

**Seven Paintings**  
**Reflections on the Singular Career of**  
**Marguerite Gérard**  
*(Grasse 1761 – 1837 Paris)*  
**In Fragonard's Studio**

**Exhibition Catalogue**

*Amélie du Closel*

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About twenty years ago, Carole Blumenfeld kindly shared with us her research on the “Fragonard-Marguerite” collaboration. Shortly afterwards, we discovered *The Angora Cat* at the Colnaghi gallery stand, a masterpiece attributed to Marguerite Gérard alone (see opposite). Cautiously, we informed Konrad Bernheimer of the possibility that Fragonard’s hand had also contributed to the painting. He then decided to withdraw it from sale and entrusted us to study it. We returned the favour by distinguishing the areas worked by each artist and he changed the attribution label to: **“Jean Honoré Fragonard and Marguerite Gérard”!** Today, the painting is a prized possession of the Wallraf Richartz Museum, Cologne, which acquired it in 2011. Marguerite Gérard’s personality remains partially obscure. Two portraits of a child (see ill. C and D) still resist attribution.

However, it was above all the discovery of a small charming painting at the Galerie Michel Descours (see ill. A), comparable in every way to another in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Besançon (ill. 7), that expanded and enriched our perception of the artist’s work.

This exhibition, accompanied by Amélie du Closel’s finely crafted catalogue, invites you to discover these insights today.

*Hubert Duchemin*





## Introduction

Marguerite Gérard holds a prominent position in the French artistic landscape of the years 1780-1820. Forgotten after her death, she remains underrepresented in French public collections, despite the Louvre's acquisition of *The Interesting Student* in 2019 (ill. 4). Long confined to the status of a pupil of Fragonard, she has experienced a resurgence of interest among art historians over the past forty years. Key contributions to our understanding of her work and personality include Sally Wells-Robertson's 1978 dissertation,<sup>1</sup> Carole Blumenfeld's major monograph of 2019,<sup>2</sup> and also studies by Jean-Pierre Cuzin<sup>3</sup> and Pierre Rosenberg.<sup>4</sup>

The youngest of seven children, Marguerite Gérard was born into a family of perfumers from Grasse that had close connections to Paris. In 1769, her sister Marie-Anne, who was eleven years

<sup>1</sup> Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Ph. D. diss., University of New York, 1978, 2 vol.

<sup>2</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Montreuil, Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Vie et œuvre. Catalogue complet des peintures*, Fribourg, Office du livre, Paris, Vilo, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Fragonard*, ed. Pierre Rosenberg (exh. cat., Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 24 September 1987 – 4 January 1988; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2 February – 8 May 1988), Paris, RMN, 1987; and Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Fragonard*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989.

older, left their hometown for Paris, where she married Jean Honoré Fragonard, the famous and wealthy painter, who was also originally from Grasse. Following their mother's death in 1775, fourteen-year-old Marguerite was taken in by the couple. Her artistic sensitivity flourished as she immersed herself in their studio. Like Marie-Anne, an accomplished miniaturist trained by her husband, she began an apprenticeship with Fragonard, who was at the height of his fame. She absorbed the painter's taste and technique, and he taught her the art of etching.

In 1778, she produced her first print after one of his drawings, *The Swaddled Cat* (ill. 1), followed by *The First Riding Lesson*. These were soon followed by other prints. Her etching *To the Genius of Franklin* (ill. 2), exhibited at the *Salon de la Correspondance* in 1779, demonstrated the young artist's growing dexterity and her development of an individual style.



**ill. 1:** Marguerite Gérard  
after Jean-Honoré Fragonard,  
*The Swaddled Cat*,  
1777–1778,  
etching, 26 x 19 cm,

inscription: “Première planche de Melle Gérard  
âgée de 16 ans,”  
Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard.



**ill. 2:** Marguerite Gérard  
after Jean-Honoré Fragonard,  
*To the Genius of Franklin*,  
1778–1779,  
etching, 47.8 x 37.4 cm,

inscription (2nd state): “Eripuit coelo  
sceptrumque tirannis / Au Génie de Franklin,”  
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France,  
Cabinet des Estampes.

Marguerite Gérard never sought an official career, particularly since the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* limited its female membership to four, a threshold reached in 1783 with the election of Vigée Le Brun and Labille-Guiard.

Although Sally Wells-Robertson refuted the idea, Pierre Rosenberg and Carole Blumenfeld have demonstrated that most of the genre scenes produced in Fragonard's studio during the 1780s in a style inspired by Dutch artists were the result of collaboration between the master and his pupil:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> At the time, these works could appear (in the engravings reproducing them) with the name Fragonard, or Marguerite Gérard, or both names combined. See Guillaume Faroult and Bruno Mottin, *Marguerite Gérard: L'Élève intéressante*, Paris, Louvre éditions, 2023, p. 33.

This is confirmed by the letter<sup>6</sup> on certain engravings reproducing these scenes of amorous flirtation or maternal tenderness, such as *Mister Fanfan plays with Mister Polichinelle*, *The Beloved Child* (ill. 3), or *The First Steps*, which bear both their names, reinforcing the idea of an artistic complicity that led to a series of jointly executed paintings.



ill. 3: Géraud Vidal after Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Marguerite Gérard, *The Beloved Child*, inscription: “L’ENFANT CHERI / D’après le Tableau de même grandeur peint par J. H. Fragonard et Mlle Gérard, gravé par G. Vidal [...]”, engraving and aquatint, 57.3 x 74.2 cm, private collection.

The inscription on the engraving after *The Interesting Student*, “M.le Gerard Él[ève] de M. Fragonard pinx.[it]”, is one of the first to suggest a work painted independently by Gérard. This distinction was likely intended to acknowledge her predominant role in its creation, perhaps even as the originator of the composition (ill. 4).<sup>7</sup> However, Fragonard’s intervention is undeniable in certain sections of the painting, particularly in the depiction of the dog, the cat, the arms, and the face. Infrared reflectography analysis has confirmed that the painting was executed in two distinct phases by two different artists.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The letter refers to all inscriptions that may appear on an engraving: a title, a verse, the names of the artist, engraver or publisher, date, dedication, caption, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Guillaume Faroult and Bruno Mottin, *Marguerite Gérard...*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.



ill. 4: Marguerite Gérard and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Interesting Student*, c. 1785–1787, oil on canvas, 64.6 x 55 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Alongside such examples of “collaboration by sections,” other paintings, executed in a more homogeneous manner, such as *The Angora Cat* (ill. 5), demonstrate an “interwoven collaboration,” where it becomes more challenging to distinguish each artist’s contribution. Thanks to Fragonard’s sophisticated use of light and shadow, these paintings form a harmonious whole.



ill. 5: Marguerite Gérard and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Angora Cat*, 1785–1788, oil on canvas, 65 x 53.5 cm, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum.

Recent studies have dismantled certain prejudices about Marguerite Gérard. Traditionally portrayed by the Goncourt brothers as a reserved young woman constrained by the limitations imposed on the women of her time, or even as Fragonard’s mistress, Marguerite Gérard was, in reality, far more than a mere pupil subservient to her brilliant brother-in-law. She was his ally and, indeed, one of the most successful and sought-after artists of her era.

Carole Blumenfeld has demonstrated that Gérard actively implemented strategies to bolster her reputation, such as adopting standardized formats and leveraging printmaking to disseminate her compositions. From 1786 onwards, engravings by G. Vidal, H. Gérard, and N. de Launay helped popularize her work among a wide audience.

Her collaboration with Fragonard did not prevent her from developing a highly personal style. Drawing on the period's enthusiasm for Dutch Golden Age painting, she found inspiration in the work of Ter Borch and Mieris for her décors, refined fabrics, and the rendering of faces (see **ill. 4, 5, and 6**). Between 1787 and 1791, alongside her genre scenes, she produced a series of small-scale portraits of artists, many of whom resided at the Louvre, as well as musicians, composers, actors, tragedians, members of literary and artistic societies, and prominent Parisian patrons. These works, painted on standardized wooden panels following a Dutch model (**ill. 9 and 11**), reflect her ambition to establish a recognizable artistic signature and compositional arrangement, ensuring her name and style gained prominence.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Gérard collaborated with speculative art dealers to artificially inflate the market value of her works.<sup>10</sup> Among the paintings auctioned during her lifetime, notable examples include *The Late Lesson*<sup>11</sup>—a true tour de force in rendering fabrics, which was presented by the renowned expert Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Brun in December 1785, as well as works from the Dubois collection sold in 1788, including *The Triumph of Minette* (**ill. 6**).



**ill. 6:** Marguerite Gérard and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Triumph of Minette*, 1784–1785, oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm, Moscow, Pushkin Museum.

Carole Blumenfeld has successfully clarified the strategic, aesthetic, and commercial stakes of Fragonard's collaboration with his sister-in-law. However, for certain works whose authorship remains ambiguous, determining each artist's contribution remains a complex issue. In the absence of documents detailing Marguerite Gérard's specific role in Fragonard's studio, we must "let the paintings speak."<sup>12</sup> Bringing together at our gallery a group of mostly unpublished works,

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<sup>9</sup> *Marguerite Gérard. Artiste en 1789, dans l'atelier de Fragonard*, ed. José de Los Llanos and Carole Blumenfeld (exh. cat., Paris, Musée Cognacq-Jay, 10 September–6 December 2009), Paris, Paris Musées, 2009, pp. 17–18.

<sup>10</sup> Cyril Lécosse, "Marguerite Gérard," *La Gazette Drouot*, 8 March 2019, p. 262.

<sup>11</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, pp. 204–205, PI, col. repr. p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

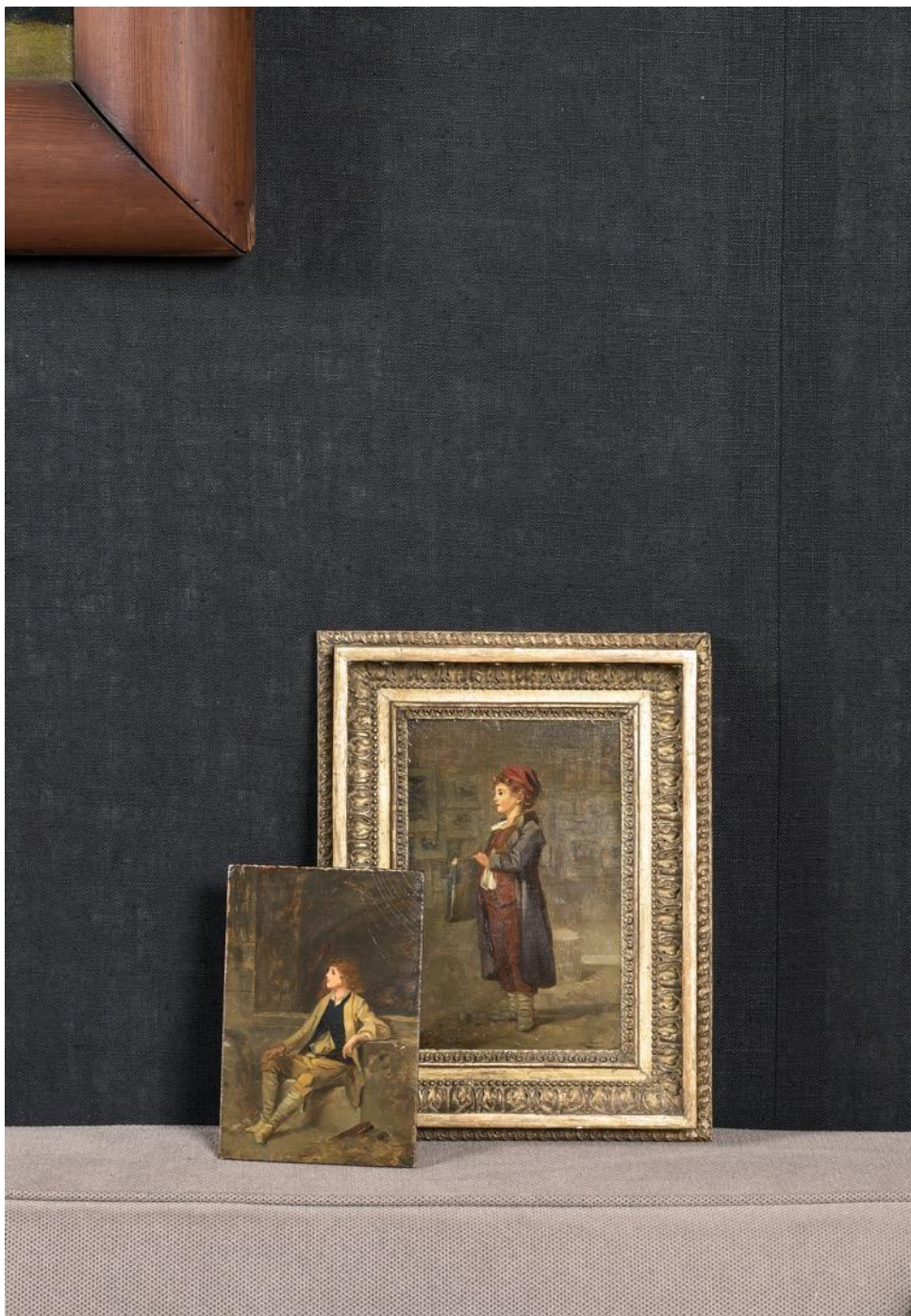
including isolated child portraits and genre scenes, provides a unique opportunity to sharpen our understanding and delve deeper into the complexity of Gérard's art. While the round *Portrait of a Child* (ill. C) and the *Portrait of a Child* from the Costa Collection (ill. D) continue to raise questions regarding the artistic exchange and mutual influences between the two painters, other works, *The Print Seller* (ill. A), *Young Boy Seated on a Stone Pedestal* (ill. B), *The Dance* (ill. E), *Before the Masquerade Ball* (ill. F), and *Woman with a Guitar Giving a her Dog a Gimblette* (ill. G), illustrate, in our view, all the defining characteristics of Marguerite Gérard's distinctive artistic approach.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Among the works we present here, Carole Blumenfeld does not recognize the hand of Marguerite Gérard in *The Print Seller* (ill. A), *Young Boy Seated on a Stone Pedestal* (ill. B), *Portrait of a Child* (ill. C), and *Woman with a Guitar Giving a Gimblette to Her Dog* (ill. G).



