Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie: The Cabinet of François Boucher, 1703-1770

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Notice of Correction

The sale of Boucher’s collection in 1771 raised a total of 181,782 *livres*, not 18,782 *livres* as stated on page 109 of this thesis.
Abstract
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.
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Introduction

On February 18 1771, the dealer Pierre Rémy (1715-1797) staged a public auction for the estate of the artist and collector François Boucher (1703-1770). The sale, which lasted several days, was held in Boucher’s studio in his apartment at the Louvre, a space that had been home to the artist and his family for close to two decades. In the catalogue that accompanied the sale, Rémy outlined the details of Boucher’s collection, which contained approximately 13,100 carefully chosen objects of art and nature.¹ This surprising large figure was unparalleled among Boucher’s artistic colleagues, as well as some of his more wealthy patrons, many of whom were celebrated collectors in their own right. As the deed to his estate reveals, over the course of his lifetime, Boucher spent approximately three quarters of his personal fortune, which totalled more than 152,600 livres, on his collection.² This was an impressive sum for an artist whose annual pension from the Crown would never rise above 1,000 livres.

According to Boucher’s contemporaries, the highlight of the collection was his assembly of shells and natural history. Admired for its variety and unique artistic arrangement, Boucher’s collection of more than 5,000 different shells, corals, minerals and other assorted natural objects was displayed in his studio at the Louvre, either on tables covered with mirrored glass, or in specially designed cabinets. Highly regarded by his peers, Boucher’s name appears on two separate lists of the principal

¹ This is based on my own calculations of objects listed in the 1771 sale catalogue. See Pierre Rémy, Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, desseins, estampes, bronzes, terres cuites, laques, porcelaines de différentes sortes, montées & non montées; meubles curieux, bijoux, mineral, cristallisations, madrepores, coquilles & autres curiosités qui composent le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, premier peintre du Roi (Paris: Musier, 1771), passim.
² Details of Boucher’s estate are revealed in a deed dated April 6 1773. This document is preserved in the Archives nationale de France. Minutier central, XXXV, 775, pp. 1-16 (my page references).
natural history collectors in eighteenth-century Europe. Boucher’s interest in these objects reflects the broader enthusiasm for shells and natural history during the eighteenth century. Indeed, between 1736 and 1780, Paris was gripped by a mania for shells—‘both painted and real’. Throughout these years, shells were an omnipresent force in the visual and material culture of the period. As collectable objects, they were considered luxury items capable of communicating the owner’s knowledge of natural history, as well as his or her capacity for wealth and taste. Equally, as popular decorative motifs, shells are found in all manner of artistic production associated with the development of the rococo, both as a formal style and a cultural mode of representation.

With their naturally asymmetric and sibilant ‘S’- and ‘C’ shaped curves, shells played a semiotic role in the evolution of the fine and decorative arts of the period. As C. T. Carr has shown, the French word for rococo, although originally a pejorative term, was derived, together with the colloquial form of ‘o’, from the first two syllables of *rocaille* and *coquillages*, meaning rock and shell-work. Used to describe the architectural motifs found in the garden grottos since the Renaissance, the words

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4 All translations are mine unless stated otherwise. ‘…les Coquillages les plus rare, soit en peinture, ou dans leur naturel.’ This one of the earliest discussions on the importance of shells in forming a collection. It was written by M. Guynot, then President of Grenier à sel. See Guynot, ‘Projet pour l’éstablishment d’un cabinet curieux & d’un Laboratoire’, *Mercure de France*, April 1727, pp. 675-680.


became synonymous with the decorative style that emerged in France during the first half of the eighteenth century known as *le rocaille*. While the words *rocaillès* and *coquillages* appear together in the literature as early as 1715, the link between the shells and *le rocaille* remained nuanced until 1734, when the terms were used to articulate the stylistic manner of a set of engravings by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier (1695-1750), who along with Boucher, was one of the period’s leading *rocaille* ornamentalists.

While the taste for *rocaille* ornament made fashionable by Boucher and Meissonnier played an important role in stimulating interest in these objects, the market for shells and other objects of natural history that emerged in Paris during the second half of the 1730s represents a formative period in the European tradition of collecting. It coincided with the rise of the cult of the collector, a phenomenon that would see a shift away from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century model of princely patronage towards a wider and more diverse mode of connoisseurship. For example, quantitative analysis of various sale catalogues produced between 1720 and 1790 reveals that there were more than 1,000 private collections in Paris during this period.

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of which more than half contained shells and other objects of natural history. \(^{10}\) By comparison, a list published in 1683 names just eighty-four amateur collectors in Paris, with around one third focusing exclusively on medals. \(^{11}\)

The sharp rise in the number of amateur collectors reflects the increasing social and financial mobility experienced during the eighteenth century by members of the lower aristocracy, officers of court, as well as some ambitious bourgeoisie. \(^{12}\) Eager to demonstrate the reality of this newly found sociability, they had turned to collecting shells along with other curiosities from the natural world as a way of displaying not only their wealthy status, but also their ambitions towards a more tasteful presentation of the self. ‘Spending time and money in this way’, argued the author of the *Encyclopédie*’s article on ‘Natural History’, ‘implies a desire to improve oneself in the domain of Natural History, or at least show a taste for this science, which is perpetuated by example and emulation’. \(^{13}\)

The association between shell collecting and the cultivation of eighteenth-century ideals of elite representation is captured in a double portrait of the French architect and encyclopaedist Jean-Rodolphe Perronet (1708-1794) and his wife from

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\(^{10}\) The number of private collection is based on my calculations taken from Frits Lugt, 'Lugt's Répertoire Online' (IDC Publishers, 1600-1825), http://lugt.idcpublishers.info/ (accessed May 2, 2010). On the subject of amateur collectors that focused on curiosities of both art and nature, see Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz, 'Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29 no. 3 (2005): 44-75, p. 44.


\(^{12}\) On the demography of amateur collectors in France during the eighteenth century, see Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 124. Although incomplete, Glorieux’s list of buyers at sales held by Gersaint between 1736-1749 is also useful for identifying various socio-economic groups. See Guillaume Glorieux, *À L’Enseigne de Gersaint* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2002), pp. 562-576.

1759 (plate 1). Painted by the Swedish artist Alexandre Roslin (1718-1793), who Boucher befriended when he arrived in Paris in 1752, the portrait portrays the fashionably dressed couple in a lavish interior surrounded by objects of fine and decorative art.\(^{14}\) The son of a Swiss Guardsman, Perronet had once studied under the Royal architect Jean Beausire (1651-1743).\(^{15}\) During the first half of the eighteenth century, he rose steadily through the ranks to claim the position of the first director of the École nationale des ponts et chaussées in 1749.\(^{16}\) In recognition of this, Perronet is positioned at his desk, holding a wooden compass in one hand and an architectural model in the other. Perronet's body appears in profile as if to gesture towards his wife, who is seen holding a shell that she has taken from a drawer of similar items resting on her lap. In keeping with the sumptuously appointed interior, fashionable dress and other carefully staged accoutrements in the room, the shells are part of a constructed identity, one that signals the Perronets knowledge of natural history, as well as their wealth and refined tastes.

While Roslin’s inclusion of the shells alludes to the Perronets knowledge of natural history, the portrait was not aimed at providing an accurate record of the couple’s collection. This is evidenced by Roslin’s decision to obscure the shells from view by drawing from the palette and patterns used to sculpt Madame Perronet’s spectacular pink and silver embroidered dress. Indeed, Roslin makes little distinction between the aesthetic representation of Madame Perronet’s dress and the collection of


\(^{16}\) Perronet would maintain this position until 1794. On his tenure as director, see Claude Vacant, Jean-Rodolphe Perronet (1708-1794): Premier ingénieur du Roi et directeur de l’Ecole des ponts et chaussées, (Paris Presses de l'Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, 2006), pp. 77-130.
shells, both of which are designed to convey the fashionability of the sitter. In this
way, the dress and the shells are made to conform to mid eighteenth-century ideals of
elite representation.

A direct link between the collection of natural history objects and the cultivation
of taste was recorded for the first time thirty-five years earlier in the form of a letter
published in the *Mercure de France* in April 1727.17 Written by the connoisseur A.-J.
Dezallier d'Argenville (1680-1765), the letter describes the type of objects one might
find in an ideal cabinet of curiosity. Although traditional items, such as paintings,
medals and coins, were still considered desirable objects, the author also
recommended a variety of shells along with other items of natural history. Such
objects, argued d’Argenville, were suitable as they were capable of ‘amusing the
honest gentleman (*honnête homme*), without incurring extraordinary expense’.18 As
the market for natural history flourished during the middle of the century, however,
the price of shells spiraled with collectors paying more for highly sought after species
like the white *Pourpre* (*Murex alabaster*)19 and the *Scalata* (*Epitonium scalare*),
than for works by Leonardo de Vinci, Titian, Van Dyck, and Poussin.20

The high prices achieved by some shells at various sales throughout the
eighteenth century raises questions about the intrinsic value of these objects and the

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17 A.-J. Dezallier d'Argenville, 'Lettre sur le choix et l'arrangement d'un Cabinet Curieux', *Mercure de
France*, June 1727, pp. 1295-1296.
18 ‘c'est sur ces remarques que je me suis formé l'idée d'un Cabinet curieux, remplis de tout ce qui peut
amuser un honnête homme, sans le jeter dans une dépense extraordinaire.’ Ibid., p. 1296.
19 Where possible I have aimed to provide the correct taxonomic name for the object in brackets. On
the use of vernacular names for shells in the pre-Linnaean era of conchology, see chapter four.
20 According to the shell historian S. Peter Dance, at a sale held by the marquis de Bonnac (1716-1778)
in 1757, the prized white *Pourpre* and *Scalata* shells sold for 1,900 and 1,611 *livres* respectively. See
Further research reveals that this was significantly more than the price paid for works by Leonardo de
Vinci and Titian at the estate sale of the duc de Tallard (1683-1755) held in Pais the previous year. See
Pierre Remy and Jean Baptiste Glomy, *Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, sculptures ... desseins et
estampes des plus grands maîtres: porcelaines anciennes, meubles précieux, bijoux, et autres effets qui
composent le cabinet de feu Monsieur le duc de Tallard* (Paris: Didot, 1756), lots 1-2, p. 7 and lot 82,
p. 46.
extent to which the French vogue for shells, which the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) would later term ‘Conchyliomanie’, can be compared to other collecting crazes in the early modern era. Rousseau’s notion of Conchyliomanie draws an immediate connection with the Dutch Tulipmania of 1636 and 1637. Widely regarded as the first speculative economic bubble, the price of tulip bulbs rose by 200 percent in a matter of several months before the market collapsed entirely. While there are similarities in the monomaniacal attitudes amongst some amateur collectors of shells and tulips, the market for shells in France took approximately twenty years before it reached its peak in 1757 and even then, the highest price paid for a single shell did not exceed 2,000 livres.

For this reason, the French manie for shells should not be considered a speculative bubble, but rather as part of a broader socio-economic phenomenon that was tied to the contemporary debate on aesthetics and the general principles of what constituted notions of taste. Indeed, the main objective for eighteenth-century collectors of natural history was to create a collection that as a whole conveyed pleasure (plaisir) to the senses. As Bettina Dietz and Thomas Nutz have argued, the amateur collector’s attachment to this type of visual pleasure represents a shift away


22 As Thompson has shown, the price of some rare tulip breeds was comparable to the cost of a luxuriously furnished house in Amsterdam at that time. See Earl Thompson, 'The Tulip Mania: Fact or Artefact', Public Choice 130 no. 1-2 (2007): 99-114. Other speculative bubbles include the Mississippi and South Sea crises that occurred in France and England respectively during the second decade of the eighteenth century. The Mississippi and South Sea crises along with the Dutch Tulipmania would later serve as a case studies for Charles Mackay’s popular text on mania from 1841. Interestingly though, Mackay makes no mention of the French craze for collecting shells, further evidence that it was not a speculative bubble. See Charles Mackay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (Hampshire: Harriman House, 2003).

23 Dance argues that the marquis de Bonnac sale in 1757 signals a turning point in the market for shells, with a noticeable drop in the price occurring at subsequent sales. See Dance, Shell Collecting, p. 66.
from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition of Kunst und Wunderkammer collecting, which placed a qualitative emphasis on the bizarre and amazing.24

At the centre of the French manie for shells was Boucher, who in addition to becoming a celebrated collector of natural history, was commissioned to design the frontispieces for two of the period’s most important treatises on conchology. The first was for the art dealer Edmé-François Gersaint’s (1694-1750) Catalogue raisonné des coquilles et autres curiosités naturelles (plate 2). Published in 1736, the catalogue accompanied the inaugural public auction in France of a collection of shells, corals, and other marine plant life. Boucher’s frontispiece aimed to promote Gersaint’s sale by locating it within a specific visual tradition, one that contemporary audiences would have identified as belonging to the decorative style of le rocaille. By adapting the language of rocaille ornament, Boucher introduced a new aesthetic for shells and natural history, one that embodied the ambitions of eighteenth-century amateur collectors, including his own.25

Boucher’s second major contribution to the development of eighteenth-century French conchology took place six years later in 1742 in the form of another frontispiece illustration for A.-J. Dezallier d’Argenville’s L’Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la Lithologie et la Conchyliologie, or La Conchyliologie as it came to be known (plate 3). The text, which was financed by twenty European amateur collectors (appendix 1), represents the first illustrated guide to shell and mineral collecting ever produced in France. The 1742 edition also marks the first time in which the term Conchyliologie appeared in the title and frontispiece.

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25 On the stylistic links between Boucher’s design for the 1736 frontispiece and the arrangement of his own collection at the Louvre, see chapter four.
of a French work.26 To this end, d’Argenville and Boucher were largely responsible for formalising the visual and material culture of eighteenth-century French conchology beyond the economic and social interests of a small network of amateur collectors and dealers, to a legitimate sub-discipline of pre-Linnaean natural history.27

Between 1736 and 1780, Boucher’s frontispiece designs for Gersaint and d’Argenville would be used as the title page for a total of seven publications. This included all three editions of d’Argenville’s La Conchyliologie, as well as promoting the sales of some of Europe’s finest collections of natural history. In this way, Boucher’s designs for the 1736 and 1742 frontispieces introduced a new aesthetic for elite practices of natural history, one that satisfied the demand for tasteful spectacle and the growing need for genuine scientific instruction. Moreover, through their use and reuse in subsequent editions and sales over the years, the 1736 and 1742 frontispieces respectively influenced a generation of collecting practices and would go onto become defining images of mid eighteenth-century connoisseurship.

While Boucher’s involvement in these projects helped position Gersaint and d’Argenville as connoisseurs in this new economy for shells, it also brought the artist into contact with an influential network of writers, dealers and collectors, some of whom would become important patrons of his work. Such exchanges were central in

27 The pre-Linnaean era generally refers to the period dating from the Middle Ages to 1758, when the Swedish natural philosopher Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) introduced his binomial system of nomenclature in the tenth edition of Systema Naturae. For a discussion of the pre-Linnaean era as it relates to the history of conchology and malacology, see S. Peter Dance, Shell Collecting, pp. 43-66.
shaping the direction of the Boucher’s identity and in authorising his artistic agency. The relationships he forged with dealers and collectors during this period also proved to be financially rewarding for the artist, with commissions like as *The Triumph of Venus* from 1740 (plate 4), providing Boucher with the financial independence he required to start his own collection.

In addition to broadening his professional and personal networks, Boucher’s work for Gersaint and d’Argenville during the 1730s and 40s exposed the artist to emerging trends in mid eighteenth-century conchology. With these relationships in mind, it comes as no surprise that Boucher’s collection followed the principles set out in the 1742 edition of d’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie*. This pre-Linnaean approach to taxonomy led Boucher to organise his collection by class and species, the criteria for which was based on aesthetic concerns. Boucher’s commitment to pedagogy, however, was tempered by his love of ornament and passion for display. It was these qualities, according to d’Argenville and Rémy, that set him apart from his contemporaries. Indeed, Boucher’s collection of natural history at the Louvre was considered by those who came into contact with it to be demonstrative of Boucher’s wider artistic agency, which Rémy and others would later refer to as ‘le goût de Boucher’.

The arrangement of Boucher’s natural history collection, together with the size and variety of its contents, raises questions about Boucher’s ambitions as a collector.

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29 For a more detailed discussion on the circumstances surrounding the commission this work, see chapter one.
30 The notion that Boucher possessed an innate sense of style when it came to forming his collection of natural history is mentioned in Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, Avant-propos* (no page numbers). A more in-depth analysis of the term ‘le goût de Boucher’ is provided in chapter five of this thesis.
Unlike other artists-turned-collectors of his generation who stockpiled objects in order to finance sideline careers as dealers, Boucher had no interest in the commercial value of his collection. According to Mannlich, he only ever sold or traded what he needed to acquire more items, or better versions of the same object. These practices saw him choose only the ‘rarest’ and most ‘perfect’ of what he could gather from every genre. His capacity to indulge his passion for collecting distinguished him from artistic colleagues. As such, Boucher was the only artist named on any of the lists detailing the principal collectors in Europe published between 1736 and 1780.

In terms of selection and arrangement, Boucher’s collection of shells and natural history was more closely aligned to that of his patrons Barthélémy-Augustin Blondel d’Azincourt (1719-1794) and Jean de Jullienne (1686-1766). As records show, Boucher sought out specific objects that were similar in appearance, or had once belonged to these celebrated collectors. This is not to suggest that Boucher, whose background was comparatively more modest, viewed his collection as a mark of nobility, or as a means for achieving aristocratic propriety. Rather, his passion for collecting was driven by the materiality of the objects and his overwhelming desire to

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31 On the rise of the artist as dealer during the eighteenth century, see Pomian, Collectors and Curiosities, pp. 139-168; and François Marandet, 'Pierre Rémy: The Parisian Art Market in the mid-Eighteenth Century', Apollo 158 no. 498 (2003): 32-44.
incorporate them into the wider practices and training that informed his stylistic processes and helped shape his artistic taste.

In this way, Boucher can be compared to another artist-turned-collector of shells and natural history, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). Like Boucher, Rembrandt acquired a large collection of natural and artificial curiosities, which he arranged in a dedicated room adjoining his studio in his house in Amsterdam. According to the art theorist Roger de Piles (1635-1709), these objects were not acquired by Rembrandt for any kind of commercial ‘profit’. Instead, they formed an important part of his studio practices, where they served as inspiration for his artistic invention, as well as being collected artefacts on display. As Svetlana Alpers has shown, Rembrandt’s studio functioned simultaneously as the museum of the collector and as the domain of the practicing artist. For those who took part in the activities of his studio, the convergence of these two factors thus revealed the virtuosity of Rembrandt the artist and the collector.

Rembrandt’s collection, which included a dedicated shell cabinet is on permanent display in its original location at The Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam.

‘il avoit de vieilles armures, de vieux instrumens, de vieux ajustemens de tête, & quantité de vieilles étoffes ouvragées, & il disoit que c’étoit-sà ses antiques. Il ne laissoie pas, malgré sa maniere, d’être curieux de beaux desseins d’Italie, dont il avoit un grand nombre aussi bien que de belles estampes, dont il n’a pas profité.’ Roger de Piles, *Abregé de la vie des peintres: avec des réflexions sur leurs ouvrages* (Amsterdam: Arkstée & Merkus, 1767), pp. 380-381. Both Rembrandt and Boucher can be compared to another seventeenth-century collector, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). As Jeffrey Muller has shown, however, Rubens regarded his collection as a financial investment and key to his success as an artist, diplomat and art dealer. See Jeffrey Muller, *Rubens: The Artist As Collector* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

For example, it is likely that Rembrandt’s collection of shells served as the model for his well known engraving from 1650, a copy of which was auctioned at a sale of Rembrandt’s works organised by Gersaint in 1750. See Edmé-François Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les estampes qui forment l’œuvre de Rembrandt et ceux de ses principaux imitateurs*, ed. Adam von Bartsch (Vienna: A. Blumauer, 1797), lot 159, p. 144. Boucher’s 1771 sale catalogue reveals that he own 478 different drawings and engravings by Rembrandt, some of which he might have purchased at Gersaint’s 1750 sale. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 237-257, pp. 47-49; lots 547-551, pp. 77-78. Boucher also owned a number of Rembrandt copies by French artists such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806). See Ibid., lots 112-115, pp. 26-27.

Alpers’s uses this idea to explain the habits of other artists-turned-collectors, such as Rembrandt and Rubens, but also as a way of examining the role of the artist as the curator of early modern museums and other private collections. See Svetlana Alpers, *The Vexations of Art: Velázquez and Others* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 4-5 and pp. 181-218.
The model of the studio as the museum is useful in considering the display of Boucher’s collection and the role these objects played in the construction of his identity as an artist and as a collector. Like Rembrandt, Boucher was a studio painter who surrounded himself with an extensive collection of art and nature, elements of which he included in his art making. Indeed, the cataloguing and arranging of his collection at the Louvre enabled Boucher to act as both the artist and curator of his own studio museum. To this end, Boucher signalled to his contemporaries his engagement with emerging trends in the arts and sciences, interests that situated him in relation to other avant-garde artists and collectors of his generation.

Despite the fact that Boucher was a leading collector in eighteenth-century France, his collection of art and nature has been largely overlooked by scholars, with focus tending towards the artist’s prolific output of more than 10,000 drawings and paintings. A notable exception to this is the research of Jo Hedley, who has brought attention to some of the more unusual items in Boucher’s wider collection as a way of demonstrating how these objects were incorporated into his art making during the late 1730s. While there are similarities between the objects that appear in works like *The Luncheon* (plate 5) from 1739 and those listed in Boucher’s 1771 sale catalogue, it is unlikely that Boucher was yet in possession of these items (as Hedley has suggested), since he did not formally begin collecting until the mid 1740s. Nevertheless, Hedley’s analysis is significant in that it maps the beginning of Boucher’s taste as a collector and his stylistic preference for certain objects.

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The only attempt to discuss Boucher’s collection in relation to the new economy for shells and natural history in mid eighteenth-century France comes from a handful of scholars outside the field of art history. Bettina Dietz and Emma Spary, for example, have both mentioned Boucher’s collection in their articles on the development of eighteenth-century French conchology. Although the contents of Boucher’s collection are not discussed, these articles are relevant to a study of the artist’s tastes and activities as a collector, as they locate his collection within a very specific field of connoisseurship. By outlining the criteria attached to the practice of shell collecting in mid eighteenth-century France, Dietz and Spary have gone a long way towards dispelling the assumption that pre-Linnaean conchology, as practiced by Boucher and others, was a late form of Kunst und Wunderkammer collecting. On the contrary, these early taxonomic approaches were an important precursor to the Linnaean era of natural history and the development of the institutional practice of collecting that underscored the rise of the public museum of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The lack of a satisfactory investigation into Boucher’s collection and his contribution to the manie for shells and natural history that evolved during this period

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43 On the relationship between the pre-Linnaean and Linnaean era of conchology, see Dance, *Shell Collecting*, pp. 29-112; and Dietz, 'Mobile Objects', pp. 365-369.
is partly a symptom of the neglect that Boucher suffered following the anti-roccoco reaction that occurred around 1750. The backlash against Boucher’s manner of painting and the artistic ideals attached to the visual and material culture of the rococo by detractors like Denis Diderot (1713-1784) is well known. \(^{44}\) What has been overlooked, however, is that Diderot and other anti-roccoco reformists were equally instrumental in criticising the activities of amateur collectors, whose enthusiastic pursuit of luxury objects, such as shells, were believed to be evidence of a failing society. For instance, writing about the recently deceased amateur collector Quentin de Lorangère (d.1744), the abbé Desfontaines (1685-1745) asked if it ‘was not crazy to ruin oneself for a shell?’ \(^{45}\) While Boucher was spared from such attacks, the idea of the shell as a symbol of the degradation of the current state of the decorative arts gathered momentum during the 1750s, with the art critic and engraver Charles-Nicolas Cochin fils (1715-1790) encouraging artists to abandon the stylistic motifs associated with le rocaille in his letters to the *Mercure de France*, published in 1754 and 1755 respectively. \(^{46}\)


Boucher’s fall from favour contributed to a prolonged absence among nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of art. One exception to this is George Brunel’s *François Boucher* from 1986, which until recently was the only modern monograph that critically addressed Boucher’s prolific talents as an artist. Brunel was also responsible for uncovering new archival material concerning the liquidation of Boucher’s estate in 1773, information that has a bearing on this study’s investigation of financial impact of Boucher’s collection.

