*)

angrily at the corpse of his mother. The horrified Orestes lurches away, vainly trying to escape the Furies and their hideous cries of accusation. The grisly scene is given a dramatic nocturnal setting—especially appropriate as the Furies were the daughters of Night—and the figures are pulled from the darkness, and Orestes's guilt exposed, by the light of the torch held by the Fury at the right. Among the surviving preliminary studies for the painting is a pencil drawing of the torch-bearing Fury (fig. 26)<sup>2</sup> and a compositional sketch in charcoal.<sup>3</sup>

Exhibited at the 1863 Salon, ORESTES was harshly judged by the critics, who balked at its heavy, melodramatic tone. Bouguereau had seldom before attempted so pure an expression of Romantic *Grand Guignol*; among earlier pictures only the 1850 DANTE AND VIRGIL IN HELL (private collection, France) matches the lurid intensity of the Norfolk picture. When his ORESTES was condemned at the Salon, Bouguereau abandoned the genre for good. Thereafter he returned to a more balanced, quiet, Raphaellesque style and favored far less dramatic pictures of beggar children, the Madonna, and coolly erotic mythological nudes. "I soon found that the horrible, the frenzied, and the heroic does not pay," he later confided, "and as the public of today prefers Venuses and Cupids and I paint to please the public, it is to Venus and Cupid I chiefly devote myself."<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTES:

1. D'Argencourt *et al.*, 1984–85, pp. 53–54.
2. Dimensions and present location unknown. See Vachon, 1900, p. 47.
3. Charcoal on paper, 41 x 49 cm., private collection. See d'Argencourt *et al.*, 1984–85, p. 163, no. 30.
4. See A. Werner, "Great Boug-Bear of Academic Painting," *Antioch Review*, Dec. 1955, p. 490, and Atlanta, 1983, p. 55.

Oil on canvas, 38½" × 53¼"  
Signed and dated lower left: *Corot 1856* (partially effaced)

#### COLLECTIONS:

Bernheim-Jeune, Paris; Georges Bernheim, Paris; Conrad Pineus, Göteborg, Sweden, 1924; Walter Halvorsen, Paris; Thannhauser Galleries, Berlin and Lucerne, 1927; Acquavella Galleries, New York, 1949; Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, 1971.

#### EXHIBITIONS:

*French Paintings*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1924, no. 2; *Corot-Daumier. Eighth Loan Exhibition*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Oct. 16—Nov. 23, 1930, no. 15; Portland, 1956–57, no. 75; Provincetown, 1958, no. 12; Dayton, 1960, no. 26; Provincetown-Ottawa, 1962; Finch College, 1965–66, no. 15; *Corot*, Wildenstein Gallery, New York, Oct. 30—Dec. 6, 1969, no. 20.

#### REFERENCES:

A. Robaut, *L'Oeuvre de Corot*, Paris, 1905, II, pp. 92–93, no. 259, ill.; V. Barker, "October Exhibitions," *The Arts*, Oct. 1930, p. 17, ill.

One of the first members of the Barbizon school of landscapists, Corot exerted a formative influence on both his fellow Fontainebleau painters and the Impressionists who followed in their wake. Indeed, his crucial role in the development of mid-nineteenth-century French landscape painting was rivaled only by that of his younger colleague Rousseau (cat. no. 24).

Corot's desire to become a painter manifested itself early, though his parents, who owned a successful dressmaker's shop in Paris, initially had other plans for him. They boarded him at schools in Rouen and Poissy and later demanded that he take up the family trade. A reluctant apprentice, Corot worked for more than five years in two Paris textile firms. Finally, at the age of twenty-six, he won his father's consent to study art and entered the atelier of the landscape painter Achille Etna Michallon. Within months of his arrival, Michallon died, but he had succeeded in impressing Corot with the importance of sketching *en plein air*.<sup>1</sup> By the time he joined the studio of the classical landscapist Jean-Victor Bertin, Corot had already begun to travel the countryside, working *sur le*

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# FRENCH PAINTINGS

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*from The Chrysler Museum*

*Jefferson C. Harrison*

THE CHRYSLER MUSEUM  
NORFOLK, VIRGINIA



ORESTES PURSUED BY THE FURIES