Marguerite Gérard: A Witness to the Daily Life of Parisian Streets,  
An Unprecedented Aspect of Her Art





### ill. A

#### **Marguerite Gérard (Grasse 1761–1837 Paris)**

*The Print Seller*, also known as *The Young Art Student*, c. 1790,  
oil on panel, 15.5 x 10.3 cm.

Circular label on verso with handwritten inscription: "Mlle / 2238 / Gérard."

#### **Provenance:**

Paris, Galerie Cailleux.

Sweden, collection of Ragnar Aschberg (1903–1996), acquired in 1936.

Sale Uppsala Auktionskammare, 9 December 2022, no. 352 (as Marguerite Gérard).

Paris, Galerie Michel Descours, 2023.

Geneva, private collection.

#### **Exhibitions:**

*Frankrike genom konstnärssögon* (exh. cat., Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, 9 May–2 June 1941),  
Stockholm, I. Hæggström, 1941, no. 336.

*Barnet i konsten* (exh. cat., Gothenburg, Röhsska Konstslojdmuseet, 1942), Gothenburg, Röhsska  
Konstslojdmuseet, 1942, no. 97.

*Barnet i konsten: Samling tillhörig Bankir Ragnar Aschberg Stockholm utställd till förmån för Norgehjälpen  
samt Föreningen Rädda Barnen* (exh. cat., Karlstad, Värmlands Museum, 10 January–21 January  
1943), Karlstad, 1943, no. 16.

#### **Literature:**

Ragnar Aschberg, *Barn i bilder under fem århundraden*, Stockholm, Fritze, 1955, pp. 42–43, repr.



**ill. B**

**Marguerite Gérard (Grasse 1761–1837 Paris)**

*Young Boy Seated on a Stone Pedestal*

c. 1790,

oil on panel,

13.4 x 9 cm.

**Provenance:**

Sale Soissons, Laon, Aisne Enchères, 23 March 2019, lot 17 (as 19<sup>th</sup>-century school, *Portrait de jeune homme assis*).

Paris, Galerie Édouard Ambroselli, since 2019.

The charming genre portrait depicting a young boy standing on a paved street, a portfolio tucked under his arm, in front of a wall covered with drawings and prints ([ill. A](#)), once belonged to Ragnar Aschberg (1903-1996), a Stockholm-based banker and discerning art enthusiast, whose collection encompassed over one hundred works from diverse periods and schools, all centred around the theme of childhood. Our painting, dated around 1790, is cited in several Swedish publications and exhibition catalogues under the title *The Young Art Student*. However, the boy is more plausibly a modest print seller wandering the streets of Paris. Childhood, consistently a central theme in Marguerite Gérard's oeuvre, is typically portrayed within scenes of comfort and gaiety. Yet here, Gérard tackles an unusually poignant, socially conscious subject: impoverished childhood.

The theme, format, composition, and technique of this small panel painting (ill. A) closely parallels another small painting by Marguerite Gérard titled *The Innkeeper's Servant* (ill. 7).<sup>14</sup> Also painted on a small panel, it belonged to Pierre-Adrien Pâris (1745-1819), architect to the king, who bequeathed thirty-eight paintings and one hundred and eighty-three drawings, including a notable collection of works by Fragonard, to the municipal library of Besançon.<sup>15</sup> As early as 1806, during Gérard's lifetime, the panel was listed as a work by her hand in the inventory of the Pâris collection: "Lot 99. A small painting by Mlle Gérard representing a young tavern servant holding a jug..."<sup>16</sup> On its reverse is a handwritten label, likely contemporaneous with the architect's posthumous inventory from 1819:<sup>17</sup> "[...] small painting at the first stroke by Mademoiselle Gérard, sister-in-law of Fragonard, painter to the King / no. 51 / wine steward [...]" (ill. 7 bis). The phrase "at the first stroke" (au premier coup) emphasizes the spontaneous, swiftly executed character of the portrait, paralleling our young *Print Seller*.



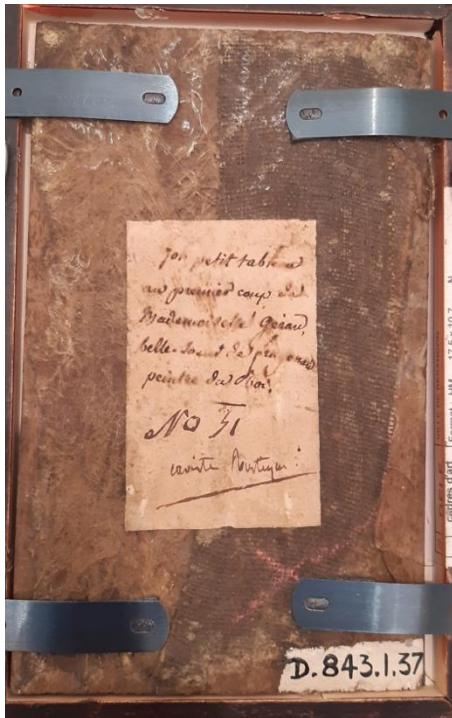
**ill. 7:** Marguerite Gérard,  
*The Innkeeper*,  
between 1787 and 1791,  
17.5 x 10.5 cm, oil on panel,  
Besançon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie.

<sup>14</sup> We are grateful to Juliette Roy of the Centre de Documentation-Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon for kindly providing us with a photograph of the work and a copy of Pierre-Adrien Pâris's posthumous inventory.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Valet d'Auberge* was allocated to the Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie in Besançon in 1843, when the museum relocated to the Halle à Grain on the Place du Marché.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre-Adrien Pâris, *Catalogue de mon livre ainsi que des autres objets qui composent mon cabinet, tels que les marbres et bronzes antiques, vases, terres cuites, bronzes modernes, plâtres moulés sur l'antique, médailles, tableaux et dessins en bordure, histoire naturelle et instruments*, 1806, 41 folios, p. 58, Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale de Besançon, Ms Pâris (1 to 31).

<sup>17</sup> The number 51 on the verso of *The Innkeeper's Servant* refers to the same number in the posthumous inventory of Pierre-Adrien Pâris, drawn up on 8 September 1819 (Archives départementales du Doubs): "no. 51. A small gilt frame representing a young man holding a jug, by Mlle Gérard, sister-in-law of M. Fragonard, estimated at fifteen francs."



**ill. 7 bis:** Marguerite Gérard, verso of ill. 7 (*The Innkeeper*).

In both these small panels, Gérard has closely adopted Fragonard's manner, particularly in the rendering of hair and skin tones, executed with nervous yet supple brushstrokes (**ill. 8**). This technique contrasts sharply with the polished, porcelain-like texture observed in some of Gérard's more finished genre scenes (**ill. 4, 5, and 6**).

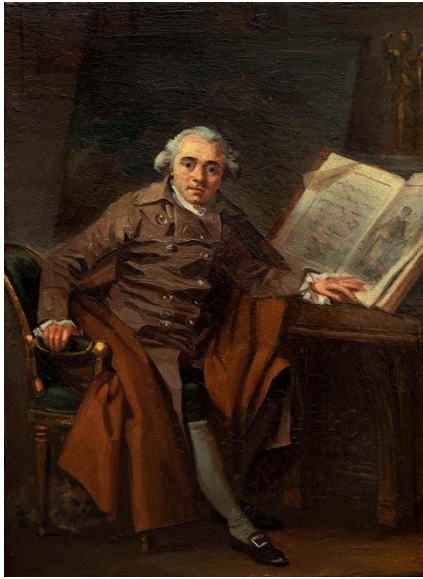


**ill. 8:**  
left: detail of ill. 7 (*The Innkeeper*);  
right: detail of ill. A (*The Print Seller*).

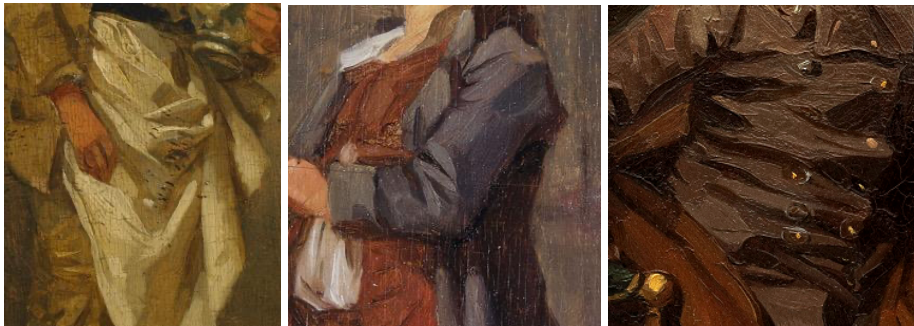
The round, dark eyes of the *Print Seller* and the *Innkeeper's Servant* remain a consistent, almost signature element of Gérard's depictions of children.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the angular drawing style and thick, textured handling used for their garments recall Gérard's series of fashionable small portraits executed between 1787 and 1791. Indeed, the handling of our subject's coat and the young servant's apron are characteristic of Gérard's practice in this series. Similar effects can be seen in the *Presumed Portrait of Jean-Jacques Lagrenée*, especially in the section of a jacket painted with

<sup>18</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, pp. 40-41, see P 48, p. 216.

an even more unctuous material (**ill. 9**). She layered several shades of the same colour, culminating in the brightest tone to accentuate deep folds of fabric (**ill. 10**).



**ill. 9:**  
Marguerite Gérard, *Presumed portrait of Jean-Jacques Lagrenée*,  
c. 1787,  
oil on zinc, 18.4 x 13.5 cm,  
Paris, Musée Cognacq-Jay.