The curious absence of Boucher from nineteenth- and twentieth-century mainstream fields of scholarship is also largely symptomatic of the nostalgic view adopted in the wake of the artist’s perceived disgrace by nineteenth-century rococo revivalists Edmund and Jules de Goncourt. In attempt to restore Boucher’s reputation and the stylistic influences of the rococo period in general, the Goncourt

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brothers turned to Boucher’s art works as their definitive historical sources, promoting them as both aristocratic and overtly feminine in style.\textsuperscript{50} This resulted in a somewhat subjective account of Boucher’s life and in the case of his collection, it has reduced its significance to a form of inspired decoration.\textsuperscript{51}

The problem of nostalgia is compounded by the fact that Boucher’s own personal records and correspondence are limited to just a handful of documents. These include a small selection of letters (three of which were only brought to light in 1988), as well a number of notarised documents that mark various events in the lives of the Boucher family.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, in order to compile a more complete understanding of Boucher and his collection, it is necessary to turn to commentators from the period, in particular his eighteenth-century biographers.\textsuperscript{53} As these writers attest, in the visual culture of pre-revolutionary France, Boucher was a ubiquitous force in both art and life. Yet as varied and as enlightening as these sources are, there is no escaping the fact that they are a substitute for a record of the artist’s own impressions of forming such an substantial collection of art and nature. The absence of Boucher’s own voice goes some way towards revealing the extent to which he was vulnerable to an attack


\textsuperscript{52} Alastair Laing, ’Trois lettres de François Boucher et de sa femme à l'auteur dramatique Favart', Archives de l'art français 29 (1988): 19-22. The marriage contract of Boucher’s two daughters is preserved in the Archives nationales de France, Minutier central, XXXI, 163. On the 1773 deed settlement of Boucher’s estate, see this chapter (note 2).

\textsuperscript{53} His eighteenth-century biographers include, Denis-Pierre-Jean Papillon de Ferté (1727-1794), Pierre Rémy and Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774), as well as those who published obituaries on the artist namely, Antoine Bret (1717-1792), Jean-Bernard Restout (1732-1797) and Jean-Auguste-Julien Desboulmiers (1731-1771).
by Diderot and others, as well as being exposed to a nostalgic reinterpretation by the Goncourts.

In the last decade, there has been a concerted effort on the part of historians of eighteenth-century art to restore Boucher’s reputation and overcome his prolonged posthumous absence from modern scholarship. Melissa Hyde, for example, has examined Boucher’s art making, particularly in relation to issues of gender, against an increasing wave of criticism from anti-rococo detractors, whose attempts to discredit Boucher polarized the cultural politics of the Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{54} As Hyde has shown, this type of opposition was neither linear nor by any means straightforward. Indeed, some of Boucher’s most vocal opponents were also privately his greatest admirers and in some cases even patrons.\textsuperscript{55}

Hyde’s monograph has been formative in breaking down the rigid barrier that still exists in the minds of some historians today between Boucher and key figures within the Enlightenment. I would add that the intellectual, social and financial flexibility that Boucher enjoyed during his lifetime was also true of his approach to his collection, which brought him into contact with some of the most unlikely of sources. To be sure, Boucher’s status as a celebrated artist and collector saw him move in circles beyond the reach of many of his colleagues. These experiences influenced Boucher’s vision of collecting, which like his art making was not driven by a discursive or overly pedagogical agenda, but rather focused on the formal

\textsuperscript{54} Hyde, \textit{Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics}; and Melissa Hyde, ’The ’Makeup’ of the Marquise: Boucher’s Portrait of Pompadour at her Toilette’, \textit{Art Bulletin} 82 no. 3 (2000): 453-76.

\textsuperscript{55} As Hyde points out, it was Rousseau who had Boucher in mind when thinking of an artist to illustrate his novel \textit{Julie; ou La nouvelle Héloïse} (1761). See Hyde, \textit{Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics}, p. 8. For an in-depth discussion on the relationship between Boucher and key Enlightenment figures, see René Démoris, ’Boucher, Diderot, Rousseau’, in \textit{Rethinking Boucher}, eds. Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), pp. 201-228.
aesthetic qualities of the object and the rituals of pleasure that bound him to a wider 
network of participants in this process.

Since the tercentenary of the artist’s birth in 2003, there have been a number of 
other important works that have addressed Boucher’s role in the development of the 
visual and material culture of the rococo.56 These works have brought to light new 
and critical material that has examined more closely the wider artistic practices that 
have informed Boucher’s own processes. Although none of these authors have dealt 
directly with Boucher’s collection of art and nature, or for that matter his involvement 
in the mid eighteenth-century mania for shells and natural history, these studies have 
opened the door for further investigation into the complexities that shaped Boucher’s 
world beyond his painted works.

In terms of the present study, the most significant among the corpus of new 
works on Boucher is in the form of a volume of essays from 2006, edited by Melissa 
Hyde and Mark Ledbury.57 Originating from a series of papers presented at the 2003 
Boucher symposium at the Getty Institute, this volume highlights certain elements of 
Boucher’s life that although previously overlooked by scholars, have shown to be 
central to the creation of his artistic identity. As the title suggests, Rethinking Boucher 
delivers a rich reassessment of an artist whose contributions to artistic practices 
outside of his traditional painted oeuvre reveals a side to Boucher that may be 
unfamiliar, but like his efforts as an amateur collector, are not all that surprising.

56 Notable contributions include but are not limited to Bailey, ‘Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher 
(1716-96)’; Hedley, Boucher: Seductive Visions; Emmanuelle Brugerolles, François Boucher et l'art 
rocaille dans les collections de l'Ecole des beaux-arts (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-
Arts, 2003); Alastair Laing, The Drawings of François Boucher (New York: London: American 
Federation of Arts in association with Scala Publishers, 2003); Françoise Joulie, ed., Esquisses, pastels 
et dessins de François Boucher dans les collections privées (Paris: Musée Lambinet 2004); and Jean-
François Méjanès and Françoise Joulie, François Boucher: hier et aujourd'hui (Paris: Réunion des 
musées nationaux, 2003).
In the chapters that follow, I too have attempted to rethink Boucher in order to develop a more nuanced portrait of this artist-turned-collector of shells and natural history. The primary aim of this dissertation is therefore to show Boucher’s evolving response to the mania for shells, both from the traditions he engaged in his art making and the example he set as a collector. Furthermore, it examines the role shells played (both real and represented) in the creation of the Boucher’s artistic identity and in turn, the extent to which this influenced the visual and material culture of the period. The current study, however, makes no pretension to identify each of the shells or shell-shaped forms in Boucher’s oeuvre. Rather, it considers more widely how shells, both collectable objects of natural history and as instruments of ornament, were incorporated into the wider practices and training that informed his stylistic processes and cultivated the direction of his artistic taste.

This dissertation consists of five chapters that exist in two parts. The first section, chapters one and two, explores the emergence of Boucher’s vision of collecting through his frontispiece designs for Gersaint and d’Argenville in the 1730s and 40s. These chapters consider certain stylistic influences that Boucher drew from in forming his approach to nature within the fictive realm. By locating this vision within the new economy for shells, a richer and more diverse portrait of the artist emerges, one that demonstrates his role in the development of French conchology and, moreover, as a conduit in the link between the eighteenth-century mania for shells and the visual and material culture of the rococo.

The second part of the thesis looks at Boucher the collector. It takes into consideration the circumstances surrounding the formation of Boucher’s natural history collection and the extent to which he indebted himself both professionally and
personally for the sake of his passion. Reports of Boucher crying when opening a case of minerals, for example, raises questions about the importance he placed on his natural history collection and similarly, the power these objects had over him. With this in mind, chapter three explores the direct and indirect channels through which Boucher purchased objects for his collection and investigates the role these types of exchanges had in shaping his approach to collecting. Charting the artist’s participation in these events provides an important contribution to existing Boucher’s chronologies and, moreover, reveals the evolution of his vision of collecting in both the real and fictive realms. This is particularly relevant at the Madame Dubois-Jourdain (d.1766) sale in 1766, where Boucher not only bought around 200 different objects of art and nature, but his design for Gersaint’s 1736 catalogue was also reused by the sale’s organiser as the frontispiece for the accompanying catalogue.

Having explored Boucher’s process for selection, the focus turns to the collection itself. Chapter four examines the contents of Boucher’s natural history collection, noting several possible connections with similar objects found in works across the artist’s oeuvre. While these links suggest that Boucher’s collection was part of his artistic training, it also exposes the fertile relationship taking place in his studio between art and nature. Such tensions are represented in his overall arrangement and the rituals surrounding the display of his collection in his studio at the Louvre, the

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59 Alastair Laing’s chronology from the 1986 catalogue is still considered the most complete to date. See Alastair Laing, ‘Chronology’ in *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, eds. Alastair Laing, J. Patrice Marandel and Pierre Rosenberg (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), pp. 15-38. Laing’s chronology was preceded by two other important contributions, namely Alexandre Ananoff’s two-volume catalogue of Boucher’s oeuvre from 1976 and Pierrette Jean-Richard’s 1978 inventory of Boucher’s drawings in the Edmond de Rothschild collection at the Louvre. As a collective, these sources provide a vital framework for further mapping of Boucher’s life. However, when compared to the dearth of material available on other artists of Boucher’s calibre, it becomes apparent that his prolonged discredit has had an erroneous and lasting effect.

60 Boucher’s presence is recorded in an annotated copy of this catalogue held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Estampes et Photographie, YD-2061 (A)-8, pp. 7, 25, 41, 51, 64, 66, 70-1, 74, 81, 85, 87, 89, 92, 97, 100, 107, 112-3, 119, 126, 136, 156.
same space that he would renovate in 1752 in order to accommodate his growing collection.

Continuing with Boucher’s collection, chapter five considers the idea of a unified aesthetic governing the artist’s approach to collecting art and nature. Particular attention is given to a selection of humanly wrought objects that take their inspiration from real shells and other marine plant life in Boucher’s collection of natural history. As Kristel Smentek has shown, these objects were highly prized among eighteenth-century collectors. Thus, their presence in Boucher’s collection raises questions about the role they played in satisfying the artist’s taste for luxe and, moreover, his curiosity for exploring the relationship between the spectacular effects of nature’s artifice and the inventiveness of the artisan’s creations. A closer analysis of these objects reveals not only a certain level of continuity in Boucher’s approach to collecting art and nature, but also offers fresh insight into how this artist’s collection was understood by his contemporaries.

From the material presented in these five chapters, it is clear that Boucher’s interest in collecting shells along with other notable objects of art and nature was more than just a casual interest. Informed by his previous work for Gersaint and d’Argenville and shaped by his relationships with other artists, dealers, writers and likeminded collectors, Boucher’s collection played a key role in the development of his artistic identity and agency. This intensified significantly after Boucher’s move to the Louvre in 1752. It was here that Boucher would spend the majority of his time, surrounded by the tools of his trade and the collection that he so passionately adored.

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The fact that Boucher’s collection formed such an integral part of his art making should come as no surprise to historians of eighteenth-century art, as it was the pleasures he pursued in life that inspired him to create. This was perhaps no more so than his collection of shells, which as symbols of natural perfection, challenged Boucher to harness, if not surpass the seemingly endless display of creativity supplied by nature. To what end this impacted on all works produced in his studio during the last eighteen years of his life remains outside the scope of this study; however, it is the hope that what follows in these chapters will open up a new pathway for future research.
Chapter I

Nature Unleashed: Boucher’s Designs for a New Economy

In 1736, thirty-three year old François Boucher was commissioned by Parisian art dealer Edmé-François Gersaint to design the frontispiece for his *Catalogue raisonné des coquilles et autres curiosités naturelle* (plate 2). The catalogue was intended as a companion piece for the sale of a collection of shells that same year—the first public auction of its kind in Paris.  

Boucher’s illustration, known only through an engraving by Claude-Augustin Duflos (1700-1786), aimed to pique the interest of French collectors whose ‘taste and eagerness for this type of curiosity’, noted the *Mercure de France*, had ‘engaged Gersaint to make an exact search for the most rare pieces, by form, colour and those best preserved’.  

Thus, in an effort to convey the singularity of Gersaint’s collection, Boucher delivered a spectacular arrangement of shells, corals and other marine plant life, one that sought to embody the ambitions of a new generation of amateur collectors for whom shells and other natural curios were quickly becoming highly visible symbols of *luxe*.

The 1736 frontispiece marks the beginning of a new era in the visual and material culture of shells and other natural objects, the culmination of which would see the installation of Boucher’s own collection in his studio at the Louvre.  

At the same time, the image represents a turning point in Boucher’s treatment of shells, which evolved during this period from a formal expression of *le style rocaille* to one...

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62 Gersaint had held two previous public auctions in 1733 and 1734. However, the sale of 1736 was the first to deal exclusively in shells. It was also the first time Gersaint included a sale catalogue to mark the event.

63 ‘Le goût et l’empressement que l’on a aujourd’hui pour ce genre de curiosité et pour tout ce qui regarde l’Histoire naturelle, l’a engagé à faire une recherche exacte des morceaux les plus rares et les plus agréables par les formes et par les couleurs, et les mieux conservés.’ *Mercure de France* November 1735, p. 2461.

64 On the display of Boucher’s collection at the Louvre, see chapter four.
that responded to more complex cultural concerns surrounding the study and collection of shells. This shift not only confirms the fertile exchange taking place between art and nature in this era of French conchology, but it also reveals the introduction of a new aesthetic for natural history—one that addressed concerns specific to contemporary audiences.

Writing about the market for shells that emerged in Paris during the 1730s, Gersaint commented on the need to travel to Holland, a rich source for shells on account of its trade links to the Far East, in order to meet the increasing demand for these objects: 65

*When I perceived that in France the taste for Shells, which belongs to the domain of Natural History, was growing in popularity, I was impelled to return to Holland in order to select all I could find of this sort, which was rare or beautiful.* 66

As Gersaint’s comments suggest, the enthusiasm for shells and other curiosities from the natural world that Boucher promoted in his design for the 1736 frontispiece responded more broadly to a new appreciation for nature during the eighteenth century. This was due in part to an increase in the number of natural history texts aimed at elite audiences. 67 Through their conversational tone and emphasis on observation and experiment, these works encouraged an empirical and thus more intimate approach to nature. The most popular among the corpus of texts was

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65 In Holland, Gersaint also observed the Dutch practice of public auctions as well as other marketing techniques, which he brought back with him to Paris and later refined. For a discussion of the strategies employed by Gersaint throughout his career as a dealer, see Andrew Andrew McClellan, ‘Watteau’s Dealer: Gersaint and the Marketing of Art in Eighteenth-Century Paris’, *Art Bulletin* 78 no. 3 (1996): 439-453.

66 ‘Le goût qu’il m’a paru que l’on prenoit en France pour les Coquillages, qui font partie de l’Histoire Naturelle, m’a engagé à retourner en Holande pour y faire un choix de tout ce que je pourrois trouver de beau & rare en ce genre.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles* ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).

undoubtedly Noël Antoine Pluche’s (1688-1761) *Spectacle de la nature* (1732-1751). Released in eight volumes over a twenty-year period, the aptly named *Spectacle* series formed a compendium of little known facts about the natural world.

The success of the first volume of *La Spectacle* led to the simultaneous publication of two more volumes in 1735, both with frontispieces after Boucher’s designs. Although Boucher had provided frontispiece illustrations for other published works, this would be the first time he had collaborated on a work of natural history. Engraved by Charles-Nicholas Cochin *fils*, Boucher frontispieces followed a general theme, which in the case of the third volume explored all things related to the sea. Accordingly, Boucher’s frontispiece depicts the Languedoc engineer Pierre-Paul Riquet (c.1609-1680), who together with finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683), are seen presenting Louis XIV with the final designs for the Canal du Midi, a project that would provide a strategic pathway between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea (plate 6).
In recognition of its exploration of the mysteries of the sea, the third volume of the *Spectacle* series also included a chapter on shells, complete with several illustrated plates. Written in the style of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle’s (1657-1757) *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), Pluche’s shell dialogue entertained readers with a lighthearted discussion on the important role shells played in the divine order of nature. In it, Pluche argued that shells provided shelter for creatures of the sea to grow and flourish, which in turn served the greater agenda of divine Creation. Furthermore, the author stressed the visual character of a shell’s exterior, as he believed that the pleasure received by their beauty would fill the mind with clear and instructive ideas. Thus for Pluche, the desire for knowledge inspired by the sight of nature’s beautiful effects would ultimately lead to the discovery of truth in nature.

The publication of the shell dialogues proved timely for Gersaint, whose sale offered an antidote for the type of objects discussed by Pluche. Indeed, Gersaint was quick to draw a connection between Pluche and his own burgeoning enterprise, acknowledging the significant contribution the author had made towards raising enthusiasm for the activities of this genre. At all times, however, the dealer was careful to appear circumspect about his role in this emerging market for shells, pledging that he would remain committed to the search for precious shells and other objects of natural curiosity, if he perceived, ‘the Public has declared itself in favour of these amusements’. Needless to say, having spent the past eighteen years building a

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72 Published in French and not Latin, Fontenelle’s *Entretiens* was designed to provide a more approachable form of natural philosophy for polite audiences. See Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. Nina Rattner Gelbart, trans. H. A. Hargraves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
75 ‘Si je m’aperçois que le Public se déclare en faveur de ces amusemens, que Bonanni appelle avec raison, ‘la Recréation de l’esprit & des yeux’, je ferai tous mes efforts pour me mettre en état de lui
successful dealership on the pont Notre-Dame, Gersaint was confident that such a gallant undertaking was sure to secure a declaration by those interested in associating themselves with this new direction in connoisseurship.  

Gersaint’s decision to commission Boucher to design the frontispiece for his catalogue was equally strategic. For in addition to his work for Pluche, Boucher had been busy establishing his reputation as a prominent painter and decorator in Paris. In the previous year, he was elected an Assistant Professor of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, as well as completing his first royal commission in the form of a set of four grisailles depicting scenes of virtue for the queen’s cabinet at Versailles. Shortly after this, he would paint The Leopard Hunt (Amiens, Musée de Picardie) for the galerie des petits cabinets in Louis XV’s recently renovated petit appartement du roi. To be sure, Boucher’s work in Paris and at Versailles was becoming increasingly more familiar in court circles, where he was fast emerging as one of the leading purveyors of le goût moderne.

Work was also nearly complete on Recueil de Fontaines (1736), the first in a two volume series of engravings after Boucher by the print dealer Gabriel Huquier (1695-1772). Based on a collection of fountain studies completed by Boucher during his trip to Rome in 1728, the Fontaines series reveals the artist’s early interest in the decorative relationship between shells and architecture. For example, in
donner de tems en tems, non seulement en cette partie, mais généralement en tout ce qui peut être compris dans l’Histoire Naturele des Collections qui puissant satisfaire par leur singularité les Naturalistes & les Curieux.’ Ibid., ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).
76 For an in depth discussion of Gersaint’s career as a dealer, see Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, passim.
77 Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 18.
78 Boucher was one of six artists invited to paint a hunt scene for the series, Chasse des pays étrangers. The paintings were designed for the galerie des petits appartements du Roi at Versailles. On Boucher’s participation in the series, see the catalogue entry in Laing, Marandel and Rosenberg, François Boucher, 1703-1770, pp. 170-173 (no. 29).
Fountain With Two Tritons Blowing Conch Shells (plate 7), which has been linked to an earlier chalk drawing in the Cleveland Museum of Art by the same name (plate 8), Boucher explored ornamental qualities of shells that would be made fashionable by his contemporaries Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier (1695-1750) and Thomas Germain (1673-1748) during the first half of the 1730s. In this way, these works represent a more formal mode of expression, one that is associated with the development of the rocaille or le genre pittoresque.

The stylistic vocabulary of these earlier fountain studies would play an important role in the maturation of Boucher’s treatment of shells during this period. For instance, in the Cleveland study of Fountain With Two Tritons Blowing Conch Shells, the workings of Boucher’s lively imagination are unveiled, revealing a new appreciation for the highly decorative qualities of the baroque fountains the artist encountered during his trip to Italy in 1728. A comparison with a similar fountain by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) in the Palazzo Antamoro in Rome (plate 9), shows an artist clearly inspired by what he saw, yet at the same time confident in his

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80 Huquier’s Fountain with Two Tritons Blowing Conch Shells is one of seven images (excluding the frontispiece) in the first Recueil de Fontaines series. A complete copy of the series is preserved in the Edmond de Rothchild Collection, Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre. Inventory: 1090-1097. On Boucher’s treatment of the figure of Triton, see chapter two of this thesis.

81 Meissonnier and Germain were both pioneers of the rococo style in the decorative arts. Meissonnier in particular, provided all manner of ornamental works, catering mainly to elite clientele. On Meissonnier, see Peter Fuhring, Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: un génie du rococo 1695-1750 (Turin: U. Allemandi, 1999); Peter Fuhring, 'Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: The Artist and his Work ', in The Thyssen Meissonnier Tureen Catalogue (New York: Sotheby's, 1998), pp. 10-49; and Dorothea Nyberg, 'Introduction', in Oeuvre de Juste Aurèle Meissonier (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), pp. 6-43.


83 Located in Via della Panetteria, the fountain was commissioned in 1667 by an officer of the Papal Court to celebrate the recent supply of water granted to him by Pope Clemens IX (1600-1669).
own ability to embellish Bernini’s already striking design.\textsuperscript{84} By adding ‘grace to beauty’ (as one eighteenth-century biographer wrote), the Cleveland drawing thus becomes a fluid representation of the architectural syntax of the baroque, together with the formal elements of a pictorial style that was by now distinctly French in orientation.\textsuperscript{85}

Embedded in Boucher’s treatment of shells in these fountain studies is the artistic signature of his posthumous mentor, Antoine Watteau (1684-1721). For although nature formed an important part of Boucher’s program while in he was in Rome,\textsuperscript{86} it was Watteau who would teach Boucher (albeit indirectly) about the relationship between the artful and the natural.\textsuperscript{87} Boucher’s exposure to Watteau took place primarily during the 1720s, when the young artist was commissioned by various patrons to engrave approximately 140 designs after Watteau.\textsuperscript{88} The majority of these

\textsuperscript{84} Alastair Laing has suggested that Boucher was not inspired by what he saw in Rome. I would argue that his fountain studies suggest otherwise. See Alastair Laing, ‘Boucher: The Search for an Idiom’, in François Boucher, 1703-1770, eds. Alastair Laing, J. Patrice Marandel and Pierre Rosenberg (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), pp. 44-47.


\textsuperscript{86} Beverly Schreiber-Jacoby has argued that Boucher was introduced to the Italian countryside by Vleughels, who in an attempt to revive the static environment of the French Academy in Rome, organised regular excursions the country, where he encouraged the students to sketch the ancient ruins and the natural surroundings. See Schreiber-Jacoby, François Boucher’s Early Development as a Draughtsman, 1720-1734, p. 113-114.

\textsuperscript{87} Prior to this, Boucher’s only exposure to the relationship between art and nature was through his teacher François Lemoyne, who had recently returned from Italy. Some example of works that demonstrate Boucher lack of knowledge and/or interest in nature during these early years include; Death of Caloman; Capture of Reims by Louis V; The King Finds Himself in Extreme Danger; Revolt of Randulph; and Capture of the Chateau of Foix. These works are all preserved in the Cabinet des Dessins, Musée du Louvre, inv: 25163; 25167; 25172; 25177; 25180. On Boucher’s early years, see Herman Voss, ‘François Boucher's Early Development’, The Burlington Magazine March (1953): 81-93.

