

HISTORY IN ART

François Boucher 1703–1770

21 September 2022

1703 – Boucher is born in Paris, the son of a minor painter Nicholas Boucher, who encourages his son to experiment with drawing and painting.

1720 – One of his paintings is admired by the then successful and much-admired painter, François Lemoyne and Lemoyne takes him on as a student. But Boucher only remains at his studio for three months before moving on to work for the engraver, Jean-François Cars. Like Lemoyne had previously, Boucher wins the Prix de Rome, a prestigious award that gives the winner the opportunity to travel and study abroad, particularly in Italy. Unfortunately because the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture is in financial difficulties, he is unable to go to Italy until five years later.

1731 – Boucher returns from Italy and becomes a member of the Academy and submits a reception painting: *Renaud et Armide*, a painting very much in the Rococo style, which he made his own. He soon establishes a reputation as an artist and becomes very fashionable. His paintings often depict amorous couples in a bucolic setting, either gods and goddesses, or supposedly peasants at play.

1733 – He marries Marie-Jeanne Buzeau and they soon have three children – two daughters who both eventually marry painters, and a son who also becomes an artist. His wife sometimes acts as his model and he is criticised for “prostituting” her because nude paintings by him are assumed to depict her.

1734 – He joins the faculty of the Academy and eventually becomes its director.

1739 – He paints a less controversial work featuring his wife with their children at breakfast.

1750 – He begins a very important business relationship – with the official mistress of the king, Madame de Pompadour. He paints her many times, and his depictions of her become central to her power and influence at court. She helps him get commissions for a range of artistic projects, including decorations for the châteaux of Versailles, Fontainebleau, Marly and Bellevue. Boucher is responsible for all kinds of Rococo design work, including theatrical sets and costumes, tapestries, and decorative features on slippers and fans. He is also a gifted engraver.

1765 – Boucher becomes First Painter to the King, the official court painter to Louis XV.

1770 – Boucher dies in Paris. Unlike his famous pupil, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, he does not live to see the Revolution, which brings an abrupt end to Rococo art.