**ill. 10:**  
left: detail of **ill. 7** (*The Innkeeper*);  
centre: detail of **ill. A** (*The Print Seller*);  
right: detail of **ill. 9** (*Presumed portrait of Jean-Jacques Lagrenée*).

A third comparable sketch (**ill. B**), showing a young boy seated on a stone pedestal, resonates in theme, format, composition, and technique with our *Print Seller* and *Innkeeper's Servant*. This third painting is executed on a panel backed with coarse canvas (**ill. B bis**), a support Gérard used frequently. Marguerite Gérard indeed utilized pre-prepared painting supports that were stabilized on their reverse side with tow to prevent warping resulting from fluctuations of humidity and temperature.<sup>19</sup> Traces of fabric residues remain visible on the reverse of our *Print Seller* (**ill. A bis**),

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<sup>19</sup> Marguerite Gérard. *Artiste en 1789...*, *op. cit.*, p. 30. Illustration of the reverse of a *Portrait of a man*, p. 30, ill. 11 (cat. 16).

painted on a panel with bevelled edges comparable to the one used for the *Portrait of Doctor François Thiery* in Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup>



**ill. A bis:** verso of **ill. A** (*The Print Seller*).

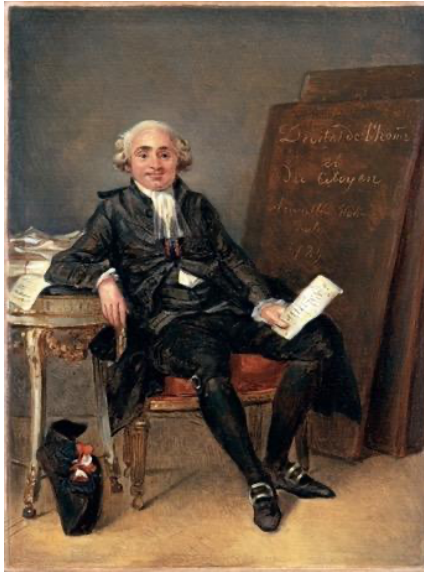


**ill. B bis:** verso of **ill. B** (*Young Boy seated on a stone pedestal*).

The posture of the young boy sitting on a stone pedestal (**ill. B**) echoes the natural, almost casual attitude frequently observed in Marguerite Gérard's intimate portraits of society figures: indeed, these subjects are typically shown seated, their torsos turned three-quarters, an elbow resting on a table or the back of a chair, the opposite arm placed casually upon their thigh, legs slightly bent, knees apart, and feet almost together, as exemplified in the *Portrait of Jean-Joseph Mougins de Roquefort* (**ill. 11**).

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. Illustration of the reverse of the *Portrait of Doctor François Thiery* (cat. 10).



**ill. 11:**

left: **ill. B** (*Young Boy sitting on a stone pedestal*);

right: Marguerite Gérard, *Portrait de Jean-Joseph Mougins de Roquefort*, 1789,  
oil on paper mounted on panel, 21 x 16 cm,

Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard - Collection Hélène and Jean-François Costa.

Scenes of Parisian street children by Gérard echo similar works by Fragonard, notably Fragonard's *The Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (**ill. 12**) and *The Young Girl with a Marmot* (**ill. 13**).<sup>21</sup> Scholars have long noted the affinity between these compositions and Chardin's *The Blind Man from Les Quinze-Vingts* exhibited at the Salon of 1753 (**ill. 14**).<sup>22</sup>



**ill. 12:** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Hurdy-Gurdy Player*,  
1772-1773, oil on canvas, 43.3 x 30.8 cm,  
Paris, private collection.



**ill. 13:** Jean Honoré Fragonard,  
*The Young Girl with a Marmot*, c. 1780,  
oil on canvas, 39.3 x 30 cm,  
Portland, Portland Art Museum.

<sup>21</sup> Several versions of this composition are known.

<sup>22</sup> A copper version of Fragonard's *The Hurdy-Gurdy Player* was paired with Chardin's *The Blind Man from Les Quinze-Vingts* in the Vassal de Saint-Hubert collection dispersed on 17 January 1774 (lots 105 and 106). A full-length *Young Girl with a Marmot* by Fragonard later appeared paired with Chardin's canvas in the Duclos-Dufresnoy collection (confiscated with the collection on 27–29 September 1793, then in the posthumous sale of 18–21 August 1795, nos. 30 and 31, as pendants).





**ill. 14:** Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin,  
*The Blind Man of the Quinze-Vingts*,  
Salon of 1753,  
oil on canvas,  
29.8 x 23 cm,  
Cambridge, Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Museum.

Although scenes explicitly referencing contemporary social realities are rare in Fragonard's oeuvre, his acquisition at the 1775 Mariette sale of a volume containing sixty counterproofs of drawings by Bouchardon for *Les Cris de Paris*<sup>23</sup> suggests that he was not indifferent to this theme.<sup>24</sup> The choice of subject for our panel may well have been inspired by *Le Marchand d'images* (The Image Dealer) (**ill. 15**), a the plate from this collection dedicated to Parisian street trades and itinerant vendors, a volume that Marguerite Gérard likely encountered in her brother-in-law's studio.

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<sup>23</sup> The “cris”, which were regulated for each guild, refer to the distinctive calls characteristic of traditional trades, used by street vendors as they plied their trade in the streets of the capital during public auctions or street sales.

<sup>24</sup> Fragonard. *Les plaisirs d'un siècle*, ed. Marie-Anne Dupuy-Vachey (exh. cat., Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, 3 October 2007–13 January 2008), Ghent, Snoeck, 2007, no. 50, p. 104, note 3, p. 171.



**ill. 15:** Comte de Caylus after Edmé Bouchardon, *The Print Seller*, from the suite representing *Études prises dans le bas peuple ou Les Cris de Paris*, third suite, print, private collection.

During the eighteenth century, depictions of the common people in art, whether engraved or painted, typically presented a softened, idealized image of reality: women were invariably young and pretty, and the figures were neatly dressed, seemingly content with their lot. Louis Sébastien Mercier, in his *Tableau de Paris* (1782), denounced the deceptive nature of these portrayals, criticizing especially Greuze's imaginary milkmaids: "These milkmaids in red skirts, tanned and mostly wrinkled, bear no resemblance to those depicted by Greuze [...]. Greuze painted fanciful portraits; these voluptuous, seductive figures he delighted in portraying are not the ones who sell us milk, butter, and fruit."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, it is difficult to identify the famously robust Françoise Chemin, known as "Fanchon la Vielleuse," a street celebrity renowned for her vigour, love of wine, and penchant for brawls, and who inspired playwrights and songwriters, with Fragonard's rosy-cheeked and elegantly attired Vielleuse (**ill. 12**).<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the charming young woman in the Portland painting (**ill. 13**), fashionably coiffed with a scarf tied around her neck, lips and cheeks subtly tinted, her bodice slightly open, holds on her lap an open box from which peers a marmot, an animal commonly exhibited in the streets of Paris by Savoyard women. Fragonard, aiming primarily to charm, painted idealized figures in genre scenes probably imbued with erotic connotations that would have been widely understood in the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

The guard stone visible in the background of our *Print Seller* (**ill. A**), and also in Fragonard's *Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (**ill. 12**) and *The Young Girl with a Marmot* (**ill. 13**), was a motif artists elevated to a symbol of Parisian street life of the period. These stone blocks kept carriage wheels at a safe distance from buildings. Though footpaths first appeared in 1781, the streets with their characteristic bollards remained common until Haussmann's modernisation in the following

<sup>25</sup> Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Amsterdam, 1782, t. II, pp. 205-206 : "Ces laitières en cotte rouge, basanées et le plus souvent ridées, ne ressemblent pas à celles que Greuze a dessinées [...]. Greuze a fait des portraits de fantaisie ; mais ces figures voluptueuses et séduisantes qu'il s'est plu à représenter ne sont pas celles qui viennent nous vendre du lait, du beurre et des fruits."

<sup>26</sup> Fragonard. *Les plaisirs d'un siècle*, *op. cit.*, p. 104 : "une solide gaillarde, aimant le vin et la bagarre et dont s'inspirèrent les auteurs de théâtre et les chansonniers"

<sup>27</sup> Fragonard, ed. Pierre Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, n° 297, pp. 565-567.

century. As Antoine Compagnon notes in his publication *Les Chiffonniers de Paris*, rubbish traditionally accumulated around these guard stones, with covered waste bins adopted only after the cholera epidemic of 1883. Since Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*, the guard stone, associated with the ragpicker, has symbolized prostitution,<sup>28</sup> waste, poverty, degradation, and drunkenness. Nineteenth-century novels frequently refer to abandoned children “at the corner of a guard stone.”<sup>29</sup> Could the young boy holding a portfolio (ill. A) have experienced such a fate? His modest attire clearly indicates his lower-class origins. Although described in literature as an “art student,” this child shown in an urban context does not fit within the longstanding iconographic tradition of youthful artists. The elegance, the refined clothing, and carefully groomed wigs of the young artists painted by Drouais and Lépicié suggest that these were privileged youths educated privately rather than in free schools (ill. 16).<sup>30</sup> The boy in our sketch shows no aristocratic refinement: dressed in lace-up shoes, short brown trousers, a matching waistcoat revealing a white shirt beneath, and a long grey coat, he wears the distinctive red bonnet of young Savoyard chimney sweeps. Indeed, most street vendors and craftsmen bustling around Paris at the time were provincial migrants, many families abandoning agriculture for seasonal work in the city. Mercier describes this vividly: “Those called labourers are almost all foreigners. Savoyards are shoe-cleaners, floor-polishers, and wood-sawyers; Auvergnats mostly water-carriers; Limousins masons; Lyonnais porters and sedan chair carriers; Normans stonecutters, pavers, and peddlers; Gascons barbers or surgeons; Lorrains itinerant shoemakers known as *carreleurs* or *recarreleurs*.”<sup>31</sup> Savoyards “frequently took up roles as chimney sweeps, messengers, and street sellers of pamphlets, books, newspapers, popular prints, or engravings. Some carried hurdy-gurdies, accompanying their own nasal singing; others displayed marmots as their only wealth; still others promoted lantern shows, announcing their arrival with an evening street organ.”<sup>32</sup> Young Savoyards, returning to their Alpine valleys only during summer, were left largely to their own devices, often engaging in multiple occupations and occasionally serving as artists' models.

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<sup>28</sup> In his classification of Parisian courtesans, Mercier refers to ‘the hang-up girl who mopes in the evening at the corner of a post’.

<sup>29</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Les Chiffonniers de Paris*, Paris, Gallimard, 2017, “Au coin de la borne[At the corner of the guard stone]”, pp. 31-59.

<sup>30</sup> Antoine Chatelain, “La représentation du jeune dessinateur. Un motif de la France des Lumières”, *Dix-huitième siècle*, 53, 2021, pp. 365-390. Available online: <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-dix-huitieme-siecle-2021-1-page-375?lang=fr>

<sup>31</sup> Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, *op. cit.* t. II, pp. 634-635. See also on this subject *Les Rues de Paris au XVIIIe siècle. Le regard de Louis Sébastien Mercier*, ed. Élisabeth Bourguinat (exh. cat., Paris, musée Carnavalet, 18 March-20 June 1999), Paris, Paris Musées, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, *op. cit.*, t. I, pp. 840-841.



**ill. 16:** Nicolas Bernard Lépicier,  
*The Young Draughtsman*, c. 1769-1772,  
oil on canvas, 55 x 46.5 cm,  
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

Our sketch, hinting at a background wall covered in prints, was likely executed by Marguerite Gérard near the Louvre's colonnade. By the late eighteenth century, the Louvre palace housed artists, academies, institutions, and royal protégés, with workshops situated in the ground-floor rooms of the Cour Carrée and beneath the Galerie du Bord-de-l'Eau. Since 1755, under the initiative of Marquis de Marigny, superintendent of the King's Buildings, efforts had been made to finish the Louvre, a project that had been abandoned by Louis XV in 1722. Ange-Jacques Gabriel and Jean Germain Soufflot oversaw the restoration of Perrault's colonnade, previously hidden by stables (**ill. 17**). The Cour Carrée was cleared, and four passageways were created, providing easier access to the Pont des Arts, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois church, the rue de Rivoli, and the Oratoire. Mercier describes the atmosphere vividly, criticizing the second-hand clothing stalls cluttering the Louvre's surroundings: "Facing this magnificent colonnade, admired by every foreigner, one sees old garments hung on strings, flapping in the wind, forming a hideous display. This flea market is both filthy and indecent."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, t. II, pp. 711-713.