\textsuperscript{88} According to Mariette, Jullienne paid the artist twenty-four livres a day for his contribution to the Figures de différents caractères de Paysage, et d'Etudes dessinées d'après nature par Antoine Watteau, or Recueil Jullienne as it was also known. The series was published in two volumes in 1726 and 1728. See Pierre-Jean Mariette, Abecedario, eds. Anatole de Montaiglon and Philippe de Chennevières, 6 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: 1851-1853), p. 165-166. During this period Boucher also worked on a further five engravings after Watteau’s paintings, published in 1727 under the title, L’Oeuvre d’Antoine Watteau, as well as another four arabesques after Watteau’s The Four Seasons. It is also
were engravings after Watteau’s studies of landscapes, allowing Boucher to take in
the highly picturesque qualities and rustic charm that would form such an important
part of Boucher’s pastoral program later on.\textsuperscript{89}

The essence of Watteau’s idealised landscapes is present in the numerous
shells, branches, fountains, scrolls, escutcheons, figures and other various
atmospheric effects that appear in the \textit{Fontaines} series. Yet Boucher’s handling of
these objects gives his compositions an impenetrable depth, one that sees Watteau’s
seemingly flat surface motifs transformed into the makings of three dimensional
ornament. By adapting the formal elements of Watteau’s landscapes to the pictorial
language and style of \textit{rocaille} ornament, Boucher’s treatment of shells and other
objects of nature in his fountain studies take on more fluid, plastic qualities. This
approach pushed the boundary between what one scholar described as the already
‘porous’ relationship between the decorative and fine arts.\textsuperscript{90}

The publication of \textit{Fontaines} series represents a significant moment in
Boucher’s career. As Alastair Laing has argued, it not only helped to solidify his
reputation as one of the leading \textit{rocaille} artists of the period, but it also proved to be
financially rewarding.\textsuperscript{91} Boucher, to be sure, was already aware of the lucrative
commercial advantages of print trade, having worked as a successful engraver for

\textsuperscript{89} For example, Boucher engraved all of the landscape studies for \textit{Recueil Jullienne}, while the figure studies were divided among other contemporary artists. See Hedley, \textit{Boucher: Seductive Visions}, p. 29. On Boucher’s pastoral paintings, see Hyde, \textit{Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics}, pp. 145-177.

\textsuperscript{90} Emmanuelle Brugerolles, \textit{François Boucher et l’art rocaille dans les collections de l’Ecole des beaux-arts} (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2003), p. 27. This point is also discussed in Hyde, ‘Rococo Redux: From Style Moderne of the Eighteenth Century to Art Nouveau’, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{91} According to Laing, there are several references to Boucher’s fountain studies in eighteenth-century catalogues, often appearing in pairs. See Laing, \textit{The Drawings of François Boucher}, pp. 204-205.
much of his early years as an artist. Nevertheless, the *Fontaines* series marks only the second time in Boucher’s career to date that a collection of engravings after his original designs had been published. Thus, in addition to the financial benefits he stood to gain, the *Fontaines* series also offered Boucher the opportunity to build his reputation in *le goût moderne*, which according to another of his eighteenth-century biographers, he was more than happy to do.

Described by the *Mercure de France* as ‘très-élegante’, the publication of the *Fontaines* series would also prove timely for Gersaint. Indeed, the prints served to reinforce the aesthetic value of shells at a time when the collecting ambitions of most were motivated as much by a desire to be associated with the fashionable world of ornament, as they were to satisfy a growing curiosity for natural history. What is more, the link with Boucher ensured Gersaint’s efforts towards establishing a new economy for shells continued to be understood as both as tasteful and chic.

If Boucher’s earlier fountain studies explored the architectural function of shells as an established decorative motif, his catalogue illustration, by comparison, had to arouse interest in what Gersaint described as the scientific and artistic attraction of shells. For this, Boucher needed a new stylistic vocabulary, one that responded to the scientific ambitions of readers while at the same time satisfied their aesthetic

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93 The only other set of engravings that contained a significant number (i.e. more than three) of original designs after Boucher by this time was the 1734 edition of *Oeuvres de Molière*, which featured thirty-three illustrations by Boucher, engraved by Laurent Cars and Pierre-Quentin Chedel. See Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 17-18.
94 Writing about a series of paintings Boucher carried out for the lawyer François Derbais (Dorbay) during this period, Mariette noted, ‘du nombre de grands tableaux qu’il a voit fait pour un sculpteur marbrier nommé Dorbay qui en a voit garni toute sa maison, ce qui lui a voit été très-facile, car Boucher, ne cherchant aures qu’à se faire connaître, les auroit, je crois, faits pour rien, plus tost que d’en laisser manquer l’occasion.’ Mariette, *Abecedario*, vol. 1, p. 165.
95 ‘Le sieur Huquier a encore fait graver un Livre de sept feuilles, de Fontaines, inventées par Boucher, Peintre du Roy, d’un très-élegante composition.’ *Mercure de France*, April, 1736, p. 767.
concerns. For amateur collectors, however, these scientific concerns were not strictly pedagogical. Rather, they were attached to the thirst for discovering the effects of what Pluche had termed the Spectacle of Nature. As Gersaint explained, those who were interested in the collection of shells fell into two distinct groups: the ‘Naturalists’ (Naturalistes) who studied their causes and the ‘Curious’ (Curieux) who observed their effects.  

With this in mind, Boucher removed these objects from the architectural format of the Fontaines series and re-presented them as the centerpiece of the display in design for the 1736 frontispiece. While the irregularity of their free-flowing forms follows the logic of rocaille ornament, their separation from the architectural inclusions in the background allows these objects to operate independently from their traditional decorative agencies. As Georges Brunel has argued, the arrangement of groups in the Fontaines series ‘are organised so as to illustrate the relationship Boucher established between figures and décor’. In the 1736 frontispiece, however, this relationship has been subverted and décor now finds itself the subject of display.

Set within a fictional cabinet interior, this striking arrangement of shells, corals and madrepores are set apart from the vials of unidentifiable specimens that line the shelves in the background. To emphasise this separation, Boucher has employed artistic conventions that balance the variety and asymmetry of the foreground with the

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97 Gersaint’s use of the term curieux in this context describes rather generally the growing number of amateur collectors interested in shells, along with the vast spectrum of objects that constituted the French field of curiosité. The type of objects collected by the curieux is outlined in Furetière’s Dictionnaire universel (1690), in which the name was given to a person, ‘qui a rassemblé les choses les plus rares, les plus belles & les plus extraordinaires qu’il a pu trouver, tant dans les arts que dans nature. C’est un curieux un livres, de médailles, d’estampes, de tableaux, de fleurs, de coquilles, d’antiquités, de choses naturelles.’ See Antoine Furetière, Dictionnaire universel, 3 vols., vol. 1 (The Hague: Rotterdam, 1701), p. 589.

formal symmetry and order of the background. The effect is a *coup d'oeil*, whereby nature appears to have broken free from its architectural constraints to form a single cohesive image capable of communicating Gersaint’s collection as a whole.

The witty interplay of symmetry and contrast that Boucher used to delineate the available pictorial space in the 1736 frontispiece can also be seen in the tensions that exist between the objects that make up the central group. For example, the sinuous vein of the large madrepore that hovers above provides a delicate foil for the smooth cavernous interior of the empty shell cartouche below.  

Similarly, the contrasting use of light and shade serves to articulate these objects in an otherwise sculptural mass. This use of definition suggests a conscious attempt by Boucher to preserve some of the organic integrity of these objects, whilst still exploring the artistic possibilities afforded by their naturally asymmetric and irregular forms.

In terms of style and composition, the 1736 frontispiece is linked to another study by Boucher, now housed in the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts (Ensba) in Paris (plate 10). Simply titled *Rocaille*, the black chalk drawing presents an equally striking arrangement of shells, fossils, corals and glass set in front of a classically inspired grotto, perhaps reminiscent of those seen by Boucher in Rome. This would suggest that the sheet was completed after Boucher’s return to Paris in 1731. However, as Pierrette Jean-Richard has observed, the setting of the Ensba drawing is still very much in the style of Meissonnier, in particular, his *Livre d’ornemens* which was announced in the *Mercure de France* in March of 1734.  

This would therefore place the work somewhere between 1734 and 1737, when an

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99 For a discussion on the possible aesthetic strategies behind the use of the empty cartouche during this period, see Jean Starobinski, *L’Invention de la liberté, 1700-1789* (Geneva: Skira, 1964), p. 22.

engraving by Duflos (plate 11) appeared along with *Leda* and three others after Boucher, most likely intended as a design set for a folding screen known as *Nouveaux morceaux pour des paravents* (whereabouts unknown).  

While the exact date of the Ensba drawing is not known, it is likely that it was completed around the same time that Boucher was working on his design for 1736 catalogue. The reasons for this assessment lie in the parallels between the artist’s handling of the subject in each. In both works, nature has literally broken free from its architectural constraints to form the centerpiece of the composition. The disorderly juxtaposition of these organic forms bestows a lively sense of movement to both, especially when contrasted against the static architecture of their respective backgrounds. This is particularly evident in the Ensba drawing, whereby the heavier, cruder approach to line and tone in the foreground is seen to distinguish itself from the lighter and more restrained treatment of the background.

The distinction created by the comparative use of line and tone in the Ensba drawing is significant, as it serves to define the various functions of the architectural inclusions in the work. The lighter treatment of the classical structure in the background, for example, is distinct from the darker shading used to describe the pedestal in the foreground. As Peter Fuhring has argued, the presence of the pedestal on which this sculptural assembly rests is a reference to the current world of the collector, whereas the architectural structure in the background represents ‘an imaginary world constituted of ancient and baroque Rome, still very present in

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101 Several authors have suggested that these panels were intended for a screen, although no such screen exists today. See Sandra Lipshultz, ed., *Regency to Empire: French Printmaking 1715-1814* (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1984), pp. 92-93.
Boucher’s mind since his return to Paris’.102 Both the 1736 frontispiece and Ensba drawing thus describe the two important worlds that shells inhabited during the second half of the 1730s, namely the realms of ornament, both past and present, and the current world of the collector, in which shells together with other items of natural history had taken centre stage.

The reality of Gersaint’s sale collection was somewhat different to the one pictured by Boucher in his designs for the 1736 frontispiece and Ensba drawing, yet it was no less impressive in terms of visual engagement. Exhibited within the confines of Gersaint’s shop on the pont Notre-Dame, the bulk of the collection was separated into multiple compartments and placed in some thirty-seven drawers.103 Each of these compartments corresponded to an individual lot number (132 in total), which appeared along with a short description of the object, or in some cases multiple objects, in the sale catalogue. Above the cabinet, Gersaint installed five shelves on which he placed a small selection of corals, madrepores and other petrified objects, similar to those seen in the background of the 1736 frontispiece.104 According to the dealer, he limited the number of available corals and petrified species, as he was ‘unsure of the Public’s taste for this range’.105 Nevertheless, the contrast between these curious looking vials neatly stacked above the free flowing branches of the corals would have visually transformed the dimly lit interior of Gersaint’s shop.

In effect, Gersaint’s sale collection would have resembled more closely a scene from an anonymous frontispiece (plate 12) used by the dealer Pierre Rémy at several estate sales during the eighteenth century, including the one belonging to the noted

102 See Peter Fuhring’s catalogue entry for Rocaille in Maloon and Munro, Boucher, Watteau and the Origin of the Rococo, pp. 138-141 (no. 25).
103 For a breakdown on the drawers, see Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, pp. 62-162.
104 On the organisation of the additional objects, see Ibid., lots 1-132, pp. 139-161.
105 Ibid., ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).
shell connoisseur A.-J. Dezallier d’Argenville in 1766. The frontispiece depicts a pre-sale viewing, a common strategy employed by eighteenth-century dealers to entice collectors.¹⁰⁶ Like the 1736 collection, shells and other objects of natural history are displayed in glass-fronted drawers and in corresponding wall cabinets. Objects also appear on the ceiling of the room as if they are party to the spectacle that takes place in the exchanges between the collectors below. As the 1766 frontispiece suggests, these pre-sale viewings were as much an opportunity to see the collection as it was to be seen by other collectors.¹⁰⁷

A more significant inclusion in the 1766 frontispiece is the cluster of shells, corals and other marine plant life, which together with two winged cupids wrap around the bottom left hand side of the composition as a partial decorative frame. The group represents a departure from the activity in the rest of the frontispiece, which is signified through actions of the seated woman in the foreground seen contemplating a shell for purchase. Rather than promote the commercial realities associated with the sale, the objects and figures that make up this frame highlight the importance of ornament in the new economy for shells. Moreover, it speaks to the continuing influence of Boucher’s 1736 frontispiece and its role in shaping the visual and material culture of natural history during the middle decades of the eighteenth century.

When viewed in the context of the 1736 and 1766 sale collections, Boucher’s designs for the 1736 catalogue and Ensba drawing present an idealised mode of cabinet decoration, one that combines the pictorial language of rocaille ornament with

¹⁰⁶ For example, details of the Gersaint’s sale were announced in the Mercure de France as early as November 1735, allowing time for members of the public to view the collection before it went to auction the following January. Mercure de France, Nov. 1735, pp. 2460-2461.
¹⁰⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the representation of spectatorship in relation to Gersaint’s dealership, see my discussion of Boucher’s trade card À la Pagode in this chapter.
the ambitions of an emerging generation of amateur collectors. Indeed, in the absence of a formal taxonomic approach to the study and collection of shells, the rituals surrounding the display of objects within the cabinet interior during the 1730s was dictated primarily by aesthetic concerns. A typical shell collection, for example, was stored in a series of long drawers that pulled out of a specific cabinet made for viewing shells, known as a *coquillier*. The term *coquillier*, however, not only described the cabinet, but also the way in which the collection was stored.108 Accordingly, Gersaint encouraged collectors to decorate the cabinet and surrounding walls, tables and ledges with larger shells and marine curios, emphasising the already fluid relationship between shells and *rocaille* ornament.109

Within the drawers of the *coquillier*, shells were arranged ‘with art’ on beds of silk or satin.110 The optical impact of this type of display could be enhanced further if shells were separated into multiple compartments made of wood and wrapped in a contrasting layer of coloured fabric.111 As Gersaint explained, if the ‘goal’ of the naturalist was ‘to study their cause, their principle, and their classification’, then the role of the amateur collector, by comparison, was to ‘declassify’ and create ‘an agreeable glance in observing the variety of forms and colours of which they are

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110 ‘et qu’on range sur du cotton avec art dans un Cabinet compose de tiroirs de différentes grandeurs, doublés de satin blanc ou autre étoffe avec compartimens.’ *Mercure de France* February 1736, p. 306.

111 While Gersaint recommended the use of compartments, they were not widely employed until the introduction of Dezallier d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode* in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*. On d’Argenville’s system, see chapter two of this thesis.
Thus, while the more accomplished collectors paid some attention to the genealogy of these objects, separating as many as they could by type or by kind, the main objective for the amateur collector during the second half of the 1730s was to create an overall visual effect that conveyed pleasure (*plaisir*) to the senses.

This notion of *plaisir* can be understood further in the context of the wider empirical approach to nature taking place during the first half of the eighteenth century. According to the French physicist and demonstration lecturer Jean-Antoine Nollet (1700-1770), one sought ‘to know the productions of nature’ not just by their descriptive properties alone, but also ‘by the effects they exhibit to the senses’.

Writing elsewhere, Pluche argued that to know nature, one need only to consider the ‘exterior decoration of the world’, or that ‘which strikes quickly’. Any attempt to discover the ‘depths of nature’ by ‘tracing effects up to their causes’ was, according to Pluche, found to be arduous and therefore best left to the naturalists. Thus, unlike the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition of collecting, the labour expended by

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112 'Les Coquillages sont l'objet de la recherche de deux différentes sortes de personnes; je veux dire des Physiciens & des Curieux. Le but des uns, en les possédant, est d’en étudier la cause, le principe & les suites, ce qui est proprement le 'Recreatio mentis' de Bonanni. Les autres ne les recherchent que 'propter Recreationem oculi', par déclassement, & pour se procurer un coup d’œil agréable en observant la variété des formes & des couleurs dont elles sont ornées. Je ne prétens pas cependant dire parlé que l’unique motif des Curieux, en acquérant des curiosités, soit l’amusement, & que le Physicien n’aît en vu que l’étude, & ne compte pour rien la récréation des yeux; mais seulement que l’agréable qui s’y rencontre n’est qu’accessoire pour le Physicien, comme l’étude & la recherche le font pour les Curieux.' Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 21-22.


114 ‘Pour nous, nous croyons qu’il nous convient mieux de nous en tenir à la décoration extérieure de ce monde, & à l’effet des machines qui forment le spectacle……Mais, contens d’une représentation qui remplit suffisamment nos sens & notre esprit; il n’est pas nécessaire de demander que la salle des machines nous soit ouverte. En un mot, notre objet est de prendre dans la scène de la nature, ce qui peut frapper vivement.’ Noël Antoine Pluche, *Le Spectacle de la nature ou entretiens sur les particularités de l’histoire naturelle*, 8 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: 1736), vol. 1, preface (no page numbers). Pluche’s pursuit of an ‘exterior’ view of nature follows on from Fontenelle’s theory of the stage as a metaphor for nature. Like Pluche, Fontenelle believed that nature was a vehicle for social spectacle. As such, it was only required to ‘present its best side’ concealing the ‘levers and levies’s that pull backstage to make it work’. See Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*, p. 11.

115 ‘exercer utilement là raison, sans jamais toucher, non-seulement à ce qui nous paroit au dessus de ses forces, mais même à ce qui pourroit aisément lasser ses efforts.’ Pluche, *Spectacle de la nature*, vol. 1, preface (no page numbers).
those amateurs interested in the collection of shells during this period was not directed towards the undiscovered, but rather at eliciting an experience that was aesthetically pleasing.

The taste for the artful elements of nature rather than its more precise descriptive qualities also appealed Boucher. This is reflected in the 1736 frontispiece and to a lesser extent the Ensba drawing where the artist has chosen to create an idealised cabinet arrangement that both delights and amuses. For instance, in a departure from the earlier Cleveland chalk drawing (plate 8), the 1736 frontispiece and Ensba sheet presents a conscious attempt by Boucher to explore the boundaries between the playful effects of nature’s artifice and the inventiveness of his own artistic creations. Thus, while Boucher’s aesthetic strategy accords with Pluche and Nollet’s sensory view of nature, it does so by adapting the language of rocaille ornament to produce a vision of collecting that contemporary audiences would have understood and enjoyed. To this end, the 1736 frontispiece and the Ensba drawing reveal the introduction of a new stylistic vocabulary, one that not only articulated the ambitions of an emerging generation of collectors, but also defined the interests of those participating in the mid eighteenth-century market for natural history.

À la Pagode

Over the next decade, Boucher continued to help Gersaint promote a market for shells both directly and indirectly. During these years, the artist completed a number of projects that bolstered support for Gersaint’s business and his efforts towards consolidating the interest in shells in mid eighteenth-century Paris. The success of their somewhat informal and sporadic partnership can be measured in terms of the public’s response to Gersaint’s business activities and the market for shells in general
between 1736 and 1750—the year of Gersaint’s death. This period would prove the most successful for the dealer, whose revenue from public sales alone reached almost 400,000 livres.\textsuperscript{116}

To be sure, Boucher’s involvement in the successful 1736 sale helped Gersaint promote a new visual and material culture for shells. It also ensured, however, that Gersaint’s transition from dealing almost exclusively in pictures to a broader inventory of shells and other objects of curiosity was achieved with an appropriate measure of taste. This was confirmed in October 1739, when a report praising Gersaint’s recent commercial activities appeared in the Mercure de France. The article stated that Gersaint had for sale a range of ‘useful and tasteful objects’, enough to ‘satisfy even the most difficult Curieux…..at very reasonable prices’.\textsuperscript{117} Pleased with the response he had received to date, Gersaint took steps to formalise the new direction in which his business had moved. That same year he changed the name of his shop from Au Grand Monarque to À la Pagode, a name he felt more accurately reflected his expanding global enterprise for curiosité.\textsuperscript{118}

To promote this new development, Gersaint once again turned to Boucher, commissioning the artist to design a new trade card for the shop (plate 13). Boucher was no doubt aware of the significance of such a project, as the nature of the commission presented him with a unique opportunity to update the early eighteenth-century model of connoisseurship captured by Watteau in his painting from 1720.

\textsuperscript{116} For statistical analysis of the evolution of Gersaint’s commerce between 1725-1750, see Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, pp. 555-556 and p. 561.

\textsuperscript{117} ‘Le Sr Gersaint a établi cette année un nouveau commerce de quinquailles et autres merchandises usuelles, et de goût, qui peuvent satisfaire les Curieux les plus difficiles, par leurs formes et leur propreté, ne se chargeant que choses utiles, agréables à vue, et faites par les ouvriers les plus habiles. Il est en état d’accommoder les marchands et les particuliers de quantité de choses, à des prix très raisonnables.’ Mercure de France, Oct. 1739, p. 2442.

\textsuperscript{118} Glorieux has argued that Gersaint subsequently adopted the pagode as an emblem for his expanding global enterprise. Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, p. 264.
Like Watteau before him, Boucher’s trade card sought to promote Gersaint’s business by providing a current definition of the type of objects that informed the ideal collector. If Watteau’s *L’Enseigne de Gersaint* explored the concept of a collecting identity through the beholder’s relationship with the modern tableaux, Boucher’s trade card drew inspiration from the current vogue for collecting shells and other curiously exotic objects. A comparison of these two works then reveals not only the development of Gersaint’s expanding business, but also an evolution in the tastes associated with the consumption of luxury goods in Paris during the first half of the eighteenth century.

This can be understood further when considering the diversification of Gersaint’s stock between 1725 and 1750. Although paintings maintained a consistent presence in Gersaint’s inventory, as Guillaume Glorieux has shown, by 1750 they would make up only twenty percent of his overall sales. The fall in paintings was matched by an increase in Gersaint’s sale of shells and other assorted curios, such as porcelain, lacquer and tea, which rose during this same period from zero to sixty percent of his total sales.

It seems this fact was not lost on Boucher, who in his trade card shows paintings pushed to one side in order to make way for the barrage of assorted objects of curiosity. Indeed, Boucher’s *Pagode* depicts the type of objects that were available for purchase at Gersaint’s shop on the Pont Notre-Dame. As the inscription reveals: ‘At the Pagoda’ one might expect to find ‘all sorts of new and tasteful decorative objects, jewels, mirrors, cabinet pictures, pagodas, lacquers and porcelains from Japan, shells

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119 I am building on Jo Hedley’s discussion of these paintings. See Hedley, *Boucher: Seductive Visions*, p. 74.
121 Ibid., p. 556.
and other objects of natural history, stones, agates and generally all curious and strange merchandise’. In keeping with the text, Boucher included a range of exotic objects designed to pique the interest of the amateur collector. Here we find shells, corals and pagodes next to other interesting objects such as a chinoiserie cabinet, coffee pots, cups and a grinder, all of which remain under the watchful eye of the grotesque Chinese figure, known to period collectors as a magot. Together, these objects reflect the growing demand for all manner of curiosity, especially those that were associated with foreign cultures. Even the shells, corals and madrepores appear more exotic by the presence of a globe placed strategically to the right of the group. In an age where few travelled, Boucher’s Pagode seems to suggest that Enlightenment concerns of exploration and discovery could be satisfied through the consumption of luxury imports.

The glamourisation of objects associated with foreign cultures was particularly prevalent among those items that originated from or were inspired by the Far East.

