

BOUCHER'S PAINTING SEEN BY DIDEROT

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Salon of 1765.

"I do not know what to say about this man, the deterioration of taste, colour, composition, characters, expression, drawing, following step by step the depravity of manners. What do you want this artist to throw on his canvas? What he imagines; and what can a man who lives his life with low-life prostitutes imagine? I challenge you to find in the whole countryside a blade of grass from these landscapes. And then a confusion of objects piled on top of each other, so out of place, so disparate that it is less the painting of a sensible man than the dream of a madman.

I dare say that this man knows nothing of what grace is. I dare say he has never known the truth. I dare say that the ideas of delicacy, honesty, innocence, simplicity have become almost foreign to him. I dare say that he has not for a moment seen nature, at least one which is made to interest my soul, yours, that of a well-born child, that of a wise woman. I dare say it is tasteless. Between the infinity of proofs that I could give, only one will suffice. In the multitude of figures of men and women that he has painted, I dare us to find four of character belonging to the bas-relief, even less to the statue; there are too many pouts, too many simpers, manners, and affectation for severe art. Although he shows them naked, I still see their lipsticks, artificial beauty marks, pompoms and all the grooming frills. When he paints children, he groups them well but they remain to frolic on clouds.

In this innumerable family, you will not find one to exercise real life actions, to study lessons, to read, to write, to weave hemp. They are romantic, ideal natures, little bastards of Bacchus and Silenus.

My friend, is there no police in this academy? In the absence of a commissioner on the board preventing that from entering, would it not be allowed to kick him along the salon, down the staircase, to the yard, until shepherd, shepherdess, sheepfold, donkey, birds, cage, trees, child, all the pastoral is in the street? Alas no, it must remain in place. But the good taste, outraged, undertakes the brutal but just execution.

And you believe, my friend, that my brutal taste will be more generous to this one? Not at all, I hear it screaming inside me: "Out of the salon, out of the salon!" In vain I repeat Chardin's lesson: "Gentle, gentle", it is aggravated and cries only louder: "Out of the salon!" It is an image of delusion. Right on the front, always the shepherdess Catinon or Favart, lying down and asleep with a nice swelling on the left eye. Why fall asleep in such a damp place? A small cat on her bosom. Behind this woman, starting from the edge of the canvas, and sinking successively to different levels, turnips and cabbage and leeks and a clay pot and syringas in this pot and a big block of stone, and on this big stone block, a large vase, garlands of flowers and trees and greenery and landscape. In front of the sleeper, a

standing shepherd gazing at her. They are separated by a small rustic barricade. He carries a basket of flowers with one hand, while on the other he holds a rose. There, my friend, tell me what a kitten is doing on the bosom of a peasant girl who does not sleep at the door of her cottage.

And this rose in the peasant's hand, is it not of an inconceivable dullness? And why doesn't that idiot bend over, does not take, does not steal a kiss on the mouth that is presented? Why doesn't he step forward slowly? But do you not think that it's everything the painter wanted to throw on his canvas? Oh no! Is there not another landscape beyond? Do we not see rising from behind the trees the smoke probably from a neighbouring hamlet? Same confusion of objects and falseness of colours as before. What an abuse of brush skills."

Salon of 1767.

"Have we not seen in the salon, seven or eight years ago, a woman naked, stretched out on pillows, leg here, leg there, offering the most voluptuous head, the most beautiful back, the most beautiful buttocks, inviting pleasure and inviting it with the easiest attitude, the most convenient to what is said to be the most natural, or at least the most advantageous? No offence to Boucher who had not blushed about prostituting his wife himself, after whom he had painted this voluptuous figure, I say that if I had had voice in this chapter, I would not have deferred saying to him that if, thanks to my caducity and his, this painting was innocent for us, it was very fit to send my son out of the Academy to Fromenteau Street, which is not far from it, and from there to Louis or Keyser's, which did not suit me at all."