**ill. 17:** Pierre-Antoine Demachy,  
*Clearing the colonnade of the Louvre; demolition of the Hôtel du Petit Bourbon and the Queen's stables,*  
 between 1753 and 1763,  
 gouache on paper, 370 x 480 mm  
 Paris, Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris.

Along the vaulted passage connecting the Cour Carrée to the colonnade wing, print and drawing dealers conducted their business, much like our young print seller. A watercolour by Antoine Meunier represents this vestibule faithfully: on the left, passers-by browse a print dealer's stall, while on the right, a young artist is followed by a porter carrying a canvas (**ill. 18**). Several paintings by Pierre-Antoine Demachy showing the Louvre's eastern entrance bustling with print, book, and art dealers, similarly illustrate this distinctive form of Parisian art trade at the end of the eighteenth century (**ill. 19**).<sup>34</sup>



**ill. 18:** Antoine Meunier, *Le Guichet and the courtyard of the Louvre,*  
 watercolour, pen and black ink on laid paper,  
 186 x 262 mm,  
 Paris, Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris.

<sup>34</sup> *Le Témoin méconnu : Pierre-Antoine Demachy, 1723-1807*, ed. Françoise Roussel-Leriche and Marie Pętkowska Le Roux (exh. cat., Versailles, Musée Lambinet, 15 February-18 May 2014), Paris, Magellan et Cie, Versailles, Ville de Versailles, 2013, p. 46.



**ill. 19:** Pierre-Antoine Demachy,  
*Print dealers under the Colonnade Passageway*,  
1791,  
oil on canvas, 38.5 x 58.3 cm,  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, on loan from the Musée Carnavalet.

Since 1765, Fragonard had occupied lodgings and a studio near the colonnade, providing an exceptional environment for Marguerite Gérard, a young artist seeking inspiration and recognition. Passing every day through this neighbourhood bustling with patrons visiting the palace galleries and common folk striving to make a living, Gérard, an acute observer of Parisian street life, might have encountered our young boy with his portfolio of prints, seizing the opportunity to sketch him on the spot.

**Children's Bust Portraits:  
Fragonard or Marguerite Gérard?**





**ill. C**

**Jean Honoré Fragonard**  
**(Grasse 1732 – Paris 1806)**  
**or Marguerite Gérard**  
**(Grasse 1761 – Paris 1837)**

*Portrait of a Child*

Oil on canvas,  
round composition on a rectangular background,  
20.5 x 16.5 cm.

**Provenance:**

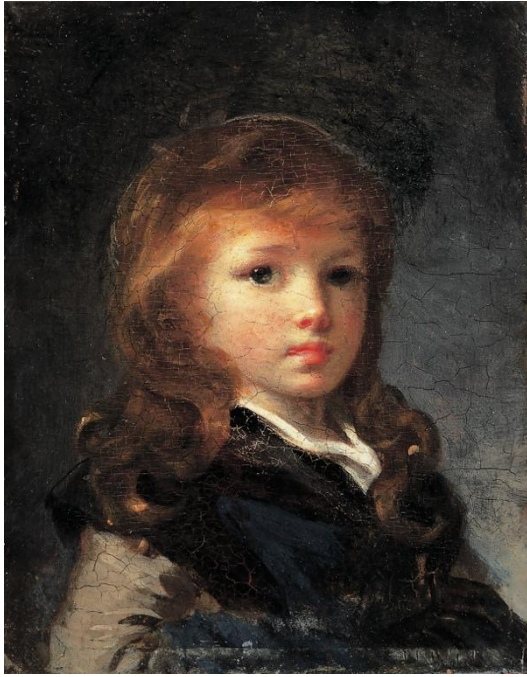
Formerly collection of Monsieur L. S.

Sale Saint-Brieuc, Armor Enchères, 19 December 2020, no. 694 (as school of Fragonard).

Paris, Galerie Hubert Duchemin, 2021.

Geneva, private collection.





**ill. D**

**Jean Honoré Fragonard**  
**(Grasse 1732 – Paris 1806)**  
**or Marguerite Gérard**  
**(Grasse 1761 – Paris 1837)**

*Portrait of a Child*

1786-1787,

Oil on panel,

10 x 8 cm.

**Provenance:**

Paris, collection Hippolyte Walferdin.

His estate sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, Me Eugène Escribe, 12–16 December 1880, no. 95 or 96 (same support, same dimensions).

Paris, collection Charles Haviland.

Sale by order of the civil tribunal of Limoges, Paris, Me Lair-Dubreuil, 14–15 December 1922, no. 50 (Marguerite Gérard), acquired by Grange for 3,700 francs.

Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, Georges Haviland collection, 2–3 June 1932, no. 108 (illustrated) (Marguerite Gérard), acquired by Cartroux for 5,200 francs.

Sale Paris, Crédit Municipal, 27 November 2004, no. 13 (attributed to Marguerite Gérard).

Acquired by Hubert Duchemin.

Paris, art trade.

Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard (Hélène and Jean-François Costa Collection).

**Literature:**

Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of New York, 1978, 2 vols., p. 1034, no. Mis 117 (rejected attribution).

Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Vie et œuvre. Catalogue complet des peintures*, Fribourg, Office

du livre; Paris, Vilo, 1987, p. 256, note 15 (Marguerite Gérard).

Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Fragonard*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 119, no. 414 (illustrated) (Fragonard).

Jean-Pierre Cuzin and Dimitri Salmon, *Fragonard, regards croisés*, Paris, Mengès, 2007, p. 168, fig. 264 (Fragonard or rather Marguerite Gérard?).

Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Montreuil, Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2019, no. 48 P, p. 216, colour illus. p. 40 (Marguerite Gérard).

The small bust length portraits of children, who are generally unidentified, placed against a dark background, occupy a unique place in the oeuvres of Fragonard and his sister-in-law Marguerite Gérard. Our tondo on canvas (**ill. C**) and the small panel at the Musée Fragonard (Hélène and Jean-François Costa Collection) in Grasse (**ill. D**) belong to this category of works whose authorship has proven challenging to ascertain.

After 1780, few of Fragonard's paintings are documented or precisely dated, but his activity as a portraitist never ceased. He made mostly portraits of those close to him, friends or fellow artists, many of whom are not identified. The small dimensions, sober execution, and tight framing that characterize our child portraits lend them an intimacy typically found in this artist's work. These portraits are imbued with the delicate charm of childhood, a charm that the painter discovered through becoming father first to Rosalie (1769-1788) and later to Alexandre Évariste (1780-1850). The birth of his son, in particular, inspired numerous bust portraits of young boys, often small in size, occasionally in Spanish costume. His son, affectionately nicknamed "Fanfan", has often been thought identifiable in this series of portraits, notably in the *Portrait of a Blonde Boy* (**ill. 20**), the *Portrait of a Boy* at the Cleveland Museum of Art (**ill. 21**), and the *Portrait of a Child with a Collar* at the Huntington Library (**ill. 24**). However, significant differences in their features introduce uncertainty about the model's identity.



**ill. 20:** Jean Honoré Fragonard,  
*Portrait of a Little Blond Boy, known as Fanfan*  
(Alexandre Évariste Fragonard?),  
c. 1780-1785,  
oil on canvas, 19 x 13,5 cm,  
private collection.



**ill. 21:** Jean Honoré Fragonard,  
*Portrait of a Boy (Alexandre Évariste Fragonard?)*,  
c. 1788?,  
oil on panel, 21.2 x 17.2 cm,  
Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

The final phase of Fragonard's career is marked by paintings with softer modelling, such as *The Sacrifice of the Rose* (ill. 22), which contrasts strikingly with the vigorous gestures and draperies executed with flair during the 1760s-1770s. Renouncing earlier visual boldness, his style evolved towards lighter, more vaporous brushwork, as evidenced by *The Bolt*, painted in 1776. Fragonard henceforth devoted himself to refined highly finished genre scenes, inspired by seventeenth-century Dutch masters, often created in collaboration with Marguerite Gérard. Our portraits display the light, blended brushwork punctuated by sharper touches characteristic of his late style.



ill. 22: Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Sacrifice of the Rose*, c. 1780, oil on panel, 54 x 43 cm, Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard (Hélène and Jean-François Costa Collection).

The magic of Fragonard's paintings owes much to their distinctive lighting, sometimes soft, and other times dramatically intense. The painter fully exploited its potential. In his later works, this moonlit, spectral illumination becomes central, enhancing the surreal quality of his nocturnal allegories, such as *The Fountain of Love* (ill. 23). Likewise, his numerous portraits of children from this period exhibit a preference for diffuse lighting and a reduced palette, favouring monochromatic tones of brown and golden caramel (ill. 24).



**ill. 23:** Jean Honoré Fragonard,  
*The Fountain of Love*, c. 1785,  
oil on canvas, 64.1 x 52.7 cm,  
Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum.



**ill. 24:** Jean Honoré Fragonard,  
*Portrait of a Child with a Collar (Alexandre Évariste Fragonard?)*, c. 1783-1785,  
oil on canvas, 21.5 x 19 cm,  
San Marino, California, The Huntington Library.

Our two portraits exemplify this preference for a monochromatic palette and Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro. In the round portrait (**ill. C**), we see a nuanced gradation of shades ranging from beige—the child’s complexion—to brown—for the chestnut hair with auburn highlights—and black—for the pupils, clothing, and dark background—accentuated by touches of white on the collar and luminous highlights on the skin, and pink for the mouth, nostrils, cheeks, and edge of the right eye. The model's features depicted in this medallion are recognizable in the charming small panel from the Musée Fragonard (Hélène and Jean-François Costa Collection), which we have the chance to exhibit today (**ill. D**). The child’s posture is identical in both works, though the framing is slightly wider and the lighting more pronounced in the Costa Collection’s painting. The child wears a green beret, a grey jacket, and a dark vest over a white shirt. His dark lively eyes, rosy complexion, small nose above finely drawn lips, and blond hair falling in soft curls are skilfully rendered.

The portraits of children succeeding the world-weary faces of dancers or fashionable women in Fragonard’s work stand out for their subtlety and captivating expressiveness. Indeed, no one captured as truthfully children's astonished eyes, smiles, dimples, and angelic curls, nor better suggested their impressionable and candid souls. The Goncourt brothers admirably described how the miniature-like size of these portraits perfectly conveys youthful vivacity: “Fragonard has painted the eyes of children as black, wet diamonds. He knew how to render that flame of youthful gazes better, moistening and lighting it more effectively than Greuze or the English painter Lawrence could achieve with the resources of oil painting. He depicted the softness of their features, the delicate indecision of their plump contours, their soft, airy flesh, the porcelain fineness of their foreheads, the azure tint of their temples, the pout or smile blooming or closing the red flower of their mouths. True miniatures of sunlight where you will seek in vain the labour, crosshatching, stippling, or dryness typical of miniatures. A drop of water struck by a sunbeam: this is the mystery and enchantment of these delicate masterpieces.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, “Fragonard”, *L’Art du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Rapilly, 1873 : “Des enfants, Fragonard a peint là les yeux de diamants noirs et humides. Il a su rendre cette flamme des jeunes regards, la

Posing almost frontally, the child in both our portraits (**ill. C and D**) presents the same delightful face with an alert gaze and vibrant youthfulness. An impression of freshness emanates from these compositions, rendered with inspired brushwork that justifies their place among Fragonard's most charming portraits. The delicate chiaroscuro modelling, light handling, transparent glazing, and the model's luminous eyes could convince us of their attribution to Fragonard if Marguerite Gérard had not also engaged in this genre diligently in the late 1780s and the following decade. The difficulty arises from confusion progressively introduced between the works of master and pupil.