Since the late seventeenth century, there had been significant growth in the number of imports from this region. The importation of such objects exposed Parisian elites to a deeper understanding of Eastern culture. However, as David Porter has argued, it was not a ‘legible’ understanding of these cultures that consumers ultimately sought, but rather the simple enjoyment of ‘a delicious surrender to the unremitting exoticism of total illegibility’. Thus, in the exchange between the dealer and his client there existed a paradox between the legible and illegible object. In cataloguing these

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122 À la Pagode, Gersaint, marchand jouaillier, sur le pont Notre-Dame, vend toute sorte de clainquailerie nouvelle et de goût, bijoux, glaces, tableux de cabinet, pagodas, vernis et porcelains du Japon, coquillages et autres morceaux d’histoire naturelle, cailloux, agathes et généralement toutes merchandises curieuses et étrangères.’ BnF Estampes, Paris, AA 3, s.n.r et Db. 28 in-fol.


imports, the dealer was obliged to provide credible information as to the provenance of these objects. Such information influenced the price and popularity of the sale item. Yet once inside the collector’s cabinet, the rituals surrounding their possession would ultimately seek to dissolve any apparent legibility of the objects in question.

The tensions that existed between the legible and illegible object can be seen in Boucher’s handling of the subject in Á la Pagode. Just as Watteau’s L’Enseigne had demonstrated twenty years earlier, Boucher’s Pagode strikes a harmonious balance between a legible rendering of Gersaint’s current inventory and the illegibility that consumers sought from the experience of viewing. Like Watteau’s L’Enseigne, Boucher’s subject matter has been artfully arranged in order to give the viewer (who substitutes as the client) the impression that they are in fact inside Gersaint’s shop. In Watteau’s version, the interplay between object and beholder becomes a part of a larger mimetic program that seeks to define an early eighteenth-century vision of collecting through the art of looking and being looked at. In his trade card, however, Boucher has forgone this idea in favour of a more intimate dialogue between the objects themselves and the beholder. The result is a journey of exploration, one in which the viewer, who poses as the client, is encouraged to sort through the clutter of objects in the hope that he or she might experience the irrepressible joy of discovering an item for their own collection.

If one of Boucher’s objectives in designing a new trade card for Gersaint was to widen the appeal for the type of objects depicted, then the project was helped by its

connection to a genre painting completed by the artist that same year.\footnote{126} In \textit{The Luncheon} (plate 5), Boucher has presented an ideal version of the bourgeois interior using objects similar to those found in his trade card for Gersaint. For example, the porcelain set of cups resting on the red lacquer table, are comparable to the set that appears in the foreground of Gersaint’s trade card. Similarly, the tea and hot chocolate pots, together with the grotesque Chinese figure and chinoiserie cabinets, can all be traced to objects found in his image for \textit{À la Pagode}.\footnote{127} The presence of these items help to contextualize the narrative meaning in this work by making a statement about the family’s status and sensibility of taste. While the room itself is not as well appointed as the one depicted in Jean François de Troy’s (1679–1752) \textit{A Reading from Molière} 1728 (private collection), there is nevertheless a sense of luxury in the choice of furnishings and ornaments displayed within the room.\footnote{128} Thus, by its own virtue, \textit{The Luncheon} puts into practice Boucher’s idea of the modern collector, for whom the act of collecting shells, along with other natural and artificial curios, is made all the more accessible by the choice, price and portability of objects available.

Any discussion of \textit{The Luncheon} must also consider its links to Boucher’s own collection and the artist’s emerging identity as an amateur collector of art and nature.\footnote{129} Indeed, the objects that appear in the painting correspond to similar items

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\item \footnote{126}{The date for Boucher’s original design for \textit{À la Pagode} is almost certainly 1739—the same year as Gersaint changed the name of his shop. However, Boucher’s illustration is known only today through an engraving from 1740 by the comte de Caylus. See BnF Estampes, Paris, AA 3, S.n.r et Db. 28 infol.}
\item \footnote{127}{This figure appears in several other works by Boucher from the period. For further discussion, see chapter four.}
\item \footnote{128}{On the formal and social dynamics of de Troy’s \textit{A Reading from Molière}, see Philip Conisbee, Thomas W. Gaehgtsen, and Colin B. Bailey, eds., \textit{The Age of Watteau, Chardin and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting} (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp.168-9 (no. 25).}
\item \footnote{129}{On the contents of Boucher collection of natural and decorative objects, see chapters four and five.}
\end{itemize}
found in the catalogue that accompanied the sale of Boucher’s collection in 1771.\textsuperscript{130} This combined with the fact that there are similarities in terms of age and gender between members of the Boucher family and the figures represented in the work has led at least one scholar to suggest that \textit{The Luncheon} presents an intimate portrait of the young family.\textsuperscript{131} However, as Alastair Laing and Colin Bailey have both observed, there is no documentary evidence to support the idea that \textit{The Luncheon} is a self-portrait masquerading as genre piece.\textsuperscript{132} Furthermore, as Melissa Hyde has proposed, if Boucher is represented in the work, then it is in such way that deliberately obscures the autobiographical elements of the painting, insofar as any reference to the artist and his family is merely a re-presentation of Boucher’s artistic self.\textsuperscript{133}

Similarly, there is no reason to suggest that the combination of decorative and utilitarian objects in \textit{The Luncheon} were the same ones owned by the artist. Indeed, Boucher did not formally begin his collection until the mid 1740s when the onset of Gersaint’s estate sales opened up the market of \textit{curiosité}.\textsuperscript{134} Moreover, with no official pension from the Crown, Boucher was not yet in a position where he would have been able to afford to indulge his passion for collecting.\textsuperscript{135} Rather than view these objects as a literal interpretation of Boucher’s collection, they can be understood as signalling a stylistic preference for certain collectable items, many of which

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\textsuperscript{130} For example, Boucher owned a number of coffee and tea pots, mounted porcelains, and other ceramic and silver service sets. See Remy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, passim.
\textsuperscript{131} The idea that \textit{The Luncheon} can be viewed as a self-portrait by Boucher was originally proposed by Regina Shoolman Slatkin in her article from 1971. Regina Shoolman Slatkin, 'Portraits of François Boucher', \textit{Apollo} 94 (1971): 280-291.
\textsuperscript{133} Hyde, ‘Getting into the Picture: Boucher's Self-Portraits of Others', pp. 14-17.
\textsuperscript{134} For a detailed discussion on the formation of Boucher’s collection, see chapter three.
\textsuperscript{135} Boucher would have to wait until 1742 to receive an annual income of 400 \textit{livres}, which was made possible by the death of the artist Pierre-Denis Martin (1663-1742). See Laing, 'Chronology', p. 22.
\end{flushright}
Boucher would pursue with gusto over course of the next three decades.\textsuperscript{136}

Boucher’s *The Luncheon*, along with *À la Pagode* and the 1736 frontispiece, represent a turning point in the visual history of eighteenth-century French collecting. When viewed in connection to Watteau’s *L’Enseigne*, they communicate the maturation of the *commerce de la curiosité* under Gersaint and with it the evolution of the tastes associated with the consumption of luxury goods in Paris during the first half of the eighteenth century. While paintings were still considered of primary importance in the formation of a collection, it seems that for the first time in the history of French collecting, shells together with other objects of curiosity had become noticeably tied to the construction of a self-fashioned identity for amateur collectors. Indeed, the somewhat ignored objects on the right of Watteau’s *L’Enseigne* have materialised within Boucher’s *Pagode* to form an expanded inventory of the type of collectable objects considered *à la mode*. Thus, within its own historical setting, Boucher’s *À la Pagode* (like Watteau’s *L’Enseigne*) functioned as both an advertisement for Gersaint’s shop and as a medium through which the aesthetics of modern collecting tastes were communicated.

*The comte de Tessin*

The visual rhetoric of *À la Pagode* is realised in a watercolour painting (plate 15) commissioned by one of Boucher’s most benevolent patrons, the Swedish diplomat and celebrated collector Carl Gustaf Tessin (1695-1770).\textsuperscript{137} Painted by Olof Fridsberg (1728-1795) in 1762, it depicts the comte de Tessin’s wife Ulrika Sparre af Sundby (1711-1768) in a faithful representation of her study at the couple’s country

\textsuperscript{136} For example, the *pagode* that sits on the shelf on the left of the composition would come to represent one of forty-five in the artist’s collection. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 659-683, pp. 89-93. For further discussion on the relationship between these objects and Boucher’s *œuvre*, see chapter four of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{137} I am grateful to Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen for bringing this work to my attention.
estate Åkerö in Södermanland, southwest of Stockholm. At the time, Fridsberg was responsible for overseeing the development of interior works at Åkerö.\textsuperscript{138} This included recreating fine and decorative works by eighteenth-century French artists, such as Watteau and Boucher, directly onto the walls of the château.\textsuperscript{139} These visual solutions were extended to Madame Tessin’s study, where Fridsberg inserted two four-meter high tromp l’oeil panels featuring a colourful depiction of Boucher’s design for \textit{À la Pagode} (plate 16).\textsuperscript{140}

For the most part, Fridsberg has preserved the original integrity of Boucher design. However, in order to accommodate its new location the artist made some minor adjustments, which included painting out the larger objects that appear on the left and right of the Japanese lacquer cabinet in Boucher’s original. There are several other notable changes to the central group of objects. Firstly, the design on the lacquer cabinet has been altered, presenting an urban scene in place of Boucher’s more rural version. Secondly, Fridsberg has replaced the grotesque character seated on the bottom right of \textit{À la Pagode} with a brightly dressed Chinese figurine. It is likely that these variations were made to match existing objects already in the comte de Tessin’s collection. Indeed, Tessin was a passionate collector of fine and decorative arts, in particular, those associated with contemporary French tastes. Thus, by mixing real objects from the collection with the appropriated design for \textit{À la Pagode}, Fridsberg was able to locate the great estate of the comte and comtess de Tessin within a very specific visual tradition of mid eighteenth-century French connoisseurship.

\textsuperscript{138} In 1756, Frisberg took over from Johan Pasch (1706-1769) as Tessin’s principal artist and decorator.\textsuperscript{139} Like Pasch before him, Fridsberg’s role was to recreate the French rococo aesthetic within the interior of the chateau, which had been built by the architect Carl Hårleman (1700-1753) during the 1740s. Hårleman’s design followed the principles set out in contemporary French treatises on architecture.\textsuperscript{140} All that remains of the study today are the two \textit{Pagode} panels.
The Pagode panels are made up by two other groups of pictorial representation, both of which aim to strengthen the association with Boucher. The first is an accurate copy of an engraving after Charles-Antoine Coypel (1694-1752), entitled Cupid as a Chimney Sweep.\(^{141}\) Coypel’s cupid appears from behind a green curtain just above Boucher’s magot, giving the impression that it has materialised from the same curtain that acts as a cartouche in À la Pagode. The second group takes the form of two Chinese figures that stand side by side, directly under the painted version of À la Pagode. The figures, which have been identified as Chinese Soldier (plate 17) and Chinese Botanist (plate 18), are taken from Boucher’s own designs for a series of engravings by Huquier published between 1738-1745 under the title, Recueil de diverse figures chinoises du Cabinet de François Boucher.\(^{142}\)

In their contemporary setting, the Pagode panels formed part of a larger decorative program in the study, designed to display the rich array of objects and modern furnishings in the comte de Tessin’s collection. The space is distinctly French rococo in style, which attests to his passion for the French fine and decorative arts.\(^{143}\)

Tessin’s enthusiasm for French art commenced during a trip to Paris in 1715, where he met with several members of Pierre Crozat’s (1661-1740) circle, including Boucher’s future biographer Pierre-Jean Mariette (1694-1774) and the artist Antoine

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\(^{143}\) For instance, the ormolu cartel clock that hangs on the wall to right of Madame Tessin is an excellent example of the type of clocks that were fashionable in Paris in the first half of the eighteenth century. The elaborate case suggests that it was made by Charles Voisin (1685-1761), whose clients included Louis XV, as well as a large number of wealthy Parisian elites. A similar clock was recently sold through Christie’s in London. See www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5339165 (accessed July 16, 2010).
Watteau, from whom he purchased several drawings.\footnote{144} His affinity with the French aesthetic intensified further in 1739, when he was posted to Paris to serve as the Swedish Ambassador until 1742.\footnote{145} It was during this period that he came into contact with Boucher along with other French artists, writers and musicians, all of whom he entertained regularly at his hôtel on the Quai des Théatins.\footnote{146}

Much of Tessin’s time in Paris was spent furthering his own collection. For advice in these matters he turned to Gersaint, with whom he would continue to correspond with until 1748.\footnote{147} Through Gersaint, Tessin purchased a range of fine art and collectable objects at estate sales organised by the dealer during the 1740s.\footnote{148} He was also the principal buyer at Crozat’s posthumous sale in 1741, where he acquired over 2,000 works by European masters, as well as others by contemporary French artists.\footnote{149} As client of Gersaint’s, Tessin was therefore familiar with Boucher’s illustration for \textit{À la Pagode}, which like his designs for \textit{Chinese Soldier} and \textit{Chinese Botanist} were engraved around the time of Tessin’s arrival in Paris in July 1739. He may also have remembered Boucher’s \textit{Chinese Soldier} from \textit{Fire} (plate 19), a red chalk drawing by the artist from 1740, which depicts this same figure taking tea with the \textit{magot} from Boucher’s design for \textit{À la Pagode}.

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\footnoteremark{144} Upon his return to Sweden, Tessin took up the position of Superintendent to the court, a role that took him back to Paris in search of works to decorate the royal residences. In this way, Tessin has been credited with introducing the French rococo style into Sweden. See Denise Bernard-Folliot, ‘Le comte de Tessin à Paris 1739-1742’, \textit{Gazette des Beaux-Arts} no. January (1985): 33-36; and Goncourt, \textit{French Eighteenth-Century Painters}, p. 64 (note 14).

\footnoteremark{145} Bernard-Folliot, ‘Le comte de Tessin à Paris 1739-1742’, p. 33.

\footnoteremark{146} Now Quai Voltaire. On Tessin’s attempt to ingratiate himself in the contemporary art scene, see ibid., pp. 33-36.


\footnoteremark{148} These included the sales of Quentín de Lorangère (1744), Joseph Bonnier, Baron de la Mosson (1745), the chevalier, Antoine de la Roque (1745), Louis-Auguste Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis (1747), and Charles Valois (1748).

\footnoteremark{149} See Pierre-Jean Mariette, \textit{Description sommaire des desseins du cabinet de feu M. Crozat} (Paris: 1741), passim. An annotated copy of the author’s sale catalogue is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. For a list of the objects purchased by Tessin at these sales, see Glorieux, \textit{À L’Enseigne de Gersaint}, p. 565.
While Tessin built an impressive collection of French art during his stay, it seems he was particularly interested in Boucher, who he visited in his studio along with the artist Gustav Lundberg (1695-1786) just five days after arriving in Paris. Over the next few years, Tessin purchased a number of important works by Boucher including, *Capriccio View of Tivoli* (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum), *Leda and the Swan* (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum) and *Lady Fastening her Garter* (Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza), as well as a pastel portrait of Madame Boucher (whereabouts unknown). He also commissioned from Boucher a set of illustrations for his short story *Faunillane* or *L’Infante jaune* (1741). However, with only two copies printed in Tessin’s lifetime, it is possible that the publication of *Faunillane* was merely a vehicle for securing the artist’s illustrations.

By far the most significant of Tessin’s purchases from Boucher during this period was *The Triumph of Venus* (plate 4) from 1740. The acquisition of the

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150 Three years later, Lundberg would present a portrait of Boucher to the Academy as part of his *morceaux de réception*. Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 22. On Lundberg’s portrait, particularly as it relates to the development of Boucher’s artistic identity, see Hyde, ‘Getting into the Picture: Boucher’s Self-Portraits of Others’, pp. 13-38. 

151 On the aforementioned paintings, see Laing, Marandel and Rosenberg, *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, pp. 130-132 (no. 16), pp. 195-197 (no. 38) and pp. 200-210 (no. 40). Tessin also purchased a number of drawings from Boucher, including *Buste de jeune femme* (Stockholm, Nationalmuseum) which is thought to be a study for the figure of the nymph in the artist’s 1742 painting of *Diane sortant du bain* (Paris, Musée du Louvre). See Per Bjurström, *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm: Collection du comte Tessin, 1695-1770, ambassadeur de Suède près la cour de France* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1970), pp. 38-41 (nos. 58-63). On the pastel portrait of Madame Boucher, see Bailey, ‘Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher (1716-96)’, pp. 228-229.


153 It has been suggested by Anatole de Montaiglon that Tessin may also have welcomed the opportunity to spend more time with Madame Boucher. See Anatole de Montaiglon, ‘François Boucher’, *Archives de l’Art Français* no. 6 (1858-60): 62-63. This is also mentioned in Laing, Marandel and Rosenberg, *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, p. 66, and pp. 196-197. If this theory is correct, it may go some way in explaining the reasons behind Tessin’s purchase of the pastel portrait of Madame Boucher.

154 In a letter dated 22 July 1740, Tessin wrote to Hårleman: ‘Boucher me fait une naissance de Vénus: Cospetto che bella Cosa! Il n’y a des yeux que comme les voûtres qui en soient dignes…’ Carl Gustaf
Stockholm Venus was a coup for the burgeoning amateur collector. The sale also represents a professional milestone for Boucher, as Tessin would pay him an impressive 1,600 livres for the painting—approximately four times the artist’s comparatively more modest annual pension of 400 livres.\footnote{Ananoff, \textit{François Boucher}, vol. 1, p. 23. Boucher’s pension of 400 livres was increased to 600 livres per annum in 1744. See Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 22.} Although Boucher had received a number of generous payments prior to the sale of the Stockholm Venus, the money had been for works completed at the request of the Crown.\footnote{For example, Boucher received a payment of 2,400 livres in 1739 for \textit{The Crocodile Hunt} (Amiens, Musée de Picardie), painted in 1738, but dated 1739. Ananoff, \textit{François Boucher}, vol. 1, pp. 12-13.} Accordingly, this would make The Triumph of Venus Boucher’s most financially successful commission by a private collector to date.\footnote{For a detailed discussion of Boucher’s \textit{The Triumph of Venus}, particularly as it relates to his frontispiece design for the 1742 edition of A.-J. Dezallier d’Argenville’s \textit{La Conchyliologie}, see chapter two.}

Tessin returned to Sweden in 1742, however, he would continue to purchase works directly from Boucher until the mid 1740s.\footnote{Some, like the \textit{Times of the Day} series, were commissioned on behalf of Princess Louisa Ulrique (1720-1782). On Boucher’s relationship with Tessin during the 1740s, see Marandel, ‘Boucher and Europe’, pp. 74-77.} Although the relationship was strained at times, Tessin never lost interest in Boucher, or the vision of mid eighteenth-century connoisseurship that works like \textit{À la Pagode} and \textit{The Luncheon} had come to represent. This is evident in the ambitious interior design scheme adopted by Tessin at Åkerö during the 1740s, which saw paintings by Boucher and other contemporary French artists hung next to motifs adapted from these same works in the form of painted decorations. Tessin’s desire to recreate the modern French aesthetic within the walls of the château thus culminated in Madame Tessin’s study, where he had instructed Fräägborg to reproduce artworks that he associated with his attempt to introduce the visual culture of the French rococo to his native Sweden.

comte de Tessin, \textit{Lettres inédites}, ed. Gunner von Proschwitz (Paris: Goteborg, 1983), pp. 70-71. The work was later engraved by Pierre-Etienne Moitte (1722-1780), under the title \textit{Venus on the Water}.\footnote{The work was later engraved by Pierre-Etienne Moitte (1722-1780), under the title \textit{Venus on the Water}.} Ananoff, \textit{François Boucher}, vol. 1, p. 23. Boucher’s pension of 400 livres was increased to 600 livres per annum in 1744. See Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 22.
Tessin’s recreation of Boucher’s *À la Pagode* at Åkerö was also tied to the preservation of his legacy as a celebrated amateur collector of fine and decorative art.\(^{159}\) During the 1750s, Tessin was forced to sell off part of his collection, including the majority of his works by Boucher, in order to counter increasing financial difficulties.\(^{160}\) With the majority of his collection sold and little favour left at court, Tessin retired to his country estate where he lived in a self-imposed exile until his death in 1770.\(^{161}\) When viewed in this context, the *Pagode* panels represent a definitive claim to mid-eighteenth-century French connoisseurship and a reference to the once great estate of the comte and comtess de Tessin.

**The 1736 frontispiece and beyond**

As Gersaint’s trade card and the *Pagode* panels suggest, Boucher’s involvement in promoting the new economy for shells and other objects of curiosity during the 1730s and 40s was not always straightforward, nor was it necessarily the direct result of actions taken by the artist. Rather, there were those around him like Gersaint (and to a lesser extent Tessin), who continued to draw on the authority of Boucher’s imagery in order to reinforce the study and collection of shells and other natural curios as a sustainable practice of elite connoisseurship. Over the years, Gersaint continued to use and reuse Boucher’s design for the 1736 frontispiece. This would set

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\(^{159}\) Shortly after his return to Sweden, Tessin began the task of cataloging objects in prized collection. This list forms the basis of his 1749 inventory, a valuable record of the collection when it was at its peak. The 1749 inventory is also useful, in that it reveals Tessin’s need for authorship over his self-fashioned identity as a collector. The 1749 catalogue can therefore be considered an early attempt by Tessin to establish his legacy as a celebrated collector. Copies of this catalogue are housed in the Institut Tessin in Paris (part of the Centre Culturel Suédois). On Tessin’s collection, see Bjurström, *Dessins du Nationalmuseum de Stockholm: Collection du comte Tessin*; and Christopher Sells, *Paris*, *The Burlington Magazine* 113 no. 814, January (1971): 59-60.

\(^{160}\) A large number of the works by Boucher, including *The Triumph of Venus*, went to the Crown in 1751. See Marandel, *Boucher and Europe*, p. 75; and Sells, *Paris*, p. 60.

\(^{161}\) While Tessin was forced to part with many of his prized possessions, he was able to retain the majority of his collection of shells and other objects of natural history. To commemorate the collection, Tessin commissioned his friend, the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778), to prepare a catalogue. See Carolus Linnaeus, *Museum Tessinianum* (Stockholm: Laurent Salvi, 1753).
an important precedent for other dealers wishing to position their sales through an association with Boucher. Moreover, it marks the beginning of an evolution in Boucher’s original design from one that embodied the early ambitions of amateur collectors, to an image that defined a generation of collecting practices.

The first in what would be several repatriations of Boucher’s design for the 1736 catalogue took place in 1737, when Gersaint staged his second annual public sale of shells and other curiosities (plate 20). As the Mercure de France reported, in the lead up to the 1737 sale, Gersaint travelled to Holland where he purchased a large number of shells and ‘all that involves Natural History, which is currently the flavour of the month in Paris and in the provinces’. While the 1737 sale followed the same format as the previous year, Gersaint decided to expand the contents of the sale beyond the thirty-six drawers of shells and include a number of Italian and French master paintings and engravings, as well as diverse range of rare and exotic curiosities:

The idea that I had developed had been to gather on the last trip that I have just done to Holland, a follow up of curiosity of different types which could amuse the Amateurs and satisfy different tastes. As I found upon my return some acquisitions to be made, I joined them together and I believe that one will be

162 For example, the dealer Pierre Rémy reused Boucher’s design as the frontispiece for the catalogue that accompanied the 1766 estate sale of the renowned shell collector, Madame Dubois-Jourdain. For a discussion of this frontispiece, see chapter three.
163 ‘Il paroit que cette curiosité et tout ce qui regarde l’Histoire Naturelle, est à présent en grande faveur à Paris et dans les Provinces, ce qui engagera sans doute notre curieux et intelligent Voyageur à étendre ses vûës et ses recherches plus loin que la Hollande pour satisfaire à l’ardeur des Amateurs qui se confient en ses lumieres et en sa droiture dans son commerce.’ Mercure de France, Oct. 1736, pp. 2320-2321. With its trade links to the East, Holland was a rich source of shells. Gersaint would return to there once more before holding his much-anticipated second sale in December 1737.
164 Gersaint’s reference to Amateurs in this context is significant, as it reveals the sort of collector he was hoping to attract to this sale. For Gersaint, a ‘genuine Amateur’, or ‘Connoisseur’ represented a more desirable type of collector than the curieux, as he, or she was more concerned with the quality of the object, rather than its price or source. See Edmé-François Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné des bijoux, porcelaines, bronzes, lacas, lustres de cristal de roche et de porcelaine, pendules de goût, & autres meubles curieux ou composés: tableaux, dessins, estampes, coquilles & autres effets de curiosité, provenans de la succession de M. Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis (Paris: P. Prault, 1747), pp. 159-160. On Gersaint’s changing attitude towards amateur collectors, see McClellan, ‘Watteau’s Dealer’, p. 449.
attracted to the variety and singularity of Pieces that will be exposed at this Sale.\textsuperscript{165}

The variety of objects on display at the 1737 sale exemplified Gersaint’s skills as a dealer in the fine and decorative arts, as well as shells and other curiously exotic objects. What is more, the appearance of such specialist skills gave Gersaint a competitive edge over his contemporaries and reaffirmed his own reputation as a connoisseur of luxury imports.

