

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of the artist-turned-collector François Boucher in the context of a new economy for shells and natural history in eighteenth-century France. At his death in 1770, shells along with other items of natural history represented approximately one half of Boucher's collection of more than 13,000 different objects of art and nature. Boucher's rise as a celebrated collector was informed by his previous work for two of the period's most significant treatises on conchology. These illustrations introduced a new aesthetic for natural history and in turn, were responsible for shaping a generation of elite collecting practices—including Boucher's own. Despite a demonstrated involvement in the promotion of a specific visual and material culture for natural history, Boucher's contribution to the eighteenth-century mania for shells, both as an artist and a collector, is almost entirely absent from existing scholarship on the period.

The study begins by looking at Boucher's frontispiece designs for the first complete guides to conchology ever published in France. Careful analysis of these illustrations provides a contextual framework for a study of Boucher's evolving response to eighteenth-century conchology. These initial chapters are an important precursor to the second half of the dissertation, which considers in detail the rituals surrounding Boucher's extraordinary collection of natural curios and similarly, those *objets d'arts* that sought to imitate them. By examining the development of Boucher's taste as a collector, both through the visual traditions he engaged in his art making and in connection with the example he set as one of the leading collectors in eighteenth-century Europe, I present a more nuanced portrait of Boucher and the role he played in the evolution of French conchology as a legitimate sub-discipline of pre-Linnaean natural history.