When ignoring the subject and comparing our paintings to contemporary history pieces by Fragonard, the evidence eloquently favours the older painter. Nevertheless, attributing these child portraits remains problematic. Scholars have attempted to clarify part of the mystery surrounding Fragonard's late production between 1785 and 1790 by cataloguing his known lost paintings documented through engravings and preparatory drawings and demonstrating that certain works by Marguerite Gérard were collaborative ventures with her teacher, although disentangling their respective contributions remains challenging. The supple drawing and varied brushwork, sometimes richly loaded, sometimes diluted, generally differentiate Fragonard's paintings from Marguerite Gérard's, whose style is drier, more angular, and more uniform in surface and colouration. For child portraits specifically, Jean-Pierre Cuzin notes Gérard's "more enveloping touch and tender, almost sentimental tone."<sup>36</sup> Carole Blumenfeld distinguishes Fragonard's livelier paintings (**ill. 24**) from Gérard's cooler lighting effects and highlights her consistent emphasis on dark eyes (**ill. 25**).<sup>37</sup>

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mouiller, l'allumer, mieux que n'ont fait, avec les ressources de l'huile, Greuze et le peintre anglais Lawrence. Il a peint le nuage de leurs traits, la molle et délicate indécision de leurs contours joufflus, leur chair douillette et soufflée, la fine porcelaine de leur front, le bleuissement d'azur de leurs tempes, la moue ou le sourire épanouissant ou fermant la fleur rouge de leur bouche. Vraies miniatures de soleil où vous chercherez vainement le travail, les hachures, le pointillé, les sécheresses des miniatures. Une goutte d'eau dans laquelle serait tombé un rayon, voilà le mystère et l'enchantement de ces légers chefs-d'œuvre."

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Vie et œuvre...*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>37</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, *op. cit.*, p. 216.



**ill. 25:** Marguerite Gérard,  
*Portrait of a Child*,  
1786-1788,  
oil on oval panel, 11 x 9 cm,  
private collection.

For several bust portraits of children, consensus remains elusive, these paintings having alternately been attributed to Fragonard or Marguerite Gérard in successive sales and publications. This applies to the small panel from the Costa Collection (**ill. D**), sold multiple times in the early twentieth century as by Gérard, rejected by Sally Wells-Robertson in 1978,<sup>38</sup> reinstated by Jean-Pierre Cuzin in 1987,<sup>39</sup> and catalogued as by Fragonard by Pierre Rosenberg in 1989.<sup>40</sup> The caption accompanying the illustration of the panel in the publication *Fragonard, regards croisés* (2007), “Fragonard (or rather Marguerite Gérard?)”, reflects hesitations among scholars.<sup>41</sup> Acquired in 2004 by Hélène and Jean-François Costa, the work joined the collection of the Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard in Grasse, which was inaugurated in 2011, and is attributed to Fragonard in the museum's 2010 catalogue.<sup>42</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, who includes it in the catalogue raisonné of Marguerite Gérard, concludes cautiously: “The handling of light and use of thick brushstrokes lean toward an attribution to Fragonard, but the presence of dark eyes almost acts as Marguerite Gérard’s signature.”<sup>43</sup>

Addressing the attribution of work between the two artists, Pierre Rosenberg admits not always having clear answers concerning these miniature-like child portraits.<sup>44</sup> Jean-Pierre Cuzin acknowledges the difficulty, noting that while some energetic and vigorous paintings reflect

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<sup>38</sup> Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.* : “Gérard did not execute Rococo-style portraits.”

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Vie et œuvre...*, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 256, note 15.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Fragonard, op. cit.*, p. 119, n° 414 (repr.).

<sup>41</sup> Jean-Pierre Cuzin and Dimitri Salmon, *Fragonard, regards croisés*, Paris, Mengès, 2007, pp. 167-168 (repr.).

<sup>42</sup> Andrea Zanella, *Trois peintres grasseois : Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard, Jean-Baptiste Mallet. Musée Fragonard. collection Hélène et Jean-François Costa*, Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 2010, pp. 44-45.

<sup>43</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, 48 P, p. 216.

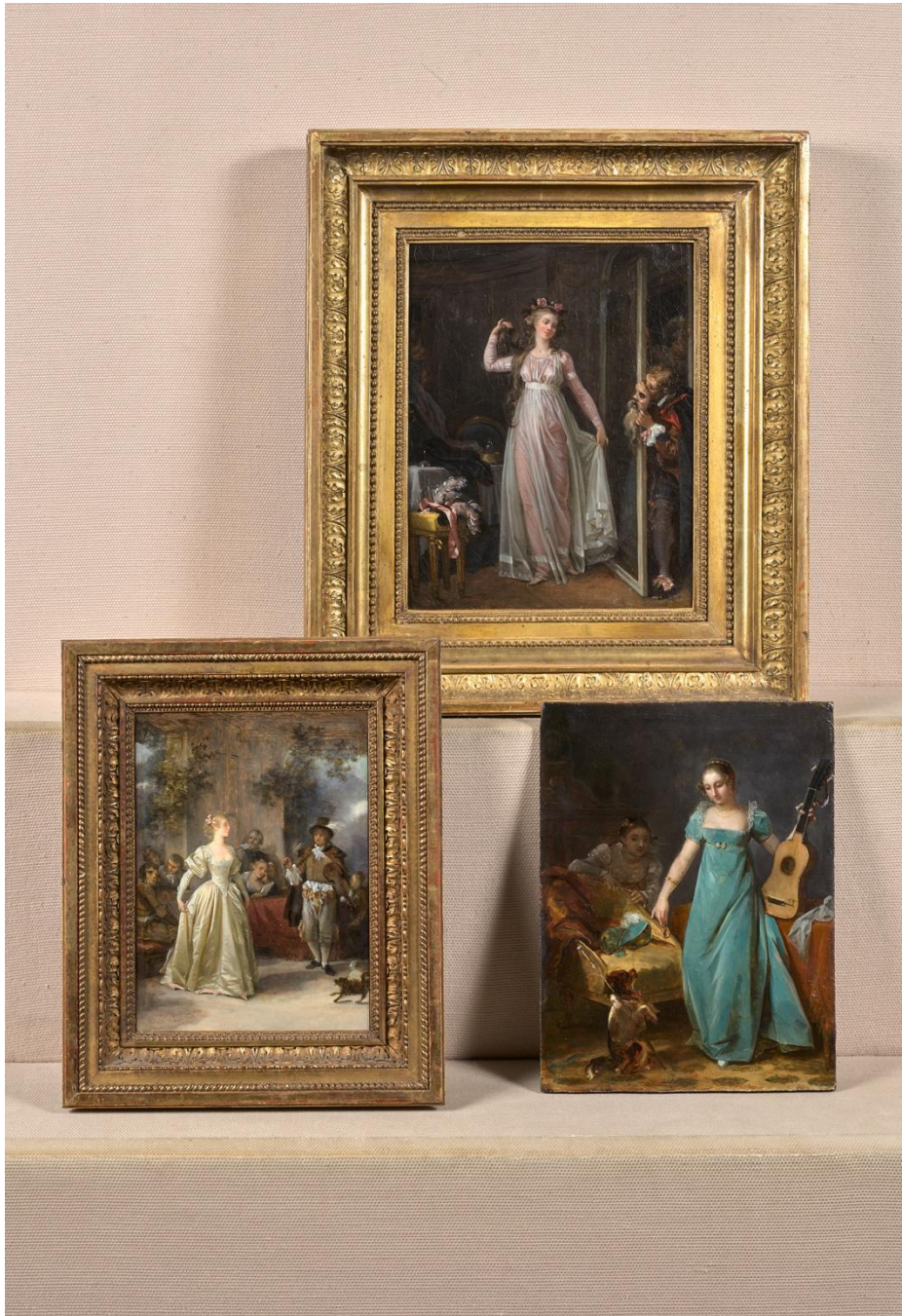
<sup>44</sup> *Le Cardinal Fesch et l'art de son temps : Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard, Jacques Sablet, Louis-Léopold Boilly*, ed. Philippe Costamagna and Carole Blumenfeld (exh. cat., Ajaccio, musée Fesch, 15 June-30 September 2007), Paris, Gallimard, 2007, p. 15.

Fragonard's genius, others, softer and marked by an emphasis on large dark eyes, appear attributable to Marguerite Gérard: "But how can one be sure? Especially since other artists, family members, or others from their circle could also have produced small 'Fragonard-like' works of this type."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57. See Jean-Pierre Cuzin, *Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Vie et œuvre...*, *op. cit.*, no. 368 to 372 and Pierre Rosenberg, *Tout l'œuvre peint de Fragonard*, *op. cit.*, no. 411 to 422.

## Marguerite Gérard, Painter of Genre Scenes Evolution and Artistic Experimentation Between 1785 and 1810



*[...] Most painters draw their subjects from the great themes of history or the radiant dreams of poetry; less ambitious yet more sensitive, Mademoiselle Gérard finds hers in the ordinary and too often unnoticed scenes of*



*domestic life. With rare talent, she has preferred to be the painter of nature rather than that of history. All her works attest to the beauty of her soul and the grace of her brush. [...]*<sup>46</sup>

Even during the artist's lifetime, critics held Marguerite Gérard's commitment to genre painting in high esteem. The presentation of three paintings together in our gallery, *The Dance* (1788-1789), *Before the Masquerade Ball* (c. 1785-1790), and *Woman with a Guitar Giving a her Dog Gimblette* (c. 1810), demonstrates her remarkable ability to adapt to a constantly shifting political context as well as to the demands of the art market. The comparison of these works also highlights her visual fluency and artistic experimentation, as she took pleasure in developing her style from one composition to the next. Indeed, while unmistakable common traits can be discerned across these sketches, Marguerite Gérard consistently refined her palette and her rendering of physiognomies throughout her career.

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<sup>46</sup> *Mémoires en cassation, pour le citoyen Bance*, 1806, p. 476. See Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, p. 105.



**ill. E**

**Marguerite Gérard (Grasse 1761-1837 Paris)**

*The Dance*

1788-1789,

Oil on cradled panel,

23 x 17 cm.

Transport labels on the reverse.

**Provenance:**

Sale, Paris, Pillet, 10 February 1865, no. 11.

Paris, Groult Collection.

Paris, Galerie Cailleux.

Paris, Galerie Didier Aaron.

**Literature:**

Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Ph.D. diss., University of New York, 1978, 2 vols., p. 747, no. 15 (illustrated).

Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Montreuil, Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2019, 30 P, p. 212 (colour illustration p. 38).

**Exhibitions:**

*Explications des peintures, gravures, miniatures et autres de femmes peintres au XVIIIe siècle exposés au profit de l'Appui Maternel* (Hôpital Tarnier), preface by Louis Réau (exh. cat., Paris, Hôtel des négociants en objets d'art, 14 May-6 June 1926), Paris, P. Frazier, 1926, no. 42.

*La Danse* (Liège, Foyer du Conservatoire Royal de Musique, 1948), 1948, no. 13.

*Danses et divertissements* (Paris, Galerie Charpentier, 1948-1949), Paris, 1948, no. 106.

*The Dance* (ill. E) is set in a pavilion with wide openings onto a park. To the left, a girl in a white dress, turned three-quarters to the right, her face in profile, holds her skirt with both hands. With her left foot forward, she executes a dance step. A dancing master, dressed according to seventeenth century fashion, beats the rhythm with the violin bow held in his right hand. They are watched by half a dozen figures, seated or standing in the background. Among them, a young woman leans on a table, holding a sheet of music, while in the lower right corner, two small dogs are visible. The subject of this work recalls the gallant scenes of Watteau, imbued with an undeniable nostalgia for a bygone past.