Despite the fact that Gersaint had significantly expanded the contents for the 1737 sale, the dealer did not think it necessary to update the catalogue’s frontispiece. Instead, Gersaint opted to reuse the design Boucher had provided for the previous year’s catalogue. As he explained:

\textit{The frontispiece of this Catalogue includes rather generally the total of what is included in the Sale, without being obliged to go into new detail when the Catalogue will do it with more precision. A eulogy of all these Curiosities surely would seem odd on my part; and I prefer to let the Public have the freedom to pass judgment themselves.}\textsuperscript{166}

Of course, what Gersaint does not mention here is that there were several advantages in reusing the image that had helped frame his business activities for polite society. Firstly, with only minor adjustments needed to accommodate the variations in text, the 1736 frontispiece would have been relatively inexpensive to reproduce.\textsuperscript{167}

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\textsuperscript{165} ‘L’Idée que je me suis formée, à été de ramasser dans le dernier voyage que je viens de faire en Hollande, une suite de curiositez de divers genres, qui pût amuser les Amateurs, & satisfaire les goûts differens. Comme j’ai trouvé à mon retour quelques acquifitions à faire, je les y ai jointes, & je crois que l’on pourra être attiré par la variété & la singularité des Morceau qui seront exposés à cette Vente.’ Edmé-François Gersaint, Catalogue d’une collection considérable de curiositez de différent genres (Paris: Prault fils, 1737), ‘Avertissement’. (no page numbers).

\textsuperscript{166} ‘Le frontispiece de ce Catalogue comprend asses généralement le total de ce que renferme la Vente, sans être oblige de retomber ici dans un nouveau detail que le Catalogue apprendra avec plus de précision. Un éloge de toutes ces Curiositez paraîtroit surement suspect de ma part; & j’aime mieux laisser au Public la liberté d’en porter lui-même son judgement.’ Ibid., ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).

\textsuperscript{167} While there was an obvious commercial advantage in reusing the Boucher’s design, any concerns Gersaint may have had in regard to production costs would prove unnecessary, as the 1737 sale achieved an impressive sum of 14,147 \textit{livres}—more than twice the amount raised at the previous year’s
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Secondly and more importantly, the reuse of the 1736 frontispiece created continuity between the two sales. This was essential if Gersaint was to maintain his reputation as a dealer of fine art and curiosity and consolidate this nascent market in natural history. By establishing a connection with the earlier sales, Gersaint was thus able to protect his existing clients and demonstrate continuity, whilst at the same time attract new collectors with similar aspirations.

Gersaint’s decision to reuse Boucher’s design for the 1736 frontispiece was also influenced by several external factors. In the intervening two years between the January sale of 1736 and Gersaint’s second auction in December 1737, Boucher had been busy building his reputation as one of the leading contemporary artist’s of his generation. 1737 also marks the year that Boucher was elected a full professeur at the Academy. That same year, he exhibited six paintings on a range of diverse subjects (all lost) at the first of the reviewed Salons. During this period, Boucher’s work also gained significance through the medium of print, with no less than fifty-one of his designs engraved by rising stars of the print world Laurent Cars (1699-1771) and Charles-Nicolas Cochin fils. This was an increase from the previous two years, when thirty-nine engravings after Boucher’s designs appeared. While this is still a significant number, only four of these were after existing works by Boucher with the sale. For details of the amount raised by Gersaint at the sales of the 1730s and 1740s, see Glorieux, "L’Enseigne de Gersaint", p. 561.

168 Boucher was made a full professor on July 6 1737, five months prior to the 1737 sale. See Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 19.

169 Audiences would have also been drawn to Maurice-Quentin de la Tour’s (1704-1788) pastel of Boucher’s wife Marie-Jeanne Buzeau (1716-1796), one of only two pastels shown at the Salon of 1737. La Tour’s Portrait of Madame Boucher is known only today through a photo of a copy of the original. For a discussion on the pictorial representation of Madame Boucher, see Bailey, ‘Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher (1716-96)’, passim. The original portrait is mentioned in the Goncourt’s entry on Boucher. See Goncourt, French Eighteenth-Century Painters, p. 96. On Boucher’s lost paintings from the Salon of 1737, see Laing, ‘Chronology’, pp. 19-20.

170 This is my calculation based on the information supplied in Laing, ‘Chronology’, pp. 18-20. On the development of print culture in France during the eighteenth century, see Victor Carlson, ed., Regency to Empire: French Printmaking, 1715-1814 (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1984).
rest engraved specifically for commissioned series such as *Oeuvres de Molière* (1735) and Pluche’s *Spectacle de la nature* (1735).¹⁷¹

Gersaint’s 1737 sale was also served by news that a second volume of the *Fontaines* series after Boucher’s designs had gone into production.¹⁷² Like the previous set of engravings, the second volume reinforced the ornamental relationship between shells and architecture in a market that was increasingly driven by the aesthetic components of the study of natural history. For collectors of Boucher’s works like the comte de Tessin, any connection between the *Fontaines* series and the designs for the 1736 and 1737 sales would have appeared a natural progression for Gersaint. Indeed, the success of the *Fontaines* series suggests that Boucher continued to play an indirect role in the active promotion of Gersaint’s business and, moreover, the direction of the visual culture of shells in mid eighteenth-century France.

**The sale of Bonnier de la Mosson**

Gersaint would reuse Boucher’s 1736 design just once more in 1745 as the frontispiece for the catalogue that accompanied the estate sale of the celebrated amateur collector, Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson (1702-1744) (plate 21).¹⁷³ The Bonnier de la Mosson sale was one of nine estate auctions organised by Gersaint during the 1740s.¹⁷⁴ All of these estates belonged to former clients of Gersaint’s with several, including Bonnier de la Mosson, appearing in the dealer’s list of the principal

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¹⁷¹ These comparisons are based on the information supplied in Laing’s chronology.

¹⁷² Announced in the *Mercure de France* in April 1737, the second volume of *Recueil de Fontaines* was engraved by Pierre Aveline. See Jean-Richard, *L’oeuvre gravé de François Boucher dans la collection Edmond de Rothschild*, pp. 82-83 (nos. 216-222).

¹⁷³ While the date of publication is listed as 1744, the catalogue was not in circulation until January the following year, when it was used to promote the two month long pre-sale viewing of Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection. For the purpose of this study, the frontispiece for the Bonnier de la Mosson catalogue will be referred to as the 1745 frontispiece.

¹⁷⁴ In addition to Bonnier de la Mosson’s sale (1745), Gersaint organised sales for Quentin de Lorangère (1744), Antoine de la Roque (1745), Louis II de Rochenchouart, duc de Mortemart (1746), Louis-Auguste Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis (1747), Nicolas Mahudel (1748), Charles Godefroy (1748), Charles Valois (1748), and M. Sévin (1749). This list represents a mix of doctors, financiers, officers of the court, and members of the lower aristocracy.
shell cabinets in mid eighteenth-century Europe (1736).\textsuperscript{175} Despite the fact that they were all eminent collectors in their own right, Bonnier de la Mosson’s sale remains the only one in which Gersaint reused Boucher’s design for the catalogue’s frontispiece. The reasons for this lie in the details of the collection itself, which was unparalleled in terms of size, contents, and organisation. To be sure, Bonnier de la Mosson’s sale would prove to be the largest and arguably most important sale of Gersaint’s career.\textsuperscript{176} Thus, it seems appropriate that the dealer would assign the estate of the late Bonnier de la Mosson an image that had become synonymous with Gersaint’s own trading practices.

With his collection of natural and artificial curiosities spread across 966 lots (many with multiple listings), the cabinet of Bonnier de la Mosson was considered by his contemporaries as ‘one of the richest and best assembled in Paris’.\textsuperscript{177} His taste for collecting came after his father’s death in 1726, when he inherited the post of Trésorier of the États du Languedoc, along with a sizeable fortune. This included the hôtel du Lude and the family château near Montpellier.\textsuperscript{178} During the 1730s, Bonnier de la Mosson carried out extensive renovations at his Paris residence in order to accommodate his growing collection of art and nature. The majority of work occurred on the first floor of the residence, where he installed nine purpose built wall cabinets,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Bonnier de la Mosson was one of twenty-two names that appear in Gersaint’s list of the principal shell collections in eighteenth-century Europe. See Gersaint, \textit{Catalogue raisonné de coquilles}, pp. 30-45.
  \item ‘un des plus riches et des mieux assortis de Paris.’ \textit{Journal de Trévoux} April 1745, p. 646. In the 1780 edition of his treatise on shells, d’Argenville described the collection as one of the best in Paris. See Dezallier d’Argenville, \textit{La Conchyliologie} (1780), vol. 1, p. 232.
  \item The hôtel du Lude, which ran along the rue Saint-Dominique and the faubourg Saint-Germain was destroyed in 1861 to accommodate the widening of what is now the Boulevard Saint-Germain. See C. R Hill, ‘The Cabinet of Bonnier de la Mosson’, \textit{Annals of Science} 43 (1986): 147-74, p. 152.
\end{itemize}
some of which were captured in a series of drawings by Jean-Baptiste Courtonne (1711-1781) from 1739. As Courtonne’s drawing of *Bonnier de la Mosson’s Second Natural History Cabinet* (plate 22) indicates, the collector’s cabinets were organised thematically, covering subjects such as chemistry, pharmacology, mechanical physics, anatomy, and of course natural history.\(^\text{179}\) Spanning across several rooms, these cabinets were connected by a series of pathways that allowed the space to be read overall as a themed galleria.

Bonnier de la Mosson’s passion for collecting was captured in a posthumous portrait from 1745 by Jean Marc Nattier (1685-1766) (plate 23). It depicts a relaxed and informally dressed Bonnier de la Mosson in one many rooms devoted to his collection of natural and artificial curiosities. The sitter is framed by visual references to his collection, including books, mechanically operated toys, and a selection of jars containing vitrified specimens.\(^\text{180}\) As Andrew McClellan has argued, Nattier’s portrait provides a foil for the 1736 frontispiece in that it puts into practice the idea of the elite amateur collector that Gersaint would ultimately seek to promote through his reuse of the artist’s design for the Bonnier de la Mosson catalogue.\(^\text{181}\)

Nattier’s inclusion of the unidentified books in the foreground of the portrait may have been understood by contemporary audiences as a reference to the collector’s involvement in the development of eighteenth-century French conchology. Bonnier de la Mosson, along with the comte de Tessin, were among twenty amateur collectors that helped finance the 1742 edition of A.-J. Dezallier d’Argenville’s *La

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\(^{179}\) For a breakdown of the cabinets, see Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson*, passim.

\(^{180}\) According to annotated notes found in the 1745 catalogue, a large number of glass vials and jars were bought on behalf of the Crown by the comte de Buffon (1707-1788), in his capacity as *intendant* of the Jardin du Roi.

Conchyliologie, the period’s most important guide to shell collecting after Gersaint’s 1736 catalogue (appendix 1). In the case of Bonnier de la Mosson, this involved covering the costs associated with engraving his collection of Nautilus shells, as well as a selection of well chosen Limaçons of the round mouth variety. In return, Bonnier’s shell collection was discussed at length in d’Argenville’s text, for which Boucher would also design the frontispiece.

While Bonnier de la Mosson’s involvement in the 1742 project and the subsequent connection with Boucher may have played a role in Gersaint’s decision to reuse the artist’s design for the catalogue, it is also likely that Gersaint was inspired by Bonnier’s selection of shells, arguably the highlight of the collection overall. As d’Argenville has confirmed, the bulk of the collection was preserved in a coquillier in the library on the first floor. Surrounded by an impressive collection of texts on shells and natural history in general, this large rectangular shaped oak cabinet (285 cm x 127 cm) formed the centerpiece of the room. It consisted of eighteen long flat drawers, which wrapped around the sides of the cabinet. The top of the coquillier was operated by two sliding wood panels that, when pulled back, revealed a large flatbed display case located within the cabinet’s cavernous interior. According to Gersaint, it contained over 1,000 rare and precious shells, including the prized Scalata shell,

182 For a detailed discussion on the circumstances surrounding the publication of the 1742 edition, see chapter two.
183 On Boucher’s design for the 1742 frontispiece, see chapter two.
184 Dezallier d'Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), p. 204.
185 Courtonne’s drawing, which is not to scale, shows the coquillier pushed to wall between two sets of French doors. However, we know from Gersaint and d’Argenville that the coquillier was placed in the centre of the room. See Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson, p. 200; and Dezallier d'Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), p. 204. For details of Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection of texts on natural philosophy, see Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson, pp. 203-208.
186 On the parallels between this and Boucher’s arrangement of shells at the Louvre, see chapter four.
thought to be the only one in existence in Paris at that time.\textsuperscript{187}

For Bonnier de la Mosson, the ability for his shell display to be both educational and pleasing to the eye provided a unifying approach to his collection.\textsuperscript{188} As Gersaint explained:

\textit{He was not happy just playing and recreating through sight of curious and agreeable things; but instead he wanted to obtain from these objects a more solid advantage by studying their nature, their differences, their species, their properties and their uses.}\textsuperscript{189}

Within the drawers of the \textit{coquillier}, for example, shells were divided into their respective families, separated by multiple compartments made of wood that had been wrapped in blue satin.\textsuperscript{190} The compartments satisfied two important roles within the collection. Firstly, they provided an internal structure for each of the drawers, which allowed these interior spaces to read scientifically. Secondly, they aimed to enhance the overall aesthetic of the display by offsetting the contrasting layers of white satin on which the shells rested. The interplay of variety and order found in the construction of the compartments was repeated in the placement of the shells, which were laid symmetrically in order to harmonise the diversity exhibited by the objects themselves. According to Gersaint, the effect of such an ‘artistic arrangement’ gave

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\textsuperscript{187} ‘La fameuse \textit{Scalata}, qui n’existe à Paris que dans ce Cabinet.’ Gersaint, \textit{Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson}, p. 174 and lot 747, pp. 192-194. Annotated notes in the 1745 catalogue reveal that the shell was sold to M. Freboule for 300 \textit{livres}. On the value of the \textit{Scalata} shell and others in this category, see Dance, \textit{Shell Collecting}, pp. 227-258.
\textsuperscript{188} It was for this reason that Gersaint generously referred to Bonnier de la Mosson in the 1736 catalogue as both a ‘Physicien’ and a ‘Curieux’, despite the fact that the financier had no official standing with the Académie Royale des Sciences. See Gersaint, \textit{Catalogue raisonné de coquilles}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{189} ‘qui ne se contente pas seulement de jouir & de se récréer par la vûë de choses curieuses & agréables; mais qui, voulant encore en tirer un avantage plus solide, cherche à se mettre en état de conoître leur nature, leurs differences, leurs especes, leurs proprietés & leurs usages.’ Gersaint, \textit{Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson}, ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).
\textsuperscript{190} Dietz, ‘Mobile Objects’, p. 173. On the construction of these compartments, see the 1742 edition of Dezallier d’Argenville, \textit{La Conchylologie} (1742), pp. 195-196; and the extract from Gersaint’s \textit{Catalogue raisonné de coquilles} (1736), reprinted in the \textit{Mercure de France}, Feb. 1736, pp. 305-308.
\end{flushright}
Writing elsewhere about the magnificent effect of Bonnier de la Mosson’s shell display, Gersaint noted that the collector’s arrangement was more ‘striking to the eye than one could imagine’. He later added that he had yet to come across a person who had not been ‘seized’ by the sight of such an effect. Thus, it is tempting to think that when Gersaint was writing about Bonnier de la Mosson’s shell collection, Boucher’s frontispiece was at the forefront of his mind. Indeed, the visual traditions that Bonnier de la Mosson engaged in when arranging his collection of shells was akin to the aesthetic strategies employed by Boucher in presenting his vision of collecting for the 1736 catalogue. In both instances, the artist and the collector have presented arrangements that sought to capture the attention of the viewer through subtle compositional ordering, and in the case of Bonnier’s mechanically operated coquillier, through the element of surprise.

The idea that Bonnier de la Mosson satisfied the vision of collecting that was suggested by Boucher in his design for the 1736 catalogue is supported by the fact that Gersaint did not use the image to promote any of his other estate sales during the 1740s. For instance, at the sales of other renowned collectors, such as Quentin de

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191 ‘ce qui donne tout à-fait l’idée d’un beau parterre varié par la vivacité & l’émail des couleurs différentes & opposées répandues sur les Coquilles qui s’y trouvent rangées artistement.’ Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson, p. 173. Gersaint’s comments highlight the already fluid relationship between shells and garden design during the eighteenth century.

192 ‘L’arrangement qu’a donné feu M. de la Mosson à ses Coquilles, forme le plus beau coup-d’œil que l’on puisse s’imaginer.’ Ibid., p. 173.

193 ‘Je n’exagere point dans cette description, & les termes dont je me ser s’ont point trop de force, puisque je n’ai procuré la vuë de ce Coquillier à personne qui n’ait été saisi d’admiration, &qui ne m’ait fait part de l’effet que cette vuë faisoit sur ses sens.’ Ibid., pp. 173-174.

194 Having only recently completed a similar estate sale for another celebrated amateur collector, Louis Quentin de Lorangère, Gersaint was under pressure to distinguish the two sales. As the the editors of the Mercure de France explained in an article published just prior to the Bonnier de la Mosson sale: ‘Le Public l’avait déjà nommé d’avance, ce qui justifie ce choix. Il y a tout lieu d’esperer que nous aurons de lui un Catalogue aussi exact de toutes les Curiosités dont ces Cabinets sont remplis, que le tems qu’on lui donnera pourra le lui permettre….On ne doubt point, au reste, que M. Gersaint ne se prête volontiers, suivant sa louable coûte, au désir de certains Curieux distingués, qui voudront joüir..."
Lorangère (1744), the chevalier, Antoine de La Roque (1745), and Louis-Auguste Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis (1747), Gersaint adopted a more generic approach when it came to the choosing a frontispiece for the accompanying catalogues. For each of these collectors, Gersaint settled on an engraving designed and executed by Charles-Nicolas Cochin fils (plate 24). Cochin’s image depicts an intimate gathering of unidentified gentlemen inspecting a collection of paintings, drawing and engravings. As McClellan has suggested, the scene most likely represents a preliminary viewing of the intended auction items.  

Cochin, however, was careful not to specify the location of the interior in which these figures are placed. This was due to the fact the Lorangère, La Roque and Fonspertuis sales were not held in Gersaint’s boutique, or in situ like Bonnier de la Mosson’s sale, but rather in various locations in and around Paris. Thus, the decision to abbreviate the location of the scene meant that the implied figure of the deceased host could be interchanged with the coming of each sale.

When viewed in the context of Gersaint’s estate sales, Boucher and Cochin’s designs can be understood as promoting each of their respective sales, yet in two very different ways. While Bonnier de la Mosson’s frontispiece draws on Boucher’s iconic image as a way of promoting the selection and arrangement of objects in the collection itself, Cochin’s image was employed to describe the tasteful manner in which these particular men collected. As Gersaint explained in the preface to the Angran de Fonspertuis catalogue:

*The various curiosities that Monsieur de Fonspertuis possessed are so well known that it is not necessary to explain their value at length here. His affable*
character, the courteous nature with which he received everyone whose love of beautiful things led them to him, the joy which he conveyed to those who shared his pleasures, the benefits of the chosen company that one could be sure of meeting…. All of this meant that he attracted many guests.  

In the case of Fonspertuis, it was not the type or number of objects collected, but rather the mode of connoisseurial conduct in which this collector engaged. Fonspertuis represented the kind of amateur collector that was more at home with the model of connoisseurship suggested by Watteau in his *L’Enseigne de Gersaint* (plate 14). This is significant in light of the parallels between Cochin’s frontispiece design and Watteau’s *L’Enseigne*. Indeed, like Watteau before him, Cochin’s image explored the issue of social spectacle through the relationship between the subject (the collector) and object (the collected). 

By comparison, Boucher’s design for the 1736 catalogue permits the same degree of social spectacle, yet does so by using an enhanced vision of nature as his model. With shells and other objects of natural history the primary focus of Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection, Gersaint must have perceived that a more specific mode of representation was necessary, one that pointed to Bonnier de la Mosson’s virtuosity as an accomplished collector of art and nature. Needless to say, the reuse of Boucher’s frontispiece was not entirely altruistic. It was also prompted by the dealer’s ambitions to establish continuity between his earlier stock sales and the great estate of Bonnier de la Mosson. This ensured that Gersaint’s commercial activities continued to be understood within a specific visual and material tradition, one that tied him to one of

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197 ‘Les différentes Curiosités que possède Monsieur de Fonspertuis, sont assez connues, sans être obligé de faire ici un long discours pour en établir le mérite, Son caractère aimable; l’urbanité avec laquelle il recevoit ceux que l’amour des belles choses attiroit chez lui; l’aisance qu’il sçavoit procurer à ceux qui venoient prendre part à son amusement; l’avantage d’une Compagnie de choix que l’on étoit toujours sur de recontner….. Tous ces motifs le saisoient visiter par tant de monde.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné,... de M. Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis,* ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).

198 I am building here on Andrew McClellan’s suggestion of a visual connection between these two works. See McClellan, ‘Watteau's Dealer’, p. 450.
the period’s most celebrated amateur collectors and, moreover, the agency of the increasingly popular and dynamic Boucher.

Similarly, the protracted use and reuse of the artist’s designs for the 1736 frontispiece and *À la Pagode* confirms Boucher’s role in promoting the new economy for shells and other natural curios that emerged in Paris during the 1730s. At the heart of Gersaint’s sale activities was Boucher, whose designs reflected the ambitions of an emerging generation of amateur collectors. When viewed in the context of earlier works such as Watteau’s *L’Enseigne*, Boucher’s designs for the 1736 frontispiece, *À la Pagode* and by extension *The Luncheon* and the Ensba drawing represent a turning point in both the French tradition of collecting and in the development of Boucher’s own style and artistic preferences. What is more, through his designs for Gersaint, Boucher embarked on what would prove to be a life-long relationship with shells and other objects of nature, one that would culminate with a personal collection so substantial that it would rival even that of the late great Bonnier de la Mosson.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ For a comparative analysis of the shell collections of Boucher and Bonnier de la Mosson, see chapter four.
Chapter II

*Conchyliologie to Conchyliomanie: In Search of a Shell Utopia*

Boucher’s work for Gersaint during the second half of the 1730s was instrumental in creating a visual culture of curiosity around shells both as collectable objects of natural history and as instruments of ornament. His involvement in these projects also reveal the artist’s evolving response to shells, one that incorporated the decorative agencies of both previous and contemporary uses of ornament and the ambitions of mid eighteenth-century amateur collectors, for whom shells had become highly visible symbols of *luxe*. Through his designs for Gersaint, Boucher introduced a new natural history aesthetic that successfully tied together the amateur collector’s interest in the study and collection of shells to established pictorial practices of *rocaille* ornament.