The sketch once belonged to Charles Camille Groult (1832-1910), a well-known industrialist and collector of eighteenth-century French paintings, pastels, and drawings, before being acquired by the Galerie Cailleux, where it was recorded as by Marguerite Gérard but considered a collaborative work.<sup>47</sup> It was exhibited three times between 1926 and 1948 and included in the corpus of Marguerite Gérard's works by Sally Wells-Robertson in 1978, followed by Carole Blumenfeld in 2019.

As Carole Blumenfeld rightly observes, dating the painting to around 1788-1789, its uniform lighting differs from that typically employed by Fragonard. Marguerite Gérard deliberately reveals the underpainting, playing with its effects for the background tones. She uses a thicker brush than usual to work the softly blurred grey background, as seen in our *Print Seller*. A similar technique appears in numerous other small paintings by the artist, particularly in *Portrait of Two Musicians* (ill. 26).<sup>48</sup>



ill. 26:

left: detail ill. E (*The Dance*);

centre: detail ill. A (*The Print Seller*);

right: Marguerite Gérard, *Portrait of two musicians* (detail), oil on paper mounted on canvas, 21.5 x 15.9 cm, private collection.

<sup>47</sup> The Marianne-Roland Michel archives (dossiers 157 and 158, Galerie Cailleux) and documentation from the Musée du Petit Palais support this hypothesis: "It is widely acknowledged that in many of her small paintings, Marguerite Gérard was guided and assisted by her brother-in-law Fragonard. This work seems to be one where such an assumption is particularly justified, and we believe it to be, more than many others, the fruit of a collaboration between the old master from Grasse and his young sister-in-law."

<sup>48</sup> Marguerite Gérard. *Artiste en 1789...*, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

In this panel, treated “in the sketch manner”, the angular head of the central figure lacks volume, much like the profile in our *Young Boy Seated on a Stone Pedestal* (ill. B). This flat modelling is also evident in the faces of the background figures (ill. 27).



ill. 27:

left and centre: detail ill. E (*The Dance*);

right: detail ill. B (*Young Boy Seated on a Stone Pedestal*).

Recent restoration has revealed two preliminary figure sketches at the centre of the scene, beneath the transparent background paint (detail ill. E). The first, a face seen frontally, slightly turned to the right, possibly male, almost overlaps that of the dancer, while the second, a profile turned left, is unmistakably female. It is visible just above the dancing master's bow. Their proportions suggest these figures were originally intended for the foreground. Are they *pentimenti* or remnants of another composition? Infrared reflectography analysis could help isolate the underdrawing, shedding light on the artist's investigations and process in conceiving this work.



ill. E: detail (traces of *pentimenti*).

Marguerite Gérard excels in capturing light effects on satin fabrics. Here, she renders the protagonist's dress with virtuoso skill, applying rapid, delicate brushstrokes, layering tones, and finally adding crisp white highlights to suggest the shimmering brilliance of silk, as in the *Portrait*

of a *Woman with a Mandolin* (ill. 28). The meticulous attention given to the folds of the sleeves, bodice, and skirt gracefully spread out by the young dancer, imbues the work with a palpable sensuality. Her skill in depicting fabrics with metallic reflections is fully evident, similar to her more refined paintings executed in the “fine manner” of Mieris and Ter Borch.



ill. 28:

left: detail [ill. E](#) (*The Dance*);

right: Marguerite Gérard, *Portrait of a woman with a mandolin*, oil on wood, 19.4 x 14.7 cm, signed (lower left): ‘Mte Gérard’, Los Angeles, collection of Lynda and Stewart Resnick.

Though not necessarily a preparatory study for a larger painting, this sketch likely inspired the more finished composition of *The Dance Lesson* (ill. 29). The spatial arrangement of figures establishes a strong connection between the two works. Although seen from the back, the young woman in *The Dance Lesson* mirrors the stance of the dancer in our panel; with an elegant gesture, she opens the folds of a meticulously rendered silk gown. This is a “collaboration by sections”, in which, according to Carole Blumenfeld, Marguerite Gérard’s contribution is predominant, both in conception and execution.<sup>49</sup> The chiaroscuro in *The Dance Lesson* is more pronounced than in our panel, with the gentle light effects on the left contrasting with the cool illumination enveloping the dancer.

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<sup>49</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, n° 31 P, p. 213.



**ill. 29:**

Marguerite Gérard with the participation of Fragonard, *The Dance Lesson*, 1788-1789, oil on canvas, 50 x 46 cm, signed lower right: 'Marte Gérard', inscription (lower right): '62', private collection.



ill. F

**Marguerite Gérard (Grasse 1761-1837 Paris)**

**with the participation of Jean Honoré Fragonard (Grasse 1732-1806 Paris)?**

*Before the masquerade ball*

Oil sketch on canvas,  
29.5 x 23.7 cm.

Old inscription (on the stretcher bar, verso): 'Mlle Gérard - 1761-1837'

**Provenance:**

(Possibly) Anonymous sale, London, 25 June 1850, no. 70 (as "A lady dressing for a masquerade").

François-Hippolyte Walferdin (1795-1880), Paris.

Sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 12-16 April 1880, lot 119, acquired by Mr. May.

Paris, Hôtel Drouot, *Catalogue de tableaux anciens*, 15 November 1882, no. 23.

Moreau-Chaslou collection.

Sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 8 May 1886, no. 51 (as "La Loge de l'actrice").

M. Demonts collection.

Sale, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, *Catalogue des objets d'art et d'ameublement principalement du dix-huitième siècle composant la collection de Monsieur Demonts*, 23-25 May 1921, no. 54 (repr.), acquired by Mr. Guiraud.

Private collection, until 1973.

New York, Wildenstein & Co.

Geneva, private collection.

### Literature:

Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1978, p. 760, no. 20a.

Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). *Orígenes e influencias. De Rembrandt al siglo XXI*, ed. Jean-Pierre Cuzin, Katharina Schmidt and Sophie Raux (exh. cat., Barcelona, CaixaForum, November 10, 2006–February 11, 2007), Barcelona, Fondation la Caixa, 2006, mentioned in the appendices of Jean-Pierre Cuzin's essay, "Fragonard en el año 2006," pp. 33, 201 (as Marguerite Gérard, dated around 1790).

*Le Cardinal Fesch et l'art de son temps: Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard, Jacques Sablet, Louis-Léopold Boilly*, ed. Philippe Costamagna and Carole Blumenfeld (exh. cat., Ajaccio, Musée Fesch, 15 June–30 September 2007), Paris, Gallimard; Ajaccio, Musée Fesch, 2007, no. 41 (as Marguerite Gérard and Jean-Honoré Fragonard), illustrated in colour p. 121, fig. 41.

*La Collection La Caze: chefs-d'œuvre des peintures des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Guillaume Faroult (exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, 26 April–9 July 2007; Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 20 September–10 December 2007; London, Wallace Collection, 14 February–18 May 2008), Paris, Hazan, 2007, mentioned in the essay by Carole Blumenfeld, "Les pionniers de la redécouverte du XVIIIe siècle," p. 91, illustrated in colour, p. 90, fig. 61 ("Le Départ pour le bal de l'Opéra"). Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard: 1761-1837*, Montreuil, Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2019, p. 213, no. 32 P; mentioned in the essay "Fragonard's Interesting Student," p. 44, illustrated in colour p. 50.

### Exhibitions:

*Intimate Encounters. Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Richard Rand (exh. cat., Hanover, New Hampshire, Hood Museum of Art, 4 October 1997–4 January 1998; Toledo, Ohio, The Toledo Museum of Art, 15 February–10 May 1998; Houston, The Museum of Fine Arts, 31 May–23 August 1998), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, no. 42, illustrated in colour p. 185.

*Parfums d'interdit: l'audace sous le pinceau de Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard et leurs pairs*, ed. Carole Blumenfeld (exh. cat., Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Collection Hélène et Jean-François Costa, 26 May–23 September 2018), Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 2018, no. 14, illustrated in colour p. 86.

Like *The Dance, Before the Masquerade Ball*, also known as *Leaving for the Opera Ball* (ill. F), dates from the revolutionary period (painted around 1788-1789<sup>50</sup> or in the early 1790s<sup>51</sup>). This well documented painting depicts a related theme: preparations for a costume party. It represents a rare example of an oil sketch on canvas by Marguerite Gérard, who usually favoured wood panels for such works.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, *op. cit.*, n° 32P, p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> *Le Cardinal Fesch et l'art de son temps*, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, *op. cit.* p. 760, no. 20a: "The small size of this canvas suggests that it may have been a study for the large version, although Gérard generally produced such studies on small wooden panels in a much freer style."



Its ambiguous iconography differs from that used by Jean-François de Troy in *Before the Ball* (ill. 30), a painting on a similar theme executed in 1735 and engraved in 1757. In our composition, the scene unfolds around a female figure dressed in a transparent, diaphanous gown with an elegant pink silk lining, similar to the dress worn by the protagonist of the painting *The Present* (ill. 31), set in an oval salon decorated with wood panelling characteristic of wealthy Parisian interiors from the Ancien Régime. Wearing a crown of roses in her flowing hair, a young woman contemplates her reflection in a mirror on the right, holding a dark lock of hair in one hand while lifting the hem of her skirt with the other. Several accessories, a feather, jewellery, and ribbons, are arranged on a stool in the foreground to the left. Two of the three surrounding figures appear inspired by the *commedia dell'arte*:<sup>53</sup> a man concealed by a bearded mask dressed in Spanish style with a black cape lined in vermilion leans in from behind the mirrored door. This youthful figure, adorned with pink bows on his knees and shoes, also appears in *I was taking care of you* and *I read them again with pleasure* (ill. 32). He evokes Pantalone, the “Venetian merchant, simple-hearted yet perpetually enamoured, frequently duped by a rival, a son, or a servant”<sup>54</sup> often characterized by lust, greed, and other vices. Behind him, in the doorway, another suitor in a white costume and hat evokes Pierrot, the naïve and ignorant character traditionally depicted wearing a white satin suit with matching headband and ruff. Richard Rand suggests the flirtatious young woman preparing for the ball may allude to Colombine, Pierrot's companion, often depicted in a light-coloured dress with flowers in her hair.<sup>55</sup> Marguerite Gérard may have been inspired by contemporary libertine texts, in which high society ladies delighted in the misunderstandings prompted by their disguises. The young woman in *Avant le bal*, intrigued by the mask and piqued by curiosity, seems untroubled by her admirers' intrusion.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See François Moureau, 'Iconographie théâtrale', in *Watteau (1684-1721)*, ed. Margaret Morgan Grasselli, Pierre Rosenberg *et al* (cat. exp., Washington, National Gallery of Art, 17 June-23 September 1984; Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 23 October 1984-28 January 1985; Berlin, Charlottenburg Palace, 22 February-26 May 1985), Paris, RMN, 1984, pp. 509-528.

<sup>54</sup> Luigi Riccoboni, *Histoire du théâtre italien*, Paris, André Cailleau, 1731, 2 vol.

<sup>55</sup> *Intimate Encounters. Love and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Richard Rand (exh. cat., Hanover, New Hampshire, Hood Museum of Art, October 1997-January 1998), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 186.