The artist’s response to emerging trends in this area would develop further when he was commissioned by the writer and collector A.-J. Dezallier d’Argenville to design the frontispiece for his highly anticipated treatise on shells (plate 3). 200

Published in 1742, d’Argenville’s *L’histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la Lithologie et la Conchyliologie*, or *La Conchyliologie* as it was later known, aimed to provide amateur collectors with practical information about the

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200 The details surrounding the publication of this work is complicated. It was first published in 1742 under the title *L’Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans deux de ses parties principales, la Lithologie et la Conchyliologie*. A second edition to the section on shells was published in separately in two volumes in 1757 as *L’Histoire naturelle éclaircie dans une de ses parties principales, la Conchyliologie, qui traite des coquillages de mer, de rivière et de terre*. Despite being published under this title, there is evidence to suggest that it was more widely referred to as *La Conchyliologie*. See *Journal de Trévoux*, March, 1758, pp. 702-722. A third and final edition was published posthumously in three volumes in 1780 as *La Conchyliologie, ou Histoire naturelle des coquilles de mer, d’eau douce, terrestres et fossiles, avec un traité de la zoomorphase, ou représentation des animaux qui les habitent*. 
study and collection of shells. Marking the first time in which the term *Conchyliologie* appeared in the title and frontispiece of a French work, the 1742 edition *La Conchyliologie* was responsible for formalising the practice of eighteenth-century conchology beyond the realm of Gersaint, transforming it into a legitimate sub-discipline of natural history.

With subsequent editions in 1757 and posthumously in 1780, d’Argenville’s *Conchyliologie* was widely circulated throughout the eighteenth century and read by amateur collectors and naturalists alike. Boucher’s illustration, which was engraved by Pierre-Quentin Chedel (1706-1763), was linked to all three editions of the text. The 1780 version also contained a description of Boucher’s own shell collection that readers enjoyed alongside the slightly retouched version of his original design for the 1742 frontispiece.

Boucher’s ongoing involvement in *La Conchyliologie*, both as a subject of discussion in one and author of all three of its frontispieces, speaks to the continuing relationship between text and image. Moreover, it reveals the stylistic traditions to which this particular study of naturalia belonged. D’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie* was the epitome of politeness, a manual for amateur collectors by a connoisseur of art.

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201 The text also contains a section on minerals, although this is comparatively smaller to d’Argenville’s dialogue on shells. For example, the mineral treatise includes ninety-one pages of text and five illustrated plates, whereas the section on shells spans over 288 pages and is accompanied by a further twenty-eight plates. The 1742 edition also offers two comprehensive glossaries on shell collecting.

202 According to Dance, even Linnaeus used the text to organise his collection. See Dance, *Shell Collecting*, p. 59.

203 This would be the second time Boucher’s collection was discussed in connection with d’Argenville. Indeed, the artist was singled out by d’Argenville in a separate publication on shell collecting, published in 1767. See Dezallier d'Argenville, *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative*, p. 312-313; and Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1780), vol. 1, p. 236. For analysis of d’Argenville’s response to Boucher’s collection, see chapter four of this thesis.

and nature. Writing in the preface to d’Argenville’s posthumous sale catalogue in 1766, the dealer Pierre Rémy explained:

_In 1736 the taste for natural history began to spread through Paris. It was M. Gersaint, known by his catalogues, who contributed the most. His public sales attracted many people: the Curious of different genres were flattered to find everything to satisfy or excite their taste. They formed cabinets but wanted to put them in order and thus needed a Book in French to address the matter._

As Rémy’s comments suggest, in the wake of the 1736 sale the shell market had exploded, with Gersaint’s clients now looking to d’Argenville to provide them with information on shells that addressed the concerns of the contemporary French collectors.

For d’Argenville, Boucher’s involvement in the project was critical to its success among his readers, the majority of whom were familiar with the artist and his work for Gersaint. In addition to the comte de Tessin, who can be linked to both Gersaint and d’Argenville, there were several other amateur collectors involved in the 1742 project found to have purchased shells from directly from Gersaint. For example, Jean de Jullienne and M. Sevin (d.1749) both acquired a large number of objects.

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205 In addition to his works on shells and other objects of natural history, d’Argenville was an associate member of the Société Royale des Sciences of Montpellier (1740), the Royal Society of London (1750), and the Académie of La Rochelle (1758). He also held the prestigious position of Maître des Comptes, which he acquired in 1733. For a brief introduction to d’Argenville, see Pierre Rémy, _Catalogue raisonné des tableaux, estampes, coquilles et autres curiosités; après le décès de feu Monsieur Dezallier d'Argenville, maître des comptes, & membre des Sociétés royales des sciences de Londres & de Montpellier._ (Paris: 1766), ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers). On d’Argenville’s rise to prominence, see Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen, ‘Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, un conchyliologue averti’, in _Coquillages et crustacés de la plage à la table: des grèves du Mont-Saint-Michel à la Baye de Vey._ (Saint-Vaast-la-Hougue: Musée Maritime de l’Île de Tatihou, 2003), p. 123; and Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen, ‘Dezallier d'Argenville, l'Encyclopédie et la Conchyliologie’, _Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie_ 24 (1998): 101-48, p. 101. I am grateful to Madame Pinault-Sørensen for sharing her notes with me.


207 The link with Gersaint was compounded by the fact that the dealer had used the 1736 catalogue to announce the forthcoming publication of _La Conchyliologie_, along with providing a favourable description of d’Argenville’s own shell collection.
shells at Gersaint’s 1736 sale. In turn, these collectors lent d’Argenville shells from their collections to be engraved for the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie* (appendix 1). In the case of Sevin, whose shell collection was auctioned off by Gersaint in 1749, five very fine *Volutes* purchased at the 1736 sale were the same shells to appear on an engraved plate in the 1742 edition. Even d’Argenville used Gersaint’s 1736 sale to build his collection, with the author purchasing a range of new shells at a cost of 225 livres.

Commissioning Boucher to design the frontispiece for the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie* thus created a sense of continuity with Gersaint’s earlier catalogue, one that would have been appreciated by the comte de Tessin and Jean de Julienne, both of whom were patrons of Boucher’s work. Julienne, for example, owned a number of works by the artist, including various paintings and drawings, as well as engravings and porcelain after Boucher’s designs. The close ties operating between the artist and this network of collectors, dealers and connoisseurs suggests that Boucher’s involvement in the 1742 project was more than just a measure of artistic

208 Between them, Julienne and Sevin purchased fifty-three lots of shells at the 1736 sale, at a combined cost of 1,050 livres. For Julienne’s purchases, see Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, lot 41, p. 78; lots 57, 61, 68 & 76, pp. 82-85; lot 186, p. 103; lots 205 & 207, p. 106; lot 216, p. 108; lots 244, 254, 256 & 259, pp. 110-111 and lot 414, p. 132. For Sevin’s purchases, see Ibid., lots 1-2, pp. 62-63; lot 10, p. 69; lot 22, p. 72; lots 34 & 35, pp. 75-76; lots 42, 44, 49-50, pp. 78-79; lot 58, p. 82; lots 70, 72 & 75, pp. 84-85; lots 78, 81 & 84, pp. 86-87; lot 98, p. 89; lot 112, p. 90; lots 117 & 120, p. 91; lot 147, pp. 98-99; lots 179 & 181, p. 103; lot 201, p. 105; lot 204, p. 106; lot 229, p. 109; lots 250, 253 & 265, p. 111-112; lot 293, p. 115; lots 315, 319, 322 & 328, p. 119-121; lots 346 & 350, pp. 123-124; lot 407, p. 131. They also paid for the cost of the engravings.

209 The *Volutes* were highly praised by Gersaint, one of which he described as ‘parfaite’. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, lot 10, p. 69; lot 34, p. 75; lot 42, p. 78; lot 322, p. 120. Sevin’s *Volutes* can be seen in Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), plate 15.

210 Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 35-36. D’Argenville’s purchases at the 1736 sale are listed as follows; lot 30, p. 74; lot 131, pp. 94-95; lot 133, p. 95; lots 137 & 139, pp. 96-97; lot 159, p. 100; lot 238, p. 110; lot 287, pp. 114-115; lot 358, pp. 124-125; lots 374 & 376, p. 126; lot 405, p. 131; lot 425, p. 134.

taste. Rather, it was a barometer by which d’Argenville’s *Conchylialogie* was identified and judged.

While d’Argenville capitalised on Boucher’s previous work for Gersaint, the decision to commission him to design the frontispiece was also reflective of Boucher’s rising reputation as a respected artist and purveyor of the modern taste. Since the publication of Gersaint’s trade card in 1740, Boucher had been busy with several royal commissions, including four overdoors for the newly installed Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothèque du Roi, as well as three pictures for Marie Anne de Bourbon, the princesse de Conti’s (1666-1739) former château at Choisy. Boucher had also recently completed four *Poséies* for the secretary of the Danish embassy in Paris. These were sent, along with a large number of other French works, to the Christianborg Castle in Copenhagen, where Christian VI (1699-1746) was undergoing a major renovation of the royal palace.

Boucher’s imagery had also become increasingly well known through the medium of reproduction. Announcements in the *Mercure de France* of engravings after designs by Boucher appeared frequently in the intervening years between the publication of Gersaint’s 1736 catalogue and d’Argenville’s 1742 text. During this same period, work had begun at the Beauvais tapestry factory on several designs after Boucher under its new director Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755). For d’Argenville,

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213 Following the death of the princesse de Conti in 1739, the château was acquired by Louis XV. Boucher would paint a further twelve paintings for Louis XV at Choisy. Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 22. 214 Ibid., p. 22; Jean-Richard, *L’oeuvre gravé de François Boucher dans la collection Edmond de Rothschild*, pp. 925-928. 215 On the role reproductive prints played in the construction of Boucher’s artistic identity, see Scott, ‘Reproduction and Reputation: ‘François Boucher’ and the Formation of Artistic Identities’, pp. 91-132. 216 Laing, ‘Chronology’, pp. 18-22. 217 These would include works from the four part series known as *Fêtes de village à l’italienne*, as well as *Psyché conduite par Zéphire dans le Palais de l’Amour*—the first in a set of three tapestries detailing the *Story of Psyche*. The decision to invite Boucher submit the preliminary paintings for *Fêtes de village à l’italienne* occurred in November in 1737, with the first weaving taking place the
all of this made Boucher an attractive candidate, whose expanding artistic agency promised to locate the frontispiece within specific visual tradition, one that signalled to the reader that *La Conchyliologie* met with the current standards of aesthetic taste.²¹⁸

Not surprisingly, Boucher’s involvement in *La Conchyliologie* resulted in the book being considered a collector’s item in its own right. This is evident from a spectacular hand-coloured copy of the 1757 edition, now preserved in the American Museum of Natural History in New York (plate 25). According to the inscription on the front cover, it once belonged to the prominent Parisian lawyer Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes (1721-1794).²¹⁹ Further analysis reveals that Malesherbes arranged at considerable expense to have his copy painted by the artist Jacques de Favanne de Montcereville (1716-1770).²²⁰ Together with his son, Favanne was responsible for engraving the plates for all three editions of *La Conchyliologie*, as well as preparing the posthumous 1780 version. The fact that Malesherbes went to such lengths to have the book transformed into an independent product of French luxe speaks not only to the popularity of d’Argenville’s text, but also to the authority of following year. Work on *Psyche* series would begin shortly after this in 1741. Ibid., p. 20-22. On the tapestries, see Kathryn Hiesinger, 'The Sources of François Boucher's "Psyche" Tapestries', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 72 no. 314 (1976): 7-23.

²¹⁸ It is possible that d’Argenville perceived he had a personal affiliation with the artist. Like Boucher, d’Argenville was formally trained in the arts, having studied at the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* under its then head Roger de Piles (1635-1709), and later with the architect Jean-Baptiste Alexandre Le Blond (1679-1719) and engraver Bernard Picart (1673-1733). His talents as a draughtsman, together with his relationship with Le Blond, led to an interest in garden design. This culminated in 1709, with the anonymous publication of *La théorie et la pratique du jardinage*, the first of several works that addressed the role of the arts in nature.

²¹⁹ Malesherbes’s posthumous sale catalogue reveals that he was also in possession of Gersaint’s 1736 catalogue as well as several other eighteenth-century sale catalogues, inventories and treatises on natural history. See, Jean-Luc Nyon, *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu Chrétien-Guillaume Lamoignon-Malesherbes* (Paris: Nyon, 1797), lot 1955, p. 159.

²²⁰ Jacques de Favanne de Montcereville is credited as the artist responsible for painting Malesherbes’s copy.
Boucher’s image, which allowed the book to function as a decorative object in its own right.  

While d’Argenville was aware of the advantages in enlisting Boucher’s help to promote La Conchyliologie, it was also necessary to distinguish the text from the wider activities of Gersaint. Unlike the 1736 catalogue, La Conchyliologie was not promoting any one particular sale. Rather, it provided collectors with a complete illustrated guide to the study and collection of shells. Through text and illustrations, d’Argenville guided the reader in the formation of a tasteful and knowledgeable shell cabinet in this pre-Linnaean era of eighteenth-century French conchology. He provided information on everything from selecting, cleaning and storing shells, to engraved plates that revealed the best arrangements for the twenty-five familial groups the author recommended collecting. Writing about La Conchyliologie in the preface to d’Argenville’s 1766 sale catalogue, the dealer Pierre Rémy noted that it was the foundation on which ‘the most beautiful cabinets’ in Paris were built.  

The ability to distinguish La Conchyliologie from contemporary sale catalogues was important for d’Argenville’s readers, many of whom were looking for a text that addressed the concerns of amateur collectors in a manner that was altogether separate from the reality associated with the commercial trade under Gersaint. Although Gersaint’s system of public sales had opened up the market for shells and other curios, it was met by an ever increasing demand for objects, one that saw the amateur collector’s exhaustive passion for accumulation become the subject of debate among collectors.  

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222 ‘Cet Ouvrage a donné l’être à tous les beaux Cabinets que renferme cette Capitale.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné…. de feu Monsieur Dezallier d’Argenville, ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers).  
period commentators.\textsuperscript{224} Thus, in order to distance themselves from the conspicuous facts surrounding the sale process, some amateur collectors sought to ritualise the experience through alternative methods of exchange—both real and imagined.\textsuperscript{225}

In response to these tensions, Boucher’s illustration depicts a fanciful vision of mid eighteenth-century natural history, one in which shells, corals, minerals and other natural curiosities are framed within a mythological context that presents shell collecting as a gallant subject and worthy of aristocratic leisure. The composition centres on the figures of a siren and Triton, who Ovid identified as having ‘his shoulders barnacled with sea shells’.\textsuperscript{226} Tucked safely in the calmer waters of an inlet, Triton together with his more passive counterpart are shown bearing gifts from nature’s vast and abundant sea.\textsuperscript{227} In this way, Boucher not only placed d’Argenville’s \textit{Conchyliologie} within a visual and conceptual framework that his audience would have appreciated and understood, he also challenged the means by which amateur collectors achieved aristocratic propriety, one of the cornerstones of elite representation during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{228}

By positioning d’Argenville’s \textit{Conchyliologie} outside the mainstream interests in the new economy for shells, Boucher successfully distanced the project from the commercial activities of the dealer. Moreover, he allowed for the text to be introduced

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\textsuperscript{224} On the collector’s desire for accumulation and the role this played in establishing a boundary between amateur collectors and connoisseurs, see Louis A. Oliver, ‘Curieux, Amateurs and Connoisseurs: Layman and the Fine Arts in the Ancien Régime’ (Ph.D. dissertation, John Hopkins University, 1976), pp. 21-42, (especially his discussion on p. 41).

\textsuperscript{225} For further analysis on alternative avenues for forming a collection during this period, see chapter three.


\textsuperscript{227} On the role gifts played in the formation of an amateur collector’s natural history collection, particularly as it relates to Boucher’s own collection, see chapter three.

as a modern work of natural history. Indeed, *La Conchyliologie* joined the canon of works on shells and natural history published in Europe during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Most notable among these was Martin Lister’s (1638-1712) *Historia Conchyliorum* (1685-1692), which had set the standard for the European approach to conchology in this pre-Linnaean era of natural history. However, as Boucher was well aware, d’Argenville’s interest in the relationship between art and nature was not only central in the formation of his response to shell collecting, it was also what set him apart from other naturalists of his generation, in particular Lister, whose work d’Argenville claimed was deliberately confusing for readers.229

In fact, d’Argenville’s *Conchyliologie* had more in common with the work of the Italian Jesuit scholar and amateur collector Filippo Bonanni (1658-1723), whose 1681 publication *Ricreatione dell’occhio e della mente* is thought to be the first book devoted entirely to shells. As the title suggests, Bonanni’s text focused on instruction through entertainment, the methodology for which was grounded in the late seventeenth- century and early eighteenth-century preoccupation with the eye and its role in the acquisition of knowledge.230 Through observation, Bonanni encouraged readers to study the formal composition of more than 450 different species identified by the author, which he organised across 106 engraved plates.

Like d’Argenville, Bonanni’s emphasis on the visual encounter with shells was also tied to his interest in the arts. In particular, the newly imported Chinese lacquer

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229 In addition to his work on shells, d’Argenville published several other texts on art and nature, including *La théorie et la pratique du jardinage* (1709) and *l’Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* (1745-62), for which Boucher also designed the frontispiece. D’Argenville’s impression of Lister is recorded in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*, pp. 113-114.

230 On the role of the eye in the development of eighteenth-century conchology, see Dietz, ’Mobile Objects’, pp. 365-367.
that had begun arriving in Europe from the late seventeenth century via the supercargoes of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC). Bonanni would later record his impressions (including recipes for imitation) in *Trattato sopra la Vernice* (1720), a text which is still is considered one of the earliest and most comprehensive studies of Chinese lacquer in Europe.²³¹

Bonanni *Ricreatione* enjoyed immediate success and went through several editions during the author’s lifetime. By far the most popular edition was the 1684 Latin translation (*Recreatio Mentis et Oculi*), which according to Gersaint was ‘available in most libraries in Paris’.²³² The 1684 edition also included six additional plates featuring shells artistically arranged in the manner of Guiseppe Arcimboldo’s (1527-1593) grotesques (plate 26). The faces, which are composed entirely of shells, corals and other marine plant life, call attention to the artifice of these objects, highlighting the fluid relationship between shells as collectable objects of natural history and as motifs for ornament.

The frontispiece published with 1684 edition was also well known among eighteenth-century audiences (plate 27). Designed by Italian artist Giovanni Francesco Venturini (1650-1710), it depicts a young noble, presumably Bonanni, kneeling on the shore of a distant or imagined ocean. In one hand, he holds up a snail shell to the young woman on his left who is busy contemplating the two pearls attached to the nacreous interior of an oyster shell. With the other, he gestures to the triton on his right, who struggles under the weight of shells that he delivers; gifts from

²³² ‘Cette traduction même a été vuë entre les mains d’un Libraire à Paris.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 49.
nature’s vast and abundant sea. In the background and in the decorative cartouche above, Bonanni is aided further by a group of tritons and his fictive guide Neptune, who is seen rising triumphantly on his shell chariot behind him. Together these mythological figures guide Bonanni through the imaginative landscape and, moreover, deliver him safely home where he will turn over his findings to his readers, who are embodied in the work through the contemplative figure of the female muse.

Bonanni’s escape into the fictive landscape is framed within the limits of another important seventeenth-century treatise on the exploration of nature published twenty years earlier.233 Written by his mentor, the German philosopher Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), Subterranean World (1664) marks a transitional moment in the life of its author. In it, Kircher recalls the life-changing journey that took him away from the sanctuary of his hieroglyphic studies in Rome and into the treacherous and untamed lands of Southern Italy in the late 1630s. During these years, Kircher witnessed a series of natural disasters including volcanic eruptions at Mounts Etna, Stromboli and Vesuvius, as well as the Calabrian earthquake that devastated the region in 1638.234 Through illustrations and text, Subterranean World reveals the frightening details of Kircher’s journey, in particular, the 1637 eruption at Mount Etna which he likened to descent into ‘Vulcan’s furnace’.235

The determination of Kircher’s plight into nature is captured in the frontispiece published with the second edition of Subterranean World (1665) (plate 28).236 Set in

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233 My analysis of this work is indebted to Paula Findlen’s interpretation of Kircher and Bonanni’s frontispieces. See Paula Findlen, Possessing Nature, pp. 188 & 339.
234 Ibid., pp. 184-185.
235 As Paula Findlen has noted, the analogy of Vulcan’s furnace was not unique to Kircher. Ibid., pp. 184-187.
236 The 1664 and 1665 editions were originally published as a two volume set. In 1678, Kircher announced a third volume in which he indicated that he viewed the earlier publications as two separate editions. See Paula Findlen, 'The Last Man Who Knew Everything or Did He?: Athanasius Kircher,
the scholar’s studio in Rome, the image depicts the interruption of Kircher by Mercury, the god of mediation and divine intervention. Identified by the wing tipped snake staff that he carries in his right hand, Mercury is seen delivering Kircher the news of his destiny. It is a message that will ultimately lead him to abandon his hieroglyphic studies in order to pursue scenes in nature such as the one pictured in the window above.237 Accompanying Mercury on his visit to Kircher’s studio is the figure of a Christian deity, who communicates his support by gently placing his left hand on his companion’s back. His presence provides an important counterpoint to Mercury’s mythic character, as it signals to Kircher and his readers that the Jesuit’s destined voyage into nature was one of divine intention.

Kircher’s pilgrimage into nature, both real and imagined, had a formative effect on Bonannni, whose response to nature was derived from a similar combination of exploration and collection. What is more, his devotion to Kircher led to his appointment as curator of the Kircher Musuem in Rome, the details of which he published in *Musaeum Kircherianum* in 1709.238 Under Bonannni’s direction, the Kircher Museum, which also housed an impressive collection of shells, was revived and its legacy restored in the minds of eighteenth-century amateur collectors and naturalists alike.239 Thus, for d’Argenville and other eighteenth-century French shell enthusiasts, Bonannni and by extension Kircher represented a model of connoisseurship to which he and his readers could aspire.

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238 Bonannni was appointed curator in 1698. Located in the Jesuit College in Rome, Kircher’s collection was home a large number of artificial and natural curiosities. It also housed many of Kircher’s inventions, including the magic lantern which has been attributed to Kircher.
239 ‘Boucher’ is listed as the purchaser of Bonnier de la Mosson’s copy of *Musaeum Kircherianum* in the 1745 sale catalogue. However, in light of the fact that his name does not appear next to any other lots, it is most likely a reference to the Abbé Boucher, who is listed extensively as a buyer throughout the catalogue.
D’Argenville’s connection with these authors is significant, as it is within the artistic and literary paradigm of Bonanni’s *Recreatio* and Kircher’s *Subterranea World* that Boucher visualised his frontispiece for the 1742 text. Indeed, through the deployment of similarly styled mythological guides in the form of a siren and Triton, d’Argenville’s readers are taken into the imaginative landscape where they are presented with a diverse and seemingly endless supply of shells, minerals, and other marine treasures. Confronted by nature’s bounty, the viewer is caught in a moment of discovery, similar to the one experienced by both Kircher and Bonanni. In this way, Boucher not only placed the text within a cultural framework that his audience would have understood and enjoyed, but he also seems to suggest that the reader’s engagement with mid eighteenth-century conchology was part of a much larger pilgrimage, as undertaken by Kircher, Bonanni and now d’Argenville.