<sup>56</sup> On this subject, see *Parfums d'interdit : l'audace sous le pinceau de Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard et leurs pairs*, ed. Carole Blumenfeld (exh. cat., Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, collection Hélène and Jean-François Costa, 26 May-23 September 2018), Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 2018, p. 86.



ill. 30: Jean-François de Troy, *Before the Ball*, 1735, oil on canvas, 82 x 65 cm, signed and dated lower right in a motif on the carpet: 'DETROY 1735', Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum.



ill. 31: Marguerite Gérard and Jean Honoré Fragonard, *The Present*, 1788-1789, oil on canvas, 54.5 x 44 cm, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum.



ill. 32: Marguerite Gérard and Jean Honoré Fragonard, *I read them again with pleasure*, 1784-1785, oil on canvas, 30 x 39 cm, Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

References to commedia dell'arte characters may explain alternative titles given to the painting (*The Artist's Dressing Room*, *An Artist from the Comédie-Française*). Such gallant scenes often lend themselves to interpretation, although no explicit intention is attributed to the artist. Nonetheless, since Gérard and Fragonard frequented theatrical circles, it is not surprising that their works reflect related themes. Their social milieu consisted of genre painters and Opéra-Comique artists, who shared similar patrons. As Carole Blumenfeld notes, "Paris was then swept up by the whims and fashions set by its most famous dancers and actresses, a euphoric city where financiers, dancers, and painters mingled around the Palais Royal and the Louvre."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Marguerite Gérard. *Artiste en 1789...*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Our sketch is preparatory for a larger composition of the same subject,<sup>58</sup> that had belonged to Cardinal Joseph Fesch (1763-1839), Napoleon's maternal uncle (**ill. 33**). This second version, whose current location is unknown,<sup>59</sup> includes variations: a fourth figure hiding behind the chair, a more elaborate still life on the left, and a modified mask (a larger smile, with the upturned nose now hooked), that matches more closely the traditional depictions of Pantalone.



**ill. 33:** Marguerite Gérard, *Before the Masquerade Ball*, 1788-1789, oil on canvas, 54 x 44 cm, current location unknown.

The two versions also differ stylistically. The larger painting, unanimously attributed to Marguerite Gérard, exhibits a cooler palette, finely executed with a precision reminiscent of Dutch masters. Opinions differ regarding our sketch. Carole Blumenfeld suggests it was created as a collaboration between both artists:<sup>60</sup> the emphasis on the central figure echoes Gérard's genre scenes, while the background arrangement and vivid rendering of the admirer in Spanish dress display Fragonard's characteristic "vibrancy and spontaneity". Conversely, Jean-Pierre Cuzin attributes both the sketch and the finished version solely to Marguerite Gérard, dating the work around 1790.

We concur with Jean-Pierre Cuzin. The vaporous effect of the gown justifies the transparent glazes employed for the central figure, contrasting with thicker impasto used to convey the cloak worn by the admirer on the right. Nevertheless, the brushwork appears homogeneous: the same soft strokes delineate the black drapery on the table and the young man's costume on the right (**ill. 34**), with identical luminous effects highlighting the pink and pearl ribbons adorning his attire and shoes and those abandoned on the stool (**ill. 35**). Finally, the lively, precise touches depicting the feathery textures echo in the floral crown of the coquettish woman and in the hair of the

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<sup>58</sup> See Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, p. 759, n° 20 and Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, n° 33 P, p. 213.

<sup>59</sup> The painting is untraced after it was sold under no. 66 in the dispersal of the Léon Lowenstein collection at the Galerie Charpentier in Paris on 17 December 1936, where it was bought for 15,800 francs by Rodière.

<sup>60</sup> *Le Cardinal Fesch et l'art de son temps, op. cit.*, p. 120.

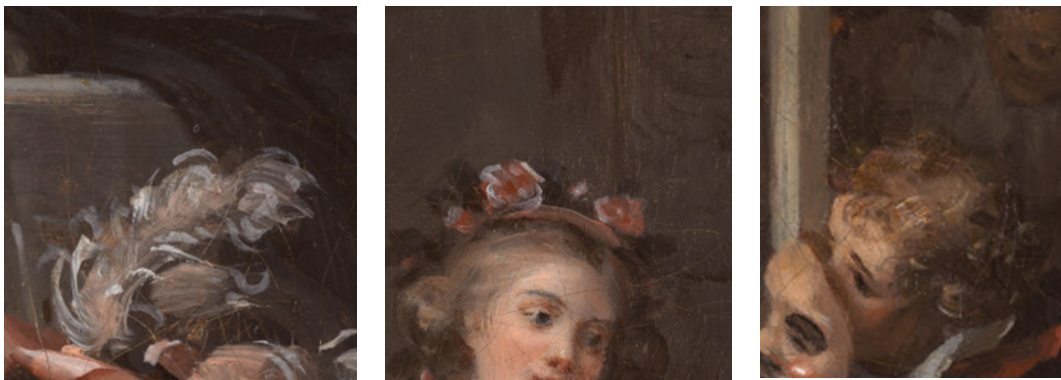
admirer on the right (ill. 36). Marguerite Gérard is thus likely the sole author of this composition, one of her most beautiful and dynamic creations from the transition between the 1780s and 1790s.



ill. 34: details ill. F (*Before the Masquerade Ball*)



ill. 35: details ill. F (*Before the Masquerade Ball*)



ill. 36: details ill. F (*Before the Masquerade Ball*)

Our painting was formerly owned by François Hippolyte Walferdin (1795-1880), a politician and physicist from Langres, who dedicated considerable leisure time to the arts and literature. A discerning collector of drawings and paintings by Fragonard, Walferdin significantly contributed

to the rediscovery of this painter. According to Carole Blumenfeld, there is a distinctive “Walferdin taste” for “a liberated, lively Fragonard, swiftly executed”<sup>61</sup>. Upon his death, Walferdin’s heirs donated his busts of Washington, Franklin, and Diderot by Houdon to the Louvre. The remainder of his collection, which became the foundation for the first Fragonard catalogue raisonné, was dispersed at one of the era’s most famous auctions. While Walferdin rarely erred in attribution, distinguishing works by Fragonard from those by Marguerite Gérard posed some challenges, a debate that continues among specialists today. His collection included paintings ranging from Marie-Anne Fragonard to Géricault (including two by Marguerite Gérard), stylistically and thematically close to Fragonard’s oeuvre.

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<sup>61</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, ‘Les pionniers de la redécouverte du xviiiè siècle’, in *La Collection La Caze, chefs-d’œuvre des peintures des XVIIè et XVIIIè siècles*, ed. Guillaume Faroult (exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, 26 April-9 July 2007; Pau, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 20 September-10 December 2007; London, Wallace Collection, 14 February-18 May 2008), Paris, Hazan, 2007, pp. 89-91.



**ill. G**

**Marguerite Gérard (Grasse 1761-1837 Paris)**

*Woman with a Guitar Giving her Dog a Gimblette*

c. 1810, oil on panel, 30 x 21.5 cm.

Early handwritten inscription (on verso): 'Mlle Gérard'. Old labels on verso bearing numbers 25 and 16.

**Provenance:**

Sale Paris, Ferri & Associés, 31 March 2023, lot 26 (as attributed to Marguerite Gérard).

The final, previously unpublished painting of our exhibition shows a young woman standing, dressed in a turquoise velvet gown, holding a guitar in her hand, near a table covered by a red cashmere tablecloth. She offers a pastry, known as a gimblette,<sup>62</sup> to a small dog standing upright on its hind legs. Another female figure, behind her on the left, observes the scene with amusement.

The work is painted on a wooden panel, whose reverse side is covered with tow fibres (**ill. G bis**), a support frequently employed by Marguerite Gérard, especially for her sketches.

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<sup>62</sup> Small, hard, dry pastry in the shape of a ring.



**ill. G bis:** verso of **ill. G** (*Woman with Guitar Giving her Dog a Gimblette*).

We concur with Jean-Pierre Cuzin, who attributes this panel to Marguerite Gérard,<sup>63</sup> dating its creation to around 1810.<sup>64</sup> Several elements support this dating: the arrangement of interior space, featuring a table diagonally placed on the right and a seat on the left, closely resembles that found in Gérard's *The Good News*, exhibited at the Salon of 1804, *The Two Gourmands* (c. 1810,<sup>65</sup> **ill. 46**), and *The Study* (c. 1810-1811).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, the gondola chair, identified by its rounded, enveloping back and curved sides that join the seat frame, reflects the fashion prevalent during the Empire and Restoration periods, marked by a general simplification of forms. Here, Gérard highlights contemporary taste among the affluent classes for furniture that symbolized refinement and social distinction.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, the clothing reflects fashions around 1810. High waistlines persisted, and rectangular necklines featured clear, distinct lines, leaving only narrow fabric bands at the shoulder onto which sleeves were attached, either short and puffed, as seen on the protagonist, or long and fitted, sometimes adorned with small puffed caps at the shoulder, as in the background figure.<sup>68</sup> Long trains became exclusive to formal wear, and heavier, darker fabrics, such as velvet promoted by Napoleon from 1808 onward to revive Lyon's silk industry, became more popular. Comparable examples appear in contemporary portraits, such as Girodet's 1809 portrait of Augustine Bertin de Vaux<sup>69</sup> or Baron Gérard's effigy of Marie Laczynska of 1810 (**ill. 37**). A similar gown appears in an 1814 issue of the *Journal des dames et des modes* (**ill. 38**). Resting on the chair is a matching "Paméla" bonnet,<sup>70</sup> a fashionable daytime accessory for women from the late 1790s until about 1815-1820. The protagonist's hairstyle, a braided chignon adorned with curls framing the face, also appears in Gérard's *The Drawing Lesson* (1814-1816, **ill. 39**).

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<sup>63</sup> Carole Blumenfeld does not share this view.

<sup>64</sup> See written communication of 29 March 2024.

<sup>65</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, no. 234 P, p. 241. Although she classifies it as one of the works produced around 1815, she points out that it could be much earlier, possibly around 1800. In fact, it is difficult to judge the dating due to quality of the 1905 photograph.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 208 P, p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Madeleine Delpierre, *Le Costume. Consulat, Empire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1990, p. 16.

<sup>69</sup> Galerie Éric Coatalem, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> A type of hat consisting of a cap or truncated cone combined with a wide fabric-covered visor, decorated with flowers or feathers and held under the chin by a ribbon.



**ill. 37:** Baron François Gérard, *Portrait of Marie Laczynska, Countess Walenska*, 1810, oil on canvas, 241 x 162 cm, Versailles, Musée National des Châteaux



**ill. 38:** Pierre-Charles Baquoy after Horace Vernet, *Parisian suit* (Satin hat. Dress trimmed with velvet), print, 20 x 13 cm, from *Journal des dames et des modes*, 1814, The Hague, Kunstmuseum.



**ill. 39:** Marguerite Gérard, *The Drawing Lesson* (detail), 1814-1816, oil on canvas, 48.5 x 40 cm, signed (on the portfolio of engravings): 'M<sup>re</sup> gerard-frago', Los Angeles, collection of Lynda and Stewart Resnick.

This painting belongs to Gérard's series of intimate genre scenes featuring children, mothers, and lovers accompanied by cats and dogs, a recurring theme from the 1790s until her late career under the July Monarchy. Though seemingly anecdotal or playful, these works carried innovative implications, inviting reflection on women's roles in family life, intellectual discourse, and education.<sup>71</sup>

Gérard draws inspiration from a repertoire familiar to her, influenced by 17th-century Dutch genre painters. Musical themes frequently recur in her work, evidenced by numerous depictions of guitar players in contemporary or "Dutch-style" clothing. The guitar featured here appears in

<sup>71</sup> Between 1808 and 1822, Marguerite Gérard drew up a repertoire of values transmitted within the home, empathy, civility, politeness, trust and respect, and presented compositions at the Salon that emphasised the role of the mother as the first relay of Catholicism. See Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.* pp. 159-160.



several earlier works, including *Sleep my Child*<sup>72</sup> (nearly thirty years earlier), *The Young Guitarist* (1797-1798, **ill. 40**), and *The Hussar Family* (1804, **ill. 41**), illustrating Gérard's penchant for repeating motifs in varying contexts.



**ill. 40:** Marguerite Gérard, *The Young Guitarist* 1797-1798, oil on canvas, 44.5 x 36.8 cm, signed (lower right): 'Mte Gérard', Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard (Hélène and Jean-François Costa Collection).



**ill. 41:** Marguerite Gérard, *The Hussar Family* Salon of 1804, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, Denver, Denver Museum of Art.

Our panel also highlights Marguerite Gérard's fondness for pets and her exceptional skill in depicting them—a skill from which she never wavered. This particular fondness, already evident in *The Swaddled Cat* (**ill. 1**), likely finds its roots in the teaching and works of Fragonard himself. Indeed, the subject of our painting immediately evokes *La Gimplette* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), *Education is everything* (**ill. 42**), or *Young Girl on Her Bed Playing with a Little Black Dog* (**ill. 43**). *The Spaniel*,<sup>73</sup> a collaborative work by Gérard and Fragonard, revisits a theme highly appreciated by Northern genre painters. Fragonard and his pupil might have drawn inspiration from Dutch Golden Age paintings accessible in Paris at the time, such as *The Curiosity* by Ter Borch, formerly in the collections of Gaillard de Gagny and Randon de Boisset, in which a puppy seated on a stool observes three women, or *The Company with a Dancing Dog* by Jacob Ochtervelt, which appeared in the Vicomte de Fontpertuis sale in Paris in 1748 (**ill. 44**).<sup>74</sup> An artwork attributed to Mieris, showing a courtesan playing with a small dog, was also featured in the Dubois sale of 1785. It is essential to bear in mind the inherent ambiguity of these subjects. Indeed, the dog, a traditional emblem of fidelity, far from being merely decorative, humorously uncovers the hidden meaning behind such compositions: contemporary connoisseurs would likely have interpreted these scenes as playful allusions to the temptations faced by polite society, often struggling to adhere to the strict conventions of faithful love.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Marguerite Gérard, *Sleep my child*, 1783-1784, oil on canvas, 54 x 44 cm, signed (lower right): 'Mte Gérard', Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle.

<sup>73</sup> Fragonard and Marguerite Gérard, *The Spaniel*, 1786-1788, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm, private collection (Carole Blumenfeld, Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit., no. 21 P, p. 210, rep. p. 48).

<sup>74</sup> See *Parfums d'interdit...*, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

<sup>75</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837*, op. cit., p. 66.



**ill. 42:** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Education is Everything*, 1775-1780, oil on canvas, 56.5 x 66 cm, Sao Paulo, Museu de Arte.



**ill. 43:** Jean Honoré Fragonard, *Young Girl on Her Bed Playing with a Little Black Dog*, known as *Les Gimblettes*, c. 1775, oil on canvas, 61 x 77.5 cm, Paris, private collection.



**ill. 44:** Jacob Ochtervelt, *Company with a Dancing Dog*, oil on canvas, 92 x 75 cm, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.

Marguerite Gérard revisited this subject several times during the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *The Triumph of Raton* (**ill. 45**),<sup>76</sup> known through an old photograph,<sup>77</sup> is a complex composition that, according to Sally Wells-Robertson, might be one of the works exhibited at the Salon of 1804,<sup>78</sup> In this painting, the artist depicts a charming family gathering, centred around a standing blonde woman dressed in a blue silk gown. She is making a small trained dog dance upright on its hind legs, holding it by a leash in her left hand while dangling a biscuit (*gimblette*) in front of its eyes. The dog, dressed in a yellow suit and a white felt hat adorned with a blue feather, is imitated by a pug behind him who has adopted the same stance. Behind the main figure, a maid holding a small whip watches over the two animals. To her right, a nurse is seated with a baby on her lap. A child leans against the back of the nurse's chair, while another, crouched in the foreground, plays with a racket and shuttlecock.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233, n° 168 P.

<sup>77</sup> Sale of the Jules Lengart de Lille collection, Paris, Drouot, 10 March 1902, lot 51, repr.

<sup>78</sup> Sally Wells-Robertson, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.* p. 844, no. 69a: she relies on a handwritten note in the margin of no. 120 of the Salon's register of entries stating "Inside a flat. A lady makes a dog dance."



ill. 45: Marguerite Gérard, *The Triumph of Raton*, c. 1804, oil on panel, 57 x 49 cm, current location unknown.

Marguerite Gérard returned to this favourite theme again in *The Two Gourmands* (ill. 46), a painting known from a reproduction in an auction catalogue of 1905,<sup>79</sup> whose location is now unknown. It might be contemporary with our panel (ill. G).<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the arrangement of the figures, their facial expressions, hairstyles, and attire suggest a date around 1810-1815. In an oval drawing-room, a lady in a white muslin dress presents a biscuit to a dog performing on its hind legs. To her right, a young boy reaches eagerly for the cake. Behind him, his mother, dressed in a white gown and black velvet mantle, sits at a table laid for refreshments. In the background, another woman approaches them carrying drinks. The artist likely took inspiration from our sketch when conceiving this composition, as the principal figure shares the same position, standing on the right, her body and face slightly turned to the left, eyes lowered, head inclined, and one arm raised delicately holding a biscuit hanging from a thread which is teasingly presented to the dog.

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<sup>79</sup> Reproduced in the catalogue of the L. B. sale, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 12 May 1905, no. 9.

<sup>80</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, no. 234 P, p. 241. Carole Blumenfeld includes the composition with the paintings executed around 1815, although she has some reservations about this dating: “The work seems to us to be by the artist. It could even be much earlier, possibly dating from the early 1800s. Only its reappearance will give us a better idea.”



**ill. G** (*Woman with a guitar giving her Dog a Gimblette*).



**ill. 46:** Marguerite Gérard, *The Two Gourmands*, c. 1810-1815, oil on canvas, 62 x 51 cm, current location unknown.

Marguerite Gérard returned one final time to this theme in 1824-1825, in a painting showing elegant ladies and children playing with a dog in an interior setting (**ill. 47**). The title suggested by Carole Blumenfeld for this composition, *Education is Everything*, is borrowed from Nicolas de Launay's famous engraving after Fragonard's painting held at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (**ill. 42**). Although Gérard revisits familiar subjects here, she nonetheless refreshes her style by “evolving the proportions of her figures and the spirit of her compositions”.<sup>81</sup>



**ill. 47:** Marguerite Gérard, *Education is everything*, 1824-1825, oil on canvas, 65 x 55 cm, signed (lower right): ‘Mte Gérard’, private collection.

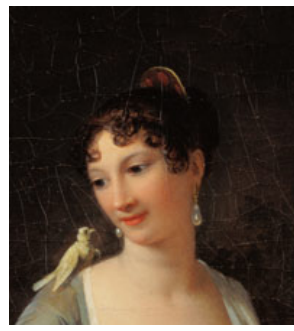
After Fragonard's death, Marguerite Gérard developed a new aesthetic vocabulary. In *La Rosière*, presented at the Salon of 1806, we see for the first time the delicate blues and pinks she would favour throughout the 1810s (**ill. 48**). As Carole Blumenfeld rightly notes, “the doll-like faces of the 1780s, followed by the rounder, fuller faces of the 1790s and early 1800s, give way to figures painted with a finer delicacy, a stylistic canon that Gérard maintained until her final

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 245, no. 275 P (reproduced in colour on p. 184).

compositions”.<sup>82</sup> In our sketch, the lady to the right, with her oval face, broad forehead, and straight nose, clearly reveals the hand of Fragonard’s pupil. Indeed, this young woman exhibits the neoclassical “Prud’hon-like”<sup>83</sup> profile favoured by Gérard in her mature works (**ill. 49**).



**ill. 48:** Marguerite Gérard, *La Rosière* or *The Kiss of Protection From the Lady of the Manor*, 1806 Salon, oil on canvas, 82 x 66 cm, signed at the bottom: ‘Mte Gérard’, private collection.



**ill. 49:**  
left: detail **ill. G** (*Woman with a Guitar Giving her Dog a Gimblette*);  
centre: Marguerite Gérard, *The Small Messenger* (detail), 1810 Salon, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, signed (bottom left): ‘Mte Gérard’, private collection;  
right: Marguerite Gérard, *The Lady with Doves* (detail), 1809-1810, oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm, signed (bottom right): ‘Mte Gérard’, private collection.

The protagonist in our panel, bathed in cool, diffused light, is painted with Marguerite Gérard’s signature precision, whereas the dog and the young woman concealed behind the chair on the left, immersed in semi-darkness, are rendered in a looser, softer, and more supple style. The quivering brushstroke and warmer palette employed in the left area evoke Fragonard. However, the hypothesis of a collaborative effort between the two artists has been swiftly dismissed: executed around 1810, the painting excludes any contribution from the older artist, who had died four years earlier. Furthermore, a close examination of the sketch *Before the Masquerade Ball* (**ill. F**)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>83</sup> Expression used by Jean-Pierre Cuzin (written communication dated 29 March 2024).

demonstrates that Marguerite Gérard was fully capable, even in her most spirited studies, of painting with a spontaneous and lively manner reminiscent of her brother-in-law (**ill. 50**).



**ill. 50:**  
left: detail **ill. G** (*Woman with a Guitar Giving her Dog a Gimblette*);  
right: detail **ill. F** (*Before the Masquerade Ball*).

The turquoise shade selected for the dress and hat is relatively uncommon in Gérard's oeuvre, though it does appear sporadically, as in *The Toilet of Minette*<sup>84</sup> (**ill. 51**).



**ill. 51:** Marguerite Gérard, *The Toilet of Minette*, 1798-1800, oil on canvas, 46 x 37 cm, signed (lower left): 'Mte gerard', private collection.

Her sophisticated use of diffuse lighting, skillfully illuminating the central figure and gently rebounding onto the chair's upholstery and the dog's back and forelegs, shows Marguerite Gérard had fully internalized Fragonard's lessons regarding the subtle interplay of light.

Lastly, the background figure is deftly sketched with a few rapid, incisive brushstrokes in shades of brown, standing out distinctly against lightly applied grey underpainting to reveal the transparency of the ground below. Marguerite Gérard frequently used this particular technique in

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<sup>84</sup> Marguerite Gérard used a turquoise green for the blonde lady's seat and shoes, and a slightly bluer shade for the brunette lady's dress.

other sketches, notably *The Reading* (ill. 52),<sup>85</sup> which features a similarly sharp graphic style and lively, pointed touch.



ill. 52:

left: detail **ill. G** (*Woman with a Guitar Giving her Dog a Gimblette*);

right: Marguerite Gérard, *The Reading* (detail), 1797-1799, oil on panel, 25.7 x 20 cm, Grasse, Musée Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Collection Hélène and Jean-François Costa.

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<sup>85</sup> Carole Blumenfeld, *Marguerite Gérard, 1761-1837, op. cit.*, n° 124 P, p. 227, rep. p. 141.

## Conclusion

Long associated with Fragonard, Marguerite Gérard is now rightly recognized as a remarkable portraitist and a genre painter in her own right, wielding her brush with grace and elegance. From the earliest years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, her compositions entered the most prestigious collections, notably those of Empress Joséphine, Cardinal Fesch, and Dominique Vivant-Denon. Her fame at that time even eclipsed that of her mentor, who officially ceased painting in 1795.

May this study contribute to a more refined understanding of Marguerite Gérard's artistry and enrich her oeuvre, building upon the significant contributions made by Carole Blumenfeld.

Indeed, most of the works we exhibit are previously unpublished and absent from the artist's catalogue raisonné (ill. A, ill. B, ill. C, ill. G), which is the case for the *Innkeeper Servant* from the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Besançon (ill. 7).

Although scholarly reservations encourage caution, particularly regarding the attribution to Fragonard or Marguerite Gérard of our small circular portrait (ill. C) and that of the Costa collection (ill. D), there is little doubt that the paintings presented here will clarify their authorship in the coming years. Let us recall that *The Bolt* aroused considerable controversy when it emerged in 1974 before being ultimately acquired by the Louvre.<sup>86</sup> Today, it is unanimously hailed as an undisputed masterpiece and a crucial milestone in the history of French painting!

*Amélie du Closel*

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<sup>86</sup> When the *Bolt* (*Le Verrou*) appeared in 1974, President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had to support Pierre Rosenberg in his wish for this masterpiece to enter the Louvre, as some people had argued that the painting was not by Fragonard. See François Duret-Robert, 'L'affaire du Verrou...', *Connaissance des arts*, no. 274, December 1974, pp. 5-11, and Pierre Rosenberg and Isabelle Compin, 'Quatre nouveaux Fragonard au Louvre. II', *La Revue du Louvre et des musées de France*, nos. 4-5, 1974, pp. 263-278.