Boucher’s attempt to recast the naturalist’s plight into nature within the realm of the eighteenth-century amateur collector is further revealed in his decision to use the figure of Triton as the reader’s primary mythological guide. As the only son of Bonanni’s fictive guide Neptune, Triton resided with his parents in an underwater palace decorated with the type of riches seen in the shell cartouche in the centre of the composition.240 Rising up from the sea, Triton gives the impression he has travelled to the reader’s fictional grotto in order to deliver gifts from his father’s palace. Oscillating between these two worlds, Boucher’s Triton is thus emblematic of the reader’s journey into the imaginary landscape. Moreover, it represents the evolution of knowledge from Bonanni’s first attempt in *Recreatio* to d’Argenville’s more complete investigation, sixty-one years later.

There are further similarities in the dichotomy of movement between the central

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figures in each of the frontispieces. For example, like the fictive Bonanni and his muse, the active pose Boucher’s Triton appears in stark contrast to the more passive body of the siren who is pictured with her eyes downcast. This passivity imbues an erotic tone to the work, one commonly associated with Boucher’s oeuvre. However, when viewed in the context of Venturini’s frontispiece, it can also be interpreted as part of a more ambitious pictorial program that entices the reader into the fictive landscape as an active participant instead of a voyeur. Boucher’s passive siren thus aims to embody rather than seduce the reader, rendering her an updated version of the contemplative muse in Venturini’s earlier frontispiece.

In addition to forging a thematic connection with Bonanni and Kircher’s texts, Boucher also maintained a strong compositional link between his design for La Conchylologie and Venturini’s illustration for Recreatio. Like Venturini, Boucher’s treatment of shells is separated into two distinct areas within the work. These pictorial divides work to highlight the defining aspects of conchology, namely the study and the collection of shells. The first area concerns the shells and other marine plant life that appear in the centre of each composition. Together they represent the objects that are in the process of being collected directly from nature. However, while Boucher pictures an imaginary delivery from nature, Venturni has chosen instead to present the shells in this section as allegorical motifs, in the form of a shell chariot for Neptune and conch horns for his triton aids. Represented in this way, the shell acts as a signifier for the process of collecting and is thus understood as emblematic of the journey that lies ahead.

If the shells in the centre of Boucher and Venturini’s compositions represent the selection process, then the objects depicted on the shoreline in the foreground of both
works refers to those items that have already been collected from nature’s vast sea. While Venturini has restricted his selection to shells, Boucher, by comparison, shows a range of objects relating to the study of natural history, including shells, corals, minerals, stones, turtles, snakes, fish, and other marine plant life. The inclusion of these objects is indicative of a more modern mode of contemplation in which the study of shells and natural history in general was not only more familiar to eighteenth-century audiences, but also thanks to Gersaint, increasingly accessible within the domestic sphere. Thus, by including objects associated with the amateur collector’s accumulation of naturalia, Boucher made d’Argenville appear more inclusive in his exploration and study of natural history.

While the similarities in the compositional handling of the objects on the foreshore draw attention to the parallels between Bonanni and d’Argenville’s texts, in their reception these makeshift collections communicate two very different meanings. For example, the disorderly arrangement of the shells in the foreground of Venturini’s frontispiece refers to the indiscriminate but everlasting and abundant cycle of nature. This is keeping with Bonanni’s Jesuit training and his belief in God as nature’s resourceful provider. However, it may also have been influenced by Bonanni’s defence of the Aristotelian position of the spontaneous generation of molluscs, which came under increasing attack during the second half of the seventeenth century.241

Comparatively, the collated objects in the foreground of Boucher’s illustration are a visual trope for the principles of collecting that d’Argenville introduced in his text. Indeed, the neatly arranged groups on the shore refer to d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode*, a system for the identification and display of shells within the domestic cabinet.\textsuperscript{242} Based on the work of the French botanist and traveller Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656-1708), d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode* identified shells by judging the object’s external visual character.\textsuperscript{243} According to d’Argenville, shells represented such diversity in nature that ‘one was obliged to find the particular details of each’.\textsuperscript{244} This pre-Linnaean approach to taxonomy saw d’Argenville divide his collection of shells into three aesthetically different categories, namely univalves, bivalves, and multivalves. Within each class, shells were separated into their respective familial units, the criteria for which was also shaped by aesthetic concerns.

In addition to providing amateur collectors with a system for identifying shells, d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode* also informed readers on the most appropriate rituals for tasteful display. This was based was on the author’s belief that the beauty exhibited by nature could be harnessed, even improved, through the application of artistic principles. Evidence of d’Argenville’s claim for order in nature through the harmonisation of pictorial aesthetics can be seen in each of the thirty-three illustrated plates that accompanied the 1742 text. For example, a plate depicting a family of nautilus shells from Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection (plate 29), shows how they have been organised within their respective family unit, taking into account formal

\textsuperscript{242} The details of d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode* are outlined in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*, pp. 231-396.

\textsuperscript{243} Pitton de Tournefort’s 1694 treatise on plants was the first work to clearly define the separation of a plant’s genus and species. This distinction would pave the way for the Linnaean system of binominal nomenclature, published more than half a century later. See Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, *Eléments de botanique, ou Méthode pour reconnaître les Plantes* 3 vols. (Paris: 1694).

\textsuperscript{244} ‘Quoiqu’on puisse dire en général que Presque toutes les Coquilles sont des Limaçons, des Volutes, des Huitres ou des Moules, la Nature a tant diversifié ces quatre genres, qu’on se trouve oblige de les detailer plus particulièrement.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), p. 117.
artistic conventions of symmetry, variety, order, and contrast.\textsuperscript{245} The small nautilus shell in the middle of the plate marked D, for instance, provides an aesthetic counterpoint for the two shells shown in reverse below (objects E and F).\textsuperscript{246} In addition to balancing the scale of the shells represented in the plate, shell D also acts as an interchange between the group of shells shown in contrasting positions on the lower half of the plate.

Arranging shells in this way not only revealed the collector’s knowledge of the object’s genealogy, but it also demonstrated an understanding of the conventions of taste that dictated the debate on aesthetics and the beauty of art.\textsuperscript{247} Indeed, in his posthumously published article for the \textit{Encyclopédie}, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755) argued that taste is apparent:

\begin{quote}
Wherever symmetry is useful to the soul and can further its functions, the soul finds it pleasant; but wherever it is useless, it is tedious because it destroys variety. Objects that we perceive one after the other must be varied because our soul sees them without difficulty; those perceived at a glance, on the other hand, must have symmetry. Thus, since we perceive at a glance the façade of a building, a flower bed or a temple, these are arranged symmetrically and delight the soul by the ease with which it can take in the entire object at once.\textsuperscript{248}
\end{quote}

For Montesquieu, the thoughtful application of symmetry and variation gave way to a beautiful and tasteful display. Moreover, it allowed for the objects in question to be

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\item According Emma Spary, the first French symmetrical shell plate appeared in Claude de Molinet’s (1620-1687) \textit{Cabinet de la Bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève}, published in 1692. Spary, ‘Scientific Symmetries’, p. 5.
\item The plate is accompanied by a legend. Dezallier d’Argenville, \textit{La Conchyliologie} (1742), pp. 250-251 (plate 8).
\item On the extent to which this type of shell imagery contributed to the contemporary debate on aesthetics, see Spary, ‘Scientific Symmetries’, p. 16; and Dietz, ‘Mobile Objects’, pp. 371-372.
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perceived as a unified whole.\textsuperscript{249} Such practices, argued Yves André in his \textit{Essai sur le beauté} (1741), ensured that the profusion of each element ‘does not create confusion’, or in the case of the amateur collector, risk the eye from suffering what d’Argenville described as ‘fatigue’.\textsuperscript{250}

D’Argenville’s mention of the term ‘fatigue’ is significant, as it is what separated in his mind the approach of the naturalists from that of amateur shell collectors like Boucher and Bonnier de la Mosson. According to d’Argenville, naturalists showed little regard for symmetry, mixing the ‘the big with the small’, whereas amateur collectors valued above all ‘the pleasures of the eye, often sacrificing methodical order for a the sake of varied arrangements…. more beautiful to the eye than can be imagined’.\textsuperscript{251} Thus for d’Argenville, the actions of an amateur collector was justified when aesthetic relationships between objects were made the primary concern.

The importance of artistic principles to the arrangement of shells within the domestic sphere underscores the fertile relationship between art and nature in this era of conchology. Just as a painting had the ability to please and surprise through subtle compositional ordering, so too did a drawer of shells. As Gersaint concluded:

\textit{In effect, nothing is more seductive than the sight of a well-ordered drawer of shells; the most beautiful flowerbed is not more agreeable, and the eye is so

\textsuperscript{249} According to Montesquieu, the correlation and interdependence of objects was an essential condition to understanding and viewing works of beauty. Idem.
\textsuperscript{250} ‘qu’un ouvrage est d’autant plus parfait, que l’ordonnance en est plus dégagée; que, si l’on compose un dessin de plusieurs pièces différentes, égales ou inégales, en nombre pair ou impair, elles y doivent être tellement distribuées, que la multitude n’y cause point de confusion.’ Yves M. André, \textit{Essai sur le beau ou l’on examine en quoi consiste précisément le beau dans le physique, dans le moral, dans les ouvrages d’esprit et dans la musique} (Paris: Ferra aîné, 1810), p. 24.
\textsuperscript{251} ‘Les Naturalistes disposer les Coquilles par classes & par families; c’est sand contredit la meilleure manière & la plus méthodique; ils mêlent, suivant ce principe, les brutes avec les belles, les grandes avec les petites, de forte que l’œil en est quelquefois fatigué. Les curieux, au contraire, donnant tout aux plaisirs des yeux, sacrifient l’ordre méthodique, pour former des compartimens variés…..c’est le plus beau coup d’œil qu’on puisse imaginer.’ Dezallier d'Argenville, \textit{La Conchyliologie} (1742), p. 195.
bedazzled, that it hardly knows where to rest or what to admire most: the perfect form of one, or the vibrant colours of another; this one’s marvellous symmetry, or that one’s harmonious irregularity. In the end, everything is stunning, right down to the most minute example whose perfection can only be grasped with a microscope, which makes you observe beauties that you would never have expected and which forces you to declare that “nature is never grander than in the littlest of things.”

For Gersaint and others, the efforts of the amateur collector was akin to that of the artist whose responsibility it was to create arrangements that privileged the viewer. This was in keeping with eighteenth-century ideas of artistic representation. In particular, the principles outlined by the art theorist Roger de Piles, who encouraged artists to arrange their subject in manner that ‘frees the shapes from confusion, and ensures that what one represents is clearer, more sensible and more capable of attracting and arresting the Spectator’. According to d’Argenville, the corollary between the amateur collector and artist was ultimately a question of skill. For in the end, he argued, ‘it is always taste that decides’.

Boucher too highlights the symbiotic relationship between the role of art and the arrangements of an enlightened amateur collector. For example, his careful ordering of shells, fish, corals and minerals on the shore in the foreground of the 1742 frontispiece emphasised the need for symmetry and variation within individual

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252 ‘En effet, rien n’est plus séduisant que la vue d’un tiroir de coquilles bien émaillées; le parterre le mieux fleuri n’est pas plus agréable, & l’œil est frappé si merveilleusement, que l’on a de la peine à pouvoir se fixer: l’embaras est de sçavoir ce que l’on doit admirer le plus, ou de la vivacité des couleurs de celle-là; de la simétrie merveilleuse de cette autre, ou de l’irrégularité harmonieuse de cette dernière. Enfin tout étonne, jusqu’à la plus petite de laquelle vous ne pouvez quelquefois découvrir la perfection que par le secours d’un microscope, qui vous y fait observer des beautés dont vous ne l’auriez jamais soupçonnée, & vous force à vous écrier que “La nature n’est jamais plus grande que dans ses plus petites choses”’. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 7. Gersaint is referring here to Pliny the elder’s statement, ‘natura nunquam major quam in minimis’ sometimes quoted as ‘natura nusquam magis quam in minimis tota’. See Pliny, *Naturalis historiae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), book 11, 1:4.

253 ‘elle tire les figures de la confusion, & fait que ce que l’on représente est plus net, plus sensible & plus capable d’appeller, & d’arrêter son spectateur.’ Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris: Arkstee E. Merkus, 1767), p. 76.

arrangements, and in the case of his overall composition, as a unified whole. In this way, Boucher’s arrangements on the shore in the foreground not only call attention to the principles of d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode*, but also to the artifice of his own art making. What is more, by creating a representation of pictorial harmony in nature, Boucher seems to suggest that by following d’Argenville’s blueprint for installing the *Nouvelle methode*, readers could achieve similar results of artistic perfection for display within their own homes.

When viewed in this context, the reader’s journey into Boucher’s fictive landscape is in keeping with the wider aims of d’Argenville’s text. For in addition to providing information about the study of shells, *La Conchyliologie* operated as a how-to-guide for aspiring collectors. Through illustrations and text, d’Argenville guided the reader in his or her efforts towards establishing a collection that could effectively communicate the owner’s knowledge of natural history and capacity for wealth and taste. To this end, the 1742 edition of *Conchyliologie* not only successfully updated Bonanni’s popular 1684 text, but it also represents the first attempt by a French author to provide an illustrated manual for the amateur collector of natural history for whom these types of curiosities were now considered a direct avenue for expressing upward social mobility.

*An exotic elsewhere*

While Boucher drew on the artistic and literary paradigms of Bonanni and Kircher’s texts to frame *La Conchyliologie* within an established canon of natural history, the artist also employed a number of other pictorial devices that addressed concerns specific to eighteenth-century audiences. If d’Argenville’s text aimed to update Bonanni’s earlier work, then Boucher needed to contemporise the visual
landscape by placing it within a modern setting that his viewers would have recognised and appreciated. For this, Boucher would turn to another important marine mythology, one he had completed for the comte de Tessin just two years earlier.

In what would be Boucher’s first painted treatment of the subject and a precursor to his design for the 1742 frontispiece, _The Triumph of Venus_ (plate 4) depicts a jubilant goddess reclining on a shell chariot that rests on a rocky outcrop of her mythological birthplace of Cythera. Boucher’s Venus is attended by a court of seductively posed naiads, frolicking cupids, and five youthful looking tritons whose role it is to support the assembled group by raising or calming the seas as needed. Accordingly, the tritons are pictured with twisted conch and clam shells, symbols of their ability to control the sea at a moment’s notice. While the tritons reference to the movement is represented allegorically, it is also central to the overall conceptual and visual play of the work. Starting with the figure blowing his twisted conch shell on the left, the tritons weave strategically through the group of languishing naiads in a pattern that mimics the rhythmic flow of the waves seen lapping the edges of the outcrop.

The sense of movement created through the active bodies of the tritons provides a foil for the comparatively more passive bodies of the naiads. This dynamic not only attests to Boucher’s artistic virtuosity, but it also reveals a narrative sub-plot that would have a bearing on his design for the 1742 frontispiece. Indeed, the interplay between the naiads and tritons in the 1740 picture is explored further through the figure of Triton and his more passive counterpart, who takes the form of a fish tailed siren, rather than the more humanly body of a naiad. In this way, the 1742

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255 Ovid, _Metamorphoses_, 1:327-364.
256 My thinking here is indebted to Georges Brunel’s analysis of this work. See Brunel, _Boucher_, pp. 225-237.
frontispiece can be understood as a continuation of the pictorial relationship established between the naiads and tritons in the 1740 canvas. Moreover, for those who were aware of the artist’s earlier work, this type of narrative juncture created a platform that privileged the contemporary viewer’s experience.

Although there is an obvious thematic connection between these two important marine mythologies, there are also more subtle stylistic affinities at play. Some of the poses and gestures seen in his earlier canvas have remerged in the form of the two principal characters in the 1742 frontispiece. For example, the nymph attending Venus in the foreground of the 1740 picture takes on a more passive role as the siren that appears in the right in the 1742 frontispiece. Similarly, the triton that delivers the nymph on the right in of the Stockholm Venus is similar to the twisted pose of the figure of Triton that bears the weight of the shell cartouche in his design for the 1742 frontispiece. As George Brunel has argued, this pose may have been inspired by the triton that appears in Raphael’s Triumph of Galatea (c.1511, Caprarola, Villa Farnese), or Poussin’s Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite (1634, Philadelphia, Museum of Art), both of which Boucher had access to during his lifetime.257

The similarities between Boucher’s Triumph of Venus and his design for the 1742 frontispiece suggest that the artist may have used the same studies, a practice not uncommon for Boucher.258 There are, however, deeper issues underscoring the relationship between these two works. To be sure, Boucher’s Venus was still very fresh in the minds of d’Argenville’s audience, the majority of whom would have seen

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257 Most likely, Boucher saw Raphael’s Triumph of Galatea during his trip to Italy in 1728. It is also possible that sometime after that he came into contact with Poussin’s Triumph of Neptune and Amphitrite, which was in the collection of Pierre Crozat until 1741. Ibid., p. 226.

258 On Boucher’s work as a draftsman, see Laing, The Drawings of François Boucher, passim.
it when it was exhibited at the annual two month long Salon of 1740. The painting appeared alongside two other landscapes, and a number of engravings after his designs for the *Four Seasons* series. For details of these works, see Laing, Rosenberg, Marandel, *François Boucher, 1703-1770*, pp. 21-22 and pp. 183-187 (nos. 34 & 35).

After the Salon, it was moved to the comte de Tessin’s Paris residence, where it remained on display to a select few until it was shipped to Sweden in August the following year. The timing of its departure to Sweden coincided with the start of the 1741 Salon, where Boucher chose for the first time since the inception of the reviewed Salons in 1737 not to show any of his works. His absence at the Salon of 1741 not only compounded the perceived visibility of his earlier marine mythology, but in retrospect, it created a greater sense of continuity with the similarly themed frontispiece design that would follow.

The decision to formally link the two works may have been inspired by Tessin himself, who Boucher was in close contact with during this period. Like Boucher, Tessin oscillated between the commercial world of the shell trade under Gersaint and the intellectual ambitions of d’Argenville’s self-styled brand of conchology. For instance, Tessin purchased his collection of *Porcelaine* and *Cames* shells from Gersaint, which in turn he lent to d’Argenville to be engraved for the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*. Thus, it is tempting to think that Tessin’s enthusiasm for conchology, combined with his deep-seated interest in Boucher, led to a discussion of the 1742 frontispiece during any number of the evenings Boucher spent at Tessin’s Paris residence—perhaps under the watchful gaze of the comte de Tessin’s newly...
acquired Venus.

While Boucher drew on the visual relationship (both real and imagined) between the 1742 frontispiece and the earlier Stockholm Venus, he also aimed to authenticate the pictorial landscape in order to make it more accessible to eighteenth-century audiences. For example, on the shoreline that wraps around the left-hand side of the composition, Boucher has presented a selection of exotic animals and vegetation, including an elephant, a camel, a palm tree, and small colony of bees that hover around a man-made hive. Such inclusions provide an important counterpoint to the mythological content in the centre of the composition, in that they give the work a sense of time and place. For eighteenth-century viewers, however, this scenery did not refer to any one particular time or place, but rather it alluded to a more general and mysterious elsewhere. Indeed, the varied vegetation combined with the implausible assembly of animals presents an amalgam of otherness, loosely conveying the type of places that eighteenth-century audiences would have identified as exotic.\textsuperscript{265}

When viewed in the context of d’Argenville’s text, Boucher’s exotic sub-scenery can be understood as a composite view of the different shell producing regions that d’Argenville refers to in La Conchyliologie. According to d’Argenville’s geographical survey, the most beautiful examples came from the East—specifically Indonesia, China, and the Red Sea.\textsuperscript{266} This was followed closely by the coast of Africa, the Persian Gulf (in particular, the waters adjacent to the island of Bahrain), and in the Gulf of Mannar which lies between the southeastern tip of India and the

\textsuperscript{265} For analysis of how the East was understood in France during this period, see David Porter, ‘Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste’, Eighteenth-Century Studies 35 no. 3 (2002): 395-411.

\textsuperscript{266} According to d’Argenville, the water in these areas were exposed to greater levels of sun, salt, nitrate and vitriol, which made the shells shinier and brighter and thus more desirable to eighteenth-century collectors. Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), pp. 168-169.
west coast of Sir Lanka. Other notable shell producing areas were found in parts of the Maldives, the Philippines, and to a lesser extent the Americas. Many of these areas were outposts for the Dutch East India Company, who in turn were responsible for bringing the bulk of shells to Europe. Thus, with the help of a dealer it was possible for amateur collectors to source shells from specific locations without ever having to leave Paris. Moreover, in an age where few people travelled, the collection of such shells along with other foreign curiosities offered collectors a tangible experience of mysterious places abroad.

The tensions between the viewer’s engagement with the real and imaginary voyage is captured in Pierre-Edmé Babel’s (1720-1775) print *Cartouche pour le commerce* from around 1755 (plate 30). Most likely a design for a trade card, the print depicts a large assortment of shells and other marine treasures spilling forth from the edges of an empty cartouche, which doubles as the ship’s external structural frame. The ornamental arrangement of shells and other marine productions that occupy the boarder of the cartouche assist the decorative function of the print. However, their attachment to the moving vessel suggests that they are also part of a commercial shipment, possibly on its way back from one of the shell producing regions mentioned in d’Argenville’s text. In this way, Babel positions the dealer to whom this trade card was intended as a noble voyager of sorts, one who was now capable of realising the ethnographic fantasies of the client.

Boucher’s defence of this subverted notion of collecting is suggested in the unlikely inclusion of a cluster of bees that hover around a large man-made hive on the

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*267* D’Argenville noted that shells from North and South America were not as attractive as those found off the coast of Africa. *Idem.*  
*268* The idea that Babel’s print existed as a design for a trade card was suggested by Kristel Smentek. See Smentek, *Rococo Exotic*, p. 23.
left of the 1742 frontispiece. While the bees are in keeping with the exotic pretext of
the scene on the left and similarly, the type of natural objects found in the foreground,
their presence may have been inspired by the French translation of Bernard
Mandeville’s (1670-1733) *Fable of the Bees* (1705), published just two years
earlier.\(^{269}\) In his epitomous *Fable*, Mandeville established an argument in favour of
luxury consumption, stating that the patronage of ‘private vices’ (such as collecting)
had wider ‘public benefits’ through their support of broader economic and social
institutions.\(^{270}\) Illustrating what would be a precursor to Keynes’s *Paradox of the
Thrift*, Mandeville recalled the story of the bees, who after deciding to forgo the
extravagance of their corrupt, but ultimately prosperous and spacious hive, leave in
search of a higher virtue.\(^{271}\) Finding little return for their hard work, the bees are
forced to return to their newly virtuous, if not now rather hollow hive.

The highly anticipated French edition of 1740 was well known among Parisian
elites, many of whom had witnessed its burning in a public demonstration that same
year by the city’s then executioner.\(^{272}\) Indeed, the notoriety that Mandeville’s poem
achieved may go some way in explaining the size and prominent position of
Boucher’s hive in the 1742 frontispiece, which acts as a pictorial node between the
collected objects in the foreground and the exotic scenery that wraps around the shore
on the left of the composition. Using the hive in this way, Boucher has created a
narrative juncture that calls attention to the relationship between the collected objects

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269 The connection between Boucher’s beehive and Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* is mentioned in
270 I am invoking here the full title of the book, ‘The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices and Public
(Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).
271 John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (New Delhi:
272 On the subject of the public burning, see Danielle Allen, ‘Burning *The Fable of the Bees*: The
Incendiary Authority of Nature’, in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, eds. Lorraine Daston and Fernando
and their foreign origin. The oversized hive, together with the bees, can therefore be understood as an emblem of the prosperity that Mandeville argued was achieved through the collection of luxury imports.

The fictive landscape, as conjured by Boucher in his illustration for d’Argenville’s 1742 text, is not only more exotic visually, but is also more intimate in the way that it engages with its audience. This was achieved through various artistic devices such as the foreshortening of the two central figures, along with the objects that are presented on the shoreline in the foreground. The intimacy of the foreground space is compounded further by the oversized shell cartouche and perched eagle, which in turn is balanced by the spacious Mandevillian beehive on the bottom left of the composition. Together these objects work to obscure the abbreviated scenes that punctuate the background, an effect that also serves to condense the enclosed activity in the foreground, turning this otherwise anonymous water inlet into a secluded and somewhat mysterious grotto.

Boucher’s attempt to create a private space in which the viewer is received represents a departure from the didactic and ennobled pursuit into nature that pictured in the frontispieces for Kircher and Bonanni’s texts. For when viewed in the context of these earlier investigations of nature, Boucher’s frontispiece strikes a comparatively more intimate chord with the viewer. The emphasis on the viewer’s relationship with the image is reinforced by the absence of any figurative reference to d’Argenville, who unlike his predecessors, is not embodied as the protagonist of the work. While this is in keeping with the pictorial practice established by Boucher in his earlier work for Gersaint, it is also reflective of the evolving response to eighteenth-century natural philosophy as an established, yet accessible discipline that could
ostensibly be known more intimately through the rubric of collecting.

The viewer’s engagement with an intimate and therefore more contemporary landscape is also central to the overall visual and conceptual play of the work. For unlike the earlier frontispieces for Bonanni and Kircher’s texts, the viewer’s response to Boucher’s imaginary landscape is akin to the discovery of objects for his or her own collection. Indeed, the viewer delights in the ability to wade through the objects presented on the shore in the foreground, while at the same time catch a glimpse of the treasures that burst from the shell cartouche above. In this way, the 1742 frontispiece is similar to the visual rhetoric of Boucher’s earlier design for Gersaint’s trade card, in which the viewer is encouraged to collect items from the jumbled array objects presented within the fictional interior of Gersaint’s shop. The similarities in the way in which these two works are received is reflective of the fact that both works were produced within two short years of each other and with the same audience in mind. Together they form a part of a shared dialogue, one that also reveals the evolution of Boucher’s own response to nature through the very process of collecting that both Gersaint and d’Argenville had engaged him to promote.

By responding to the collective desire for a more intimate approach to nature, Boucher’s illustration for the 1742 frontispiece is suggestive of an emerging sentiment for shells and natural history in general. The new natural sentiment for shells was attached to the more general and widespread appreciation of nature as a site of emotional experience.273 This would culminate with Enlightenment ideals on

the restorative powers contained in a return to a state of naturalness. While Boucher was not an advocate for such philosophical rationings, his design for the 1742 frontispiece promoted an idealised notion of nature, one that combined an acute awareness for the emotive qualities of nature with the aesthetic ambitions of d’Argenville’s readers.

The sentiment for shells and nature in general that Boucher captured in his design for the 1742 frontispiece can be viewed in connection with other literary responses from the period. One of the earliest examples of an emerging sensibility in the mania for shells takes the form of a poem by Paul Desforges-Maillard (1699-1772). Published in the _Mercure de France_ in 1733, the poem, entitled ‘Les Coquillages’ was addressed to the amateur collector and then editor of the _Mercure_, Antoine de La Roque (1672-1744). It recounts the pain and misery felt when the postman fails to deliver a case of shells bound for La Roque:

> By this unfortunate chance my pretty shells,  
> Chosen on the sandbanks that board our shores,  
> Have they no longer reached your hands?  
> You receive no news.  
> Without doubt the postman, this unfaithful carrier

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275 The poem, which was published under the pseudonym Mademoiselle de Malcrais de la Vigne, appeared in the February edition of the _Mercure de France_. It was also included in a book of poetry by the author, published in 1735. See Paul Desforges-Maillard, _Poesies de mademoiselle de Malcrais de La Vigne_ (Paris: La Veuve Pissot, 1735), pp. 83-89. A slightly expanded version was included in Paul Desforges-Maillard, _Poésies diverses de Desforges-Maillard_ (Paris: A. Quantin, 1880), pp. 54-58. On La Roque’s collection, see chapter three of this thesis.
To whom was given this responsibility, will have kept them.
Alas! Such devoted care
During this sweltering heat
For a knowing friend that I esteem and love,
Sweetfully employed and so sadly lost!\textsuperscript{276}

In the pages that follow the author continues his lament, taking great pains to convey to La Roque the tragedy of this loss. Reconstructing the memory of their selection, the experience takes him back to the depths of Thetis’s cave. There, among the ‘naïve architecture’ of this ‘hidden grotto’, he recalled the discovery of these shells.\textsuperscript{277} It is ‘in these places’, he wrote to La Roque, that ‘I committed myself to gather each day for you a certain number of shells’. Yet, he added, ‘I never went out if the sky was dark for fear that my dreamy spirit would carry me away from myself’.\textsuperscript{278}

The choice of language in forming this and other described responses to the selection of shells during this period reveals their power in evoking the sensibility of nature.\textsuperscript{279} In the case of Desforges-Maillard, this took the form of an acute hysteria. Indeed, as the poem draws to a close, the author becomes increasingly overwhelmed by his grief. ‘Darling shells’, he concluded, ‘put an end to our unhappiness when we have lost what we love. Life is such extreme torment that the end is sweet’.\textsuperscript{280} For Desforges-Maillard, the pleasure of shell collecting represented a sentiment that knew

\textsuperscript{276}‘Par quel fâcheux hazard mes jolis Coquillages / Choisis sur les sablons qui bordent nos rivages / Ne sont-ils point encore dans tes mains parvenus? / Tu n’en reçois point de nouvelle / Sans doute le courier, ce porteur infidèle / Qui s’en étoit chargé, les aura retenus / Hélas! que de soins assidus / Pendant la Canicule même / Pour un sçavant ami que j’estime et que j’aime / Doucement employés, et tristement perdus!’ Ibid., pp. 54-59.

\textsuperscript{277}‘Dans une grotte reculée….. / Dont la naïve Architecture / Est uniquement dûe à la simple Nature.’ Ibid., p. 55.

\textsuperscript{278}‘Dans ces lieux, cher La Roque, à moi-même fidèle / Je m’étois imposé la loi / De cueillir chaque jour pour toi / De coquillages certain nombre / Je n’en sortois jamais que le Ciel ne fût somber / Tant mon esprit rêveur m’emportoit loin de moi.’ Ibid., p. 56.


\textsuperscript{280}‘Coquillages chéris…. / Mettez le comble à nos malheurs / Quand on a perdu ce qu’on aime / La vie est un tourment extrême / Et le trépas a des douceurs.’ Idem.
no bounds and thus could only be expressed it in the context of either great joy or excruciating pain.

Sixteen years later, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau would test the limits of this fictive encounter by describing an equally seductive experience of shell collecting in *The Confessions* (1782), an autobiographical account covering the first fifty-three years of his life. Writing in 1749, shortly after the epiphany that led to his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), Rousseau recalled the fate of his friend the retired jeweller François Mussard, who after discovering shells in the garden of his house at Passy, became so engrossed with these objects that the very nature of his own existence was brought into question:281

> This good Mussard, a real practicing philosopher, lived without care in a very pleasant house that he had built for himself, and a very pretty garden which he had planted with his own hands. In digging over the terraces of this garden he found fossil shells, and in such great quantities that his lively imagination could see nothing but shells in the whole of Nature and finally came to believe that the Universe consisted only of shells and the remains of shells..... With no other thought in his head but his singular discoveries, he got so excited about his ideas on the subject that they would finally have turned into a system in his head..... 282

As Rousseau explained, Mussard’s obsession to create a ‘universe’ or complete system of shells that could ostensibly unlock the secret mysteries of the natural world, would ultimately cause him to turn away from his friends, among them the physician Procope Couteau (1684-1753), writers Nicolas Antoine Boulanger (1722-1759) and the abbe Prévost (1697-1763), as well as Voltaire’s niece Madame Denis (1712-
According to Rousseau: ‘Such was more or less the company M. Mussard kept, and I should have enjoyed it very much had I not enjoyed his Conchylomania (Conchylomanie) in private even better’.  

Rousseau’s comments are significant for several reasons. Not only did he attempt to identify the power these objects had over Mussard, but in doing so he introduced a new term to describe the imaginary condition he called Conchylomanie. The word is a play on the abbreviated title of the 1742 edition of d’Argenville’s Conchyliologie, the same work that provided amateur collectors with a blueprint to create their own shell collections within the domestic sphere. Used in this context, the term Conchylomanie implies that in less than ten years since the publication of the first edition of d’Argenville’s text, a broader cultural revolution had taken place in the development of French conchology. Moreover, the terminology shows that mid-eighteenth-century French conchology had rapidly evolved from a loosely formed sub-discipline of pre-Linnaean natural history under d’Argenville and Boucher, to a more complete intellectual, social and economic enterprise.

However, what is perhaps more significant than his attempt to describe the manie that afflicted his friend is Rousseau’s confession of being equally captivated by shells, adding that he too abandoned the reality of his own existence ‘for six months or more’. By his own admission, Rousseau was so engaged by Mussard’s Conchylomanie that he could say with great truth that he worked alongside him ‘in

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283 Recently, Michael E. Yonan has explored a connection between Mussard’s attempt to construct a system that explained the transformative processes of nature and the visual and conceptual concerns surrounding the construction and display of porcelain objects (and similarly, those materials that invoke the porcelain aesthetic), in various architectural programs such as the cabinets chinois at the Schönbrunn palace. Michael E. Yonan, ‘Igneous Architecture: Porcelain, Natural Philosophy, and the Rococo cabinet chinois’, in The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain, eds. Alden Cavanagh and Michael E. Yonan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 81-83.
285 Ibid., p. 349.
his cabinet with as much pleasure as he did.\textsuperscript{286} This suggests that the author did not intend to convey a moralising tone, but rather one that explained the lucidity of a shell utopia, a place of total surrender for Mussard who would later die in his house at Passy, and in the case of Rousseau a form of regenesis.\textsuperscript{287}

Rousseau’s participation in the activities at Passy confirms that a new cultural shift had emerged in the development of eighteenth-century French conchology, one that was inclusive of a broader network of participants. Indeed, by the 1750s, this pre-Linnaean mode of conchology had evolved beyond the realm of the elite amateur collector to encompass a wider philosophical pursuit of the pleasures in nature.

Following Rousseau’s definition of \textit{Conchyliomanie}, shell collecting was not necessarily understood as a product of aristocratic frivolity, nor was it an exponent of the corrosive role that Rousseau argued the arts and sciences played in the degradation of mankind.\textsuperscript{288} Rather, Rousseauian \textit{Conchyliomanie} was an entirely modern construct that had grown out of the pleasurable and very seductive ideals attached to d’Argenville’s brand of \textit{Conchyliologie}. What is more, it augmented these ideas as an example of enlightened behaviour.

At the centre of this evolution was Boucher, whose frontispieces for Gersaint and d’Argenville collectively shaped the direction of conchology in eighteenth-century France. While these illustrations were not made with a Rousseauian audience

\textsuperscript{286} Idem.
\textsuperscript{287} The regenerative powers that were attached to Rousseau’s idea of \textit{Conchyliomanie} also extended to the water from which these objects came. As Rousseau explained, his friend had ‘long insisted upon the virtues of the water at Passy’ and had thus invited him to escape the ‘tumult of the city’ in order to experience its healing properties. It was during one particular stay at Passy in 1752, that after drinking the water, Rousseau found the creative inspiration for his successful one act opera \textit{Le devin du village} (\textit{The Village Soothsayer}), which he claimed he completed in less than six days. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, \textit{Le devin du village}, ed. Charlotte R. Kaufman (Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 1998), p. xv; and Rousseau, \textit{The Confessions}, p. 349.
\textsuperscript{288} In his prize winning \textit{Discourse on the Sciences and Arts} (1750), Rousseau condemned the arts and sciences for their role in corrupting the morals of civilization. See Rousseau, \textit{Discourse on the Sciences and Arts}, passim.
in mind, they were responsible for inciting a visual culture of curiosity around shells that continued until the last quarter of the eighteenth century. By placing Gersaint’s and d’Argenville’s texts within a cultural framework that viewers would have appreciated and enjoyed, Boucher’s frontispieces are illustrative of the contemporary ideals from which Rousseau’s notion of *Conchylomanie* was later formed. In this way, Boucher can be understood as participating within the broader philosophical, social and economic institutions that constituted Rousseau’s vision of the Enlightenment.
Chapter III

Artist as Collector: In Pursuit of Conchyliomanie

Boucher’s interest in shells was motived by the world of ornament, both past and present, and the current world of the collector in which shells together with other items of natural history had begun to take centre stage. This interest was further served by his work for Gersaint and d’Argenville in the second half of the 1730s and 40s. His involvement in these projects not only helped to define a generation of amateur collecting practices, but in turn, it also exposed the artist to emerging trends in mid eighteenth-century conchology. Accordingly, it was around this time that Boucher formally began his own collection, which he pursued passionately until his death in 1770.

During this period, Boucher amassed a collection of more than 2,000 shells, corals and madreporites, with a combined value of 11,176 livres.289 These items formed part of his extensive collection of more than 13,000 artificial and natural curiosities, among which included a striking range of minerals, fossils, precious stones, lacquer, and porcelain.290 Such objects, noted the engraver Johann Georg Wille (1715-1808), had been acquired ‘over many years by this famous and gracious painter, with as much taste as expenditure’.291 Wille’s comments are reflected in the amount raised by the sale of Boucher’s collection in 1771, which sold for an impressive 18,782 livres.

289 All figures relating to the price of Boucher’s estate items are based on the BnF’s annotated copy of the 1771 sale catalogue.
290 This is a conservative estimate based on my own calculation of items in each of the 1,065 lots listed for sale in the catalogue.
291 Writing about his family’s visit to the sale of Boucher’s estate in 1771, Wille noted that his wife and son were surprised when, ‘en voyant des porcelaines, minéraux, coquilles, pierres précieuses, laques, armes, instruments, et autres productions de la nature et de l’art, rassemblés depuis nombres d’années par ce fameux et gracieux peintre, avec autant goût que de dépense.’ Wille, Mémoires et Journal, p. 470. For further discussion of Wille’s recollections of the sale, see chapter four of this thesis.
and 10 sols. Of this, approximately 21,000 livres came from the sale natural history collection alone. This was a significant achievement for an artist whose annual pension would never go beyond 1,000 livres per year.

Boucher’s collection of art and nature was unparalleled in terms of its selection and arrangement. As the organiser of the artist’s 1771 estate sale Pierre Rémy argued, it was generally agreed ‘by everybody’ that Boucher’s collection was ‘one of the richest and most pleasant ever seen in Paris’. He later added that ‘without knowledge of these objects, one would be surprised and enchanted by the richness and immense variety of forms and colours’. While Boucher was praised for the diversity of his selection of objects of art and nature, according to d’Argenville, it was the shells that were the highlight of the collection:

M. Boucher possesses a beautiful cabinet in a number of genres of natural history and all of the curiosities of art. Above all it is the shells that attract the most attention either by their rarity, their size or finally by their brilliance and variety of colour joined to the finest state of preservation.

Indeed, Boucher’s collection was highly regarded by his contemporaries, with his name appearing on d’Argenville’s list of the principal shell cabinets in eighteenth-century Europe. His shells were also discussed in period guides to collecting, as

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292 For a breakdown on the amount raised at Boucher’s estate sale, see the handwritten notes located on the final page of the BnF’s copy of the 1771 sale catalogue.
293 On Boucher’s pension, see chapter four.
294 ‘Son Cabinet passoit à juste titre, & de l’aveu de tout le monde, pour une des plus riches & des plus agréables collections que l’on voit à Paris.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers).
295 ‘Sans se connaître aux objets qu’il renfermoit, on étoit étonné & enchanté au premier aspect de cette riche & immense variété de forms & de coulers.’ Idem.
296 ‘Feu M. Boucher, premier Peintre du Roi, possédoit un beau cabinet dans divers genres d’ histoire naturelle, de même que dans les curiosités de l’art. Les coquillages surtout attiroient les regards, soit par la rareté de l’espèce, soit par leur grandeur, soit enfin par l’éclat & la variété de leurs couleurs, jointes à la plus conservation.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1780), vol. 1, p. 236.
297 Idem.
well as several memoirs of those who either knew Boucher’s personally, or who were in attendance at his estate sale, held in the artist’s studio at the Louvre.298

The estate sales: Antoine de La Roque (1745)

Like other amateur collectors of his generation, Boucher’s collection was acquired through several different channels. The most recognisable process for selection was via the various estate auctions held in Paris from the middle of the 1740s. These sales would become the primary vehicle for the distribution of collectable objects during the eighteenth century and a mainstay for the burgeoning shell market. Each sale was accompanied by a catalogue, which not only listed the items available for purchase, but it also provided a brief biography on the collector and his or her estate. As a record, these sale catalogues are useful in reconstructing a framework for provenance. For example, certain catalogues reveal that shells sold at Gersaint’s 1736 sale had begun to reappear at estate auctions as early as 1745.299 The ability to trace these items is significant, as it raises questions about the ambitions of buyers and the relative value, if any, they may have placed on objects that were once owned by these celebrated collectors.

Such questions are also relevant to Boucher, who according to various catalogues is known to have purchased part of his collection at the estate sales of three high profile French collectors. The first was at the estate auction of the former editor of the Mercure de France Antoine de La Roque. The La Roque sale commenced on April 27 1745, seven months after the collector’s death and only one month after Gersaint’s most successful estate sale to date, that of the renowned amateur collector

298 Wille, Mémoires et Journal, 1, p. 470.
299 For instance, Antoine de La Roque purchased a number of shells at Gersaint’s 1736 sale, many of which can be traced to 1745 catalogue. La Roque’s purchases are listed in, Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, lots 23 & 25, pp. 72-3; lot 123, pp. 92-3; lot 185, p. 103; lot 196, pp. 104-105; lot 219, p. 108; lot 290, p. 115; lot 381, p. 119; lot 393, p. 130.
Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson. The sale attracted the usual crowd of collectors, including Jean de Jullienne, lady-in-waiting the duchesse de Brancas (1676-1763), the comte de Tessin, as well as Pierre Crozat’s nephews Louis-Antoine Crozat, baron de Thiers (1699-1770) and Joseph-Antoine Crozat, baron de Tugny (1696-1750), each of whom had recently inherited a large portion of their late uncle’s collection.300

As Guillaume Glorieux has pointed out, there was also a significant increase in the number of luxury merchants (marchands merciers) present at the La Roque sale.301 The most likely reason for their attendance was the overwhelming success of the Bonnier de la Mosson sale, which had raised more than 100,000 livres.302 This figure was a vast improvement on the 36,602 livres achieved by Gersaint at the Quentin de Lorangère estate sale in March the previous year.303 Gersaint’s success in this area was thus perceived as opportunity for this group of aspiring dealers, among them Pierre Rémy, who in addition to organising Boucher’s sale in 1771 would conduct no less than 130 estate sales between 1755 and 1791.304

Also present at the La Roque sale were a handful of artists, including the painter and expert valuer Jacques Pingat (d.1752), painting restorer and picture dealer François-Louis Colins (1699-1760), engraver Louis Surugue (1686-1762), cabinet maker Charles Cressent (1685-1768), sculptor and ornamentalist Jacques Verbreckt (1704-1771), and of course Boucher.305 While the lots purchased by these artists

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300 Glorieux has identified forty-five buyers at the La Roque sale. They are broken up into six different groups, les Aristocrates (13), les Amateurs (5), les Marchands (14), les Artistes (6), les Ecclésiastiques (5), and la Famille (2). Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, pp. 562-576.
301 Ibid., p. 372.
302 This estimate is based on annotated notes found in the BnF’s copy of the catalogue. See Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné... de feu Monsieur Bonnier de la Mosson, passim.
303 Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, p. 561.
304 On Rémy’s career as a dealer, see Marandet, ‘Pierre Rémy: The Parisian Art Market in the mid-Eighteenth Century’, pp. 32-44.
305 This information is provided by Glorieux in his list of buyers at Gersaint’s sales during the 1730s and 1740s. Glorieux, À L’Enseigne de Gersaint, pp. 573-4.
represents only 2.4 percent of the total 805 lots sold at the La Roque sale, their respective purchases were by no means insignificant. For example, Cressent paid 2,301 livres for a pair of landscape paintings by Claude Lorrain (c.1600-1682). The same artist paid a further 166 livres for a work by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). By comparison, Colins purchased several works by European masters, including a ‘magnificent Landscape’ by the Dutch painter Philips Wouwerman (1619-1668) featuring the story of the Prophet Elisha and the mocking children.

While Boucher was by no means the largest spender of the group, he was the only artist to buy shells or any other items of natural history. The reason for this can be attributed to Boucher’s emerging passion for these objects and, moreover, his financial ability to sustain this interest. However, it can also be understood in the context of the motivations surrounding some of the other artists present at the La Roque sale. For instance, both Pingat and Colins were in the process of establishing themselves as picture dealers and like other burgeoning art dealers in Paris during this period, they would come to use these estate auctions to accumulate stock for their own sale collections. Furthermore, Colins’s purchase of several paintings by

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307 Ibid., lot 17, p. 11.
308 ‘Un magnifique Paysage peint sur bois Wauwermens (sic), dans lequel est représenté le Prophete Elisée, poursuivi & mocqué par les enfans. Il est renfermé dans une bordure de bois doré, très-vif en couleur, parfaitement bien peint.’ Ibid., lot 51, p. 21. Colins also bought paintings by Charles de la Fosse (1636-1716) and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682). See Ibid., lot 90, p. 39 and lot 103, p. 43.
309 Only a handful of artists were found to have purchased shells at sales organised by Gersaint during the 1730s and 40s. They include Houasse and Ravechet, who each bought one lot of shells at the 1736 sale and Jean-Baptiste Slodtz, who purchased two lots of shells at M. Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis’s estate sale in 1747. For Ravechet and Houasse’s purchases, see Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, lot 111, p. 90 (12 livres 10 sols) and lot 243, p. 110 (13 livres and 10 sols). For Slodtz’s purchases, see Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné.... de M. Angran, vicomte de Fonspertuis, lots 602 & 611, pp. 301 & 303 (13 livres and 31 sols in total). In addition to being a painter and member of the Académie de St-Luc, Slodtz, like Pignat and Colins, was also a picture dealer. This information is provided by Marandet, in the form of a list of people who had business dealings with Pierre Rémy. See Marandet, ‘Pierre Rémy: The Parisian Art Market in the mid-Eighteenth Century’, p. 42.
310 According to the late nineteenth-century writer and curator Jules Guiffrey, Pignat and Colins would later form a partnership that would see the dealers accumulate approximately 2,700 livres worth of
Flemish masters can be understood as central to his overriding ambitions as an aspiring expert in the field of Flemish and Dutch art. As practicing artists and craftsmen, Pingat and Colins’s focus at the La Roque sale was thus limited to paintings and other objects that lay within the realm of their expertise.

In contrast to this, Boucher’s purchases at the 1745 sale were not commercially motivated. Rather, they reflect his growing interest in shells, particularly those once owned by a reputed collector such as La Roque. From La Roque, Boucher purchased two drawers of shells plus nine others, several of which were listed as extremely rare. The first of these two drawers contained a mix of both univalves and bivalves. According to Gersaint, however, the drawer appeared to be incomplete, with the dealer implying that La Roque’s pairing in this instance was somewhat ‘mismatched’. Undeterred by Gersaint’s observations, Boucher went on to acquire the objects for his collection. Perhaps it was the individual shells that caught his attention, or simply the imperfections of their arrangement that appealed to his desire as an artist to improve them. Needless to say, the qualities attached to this particular drawer resonated strongly with Boucher who paid seven livres for its contents.

The motives behind Boucher’s purchase of the second drawer of shells are a more straightforward. While Gersaint noted that drawer contained ‘many more bivalves than univalves’, he went on to explain that there were some exceptional paintings. J. Guiffrey, ‘Scellés et inventaires d'artistes français’, *Nouvelles archives de l'art français* vol. II (1884), pp. 44-66.

311 On the rise of Colins’s career as a picture dealer and specialist in Northern art, see Marandet, ‘Pierre Rémy: The Parisian Art Market in the mid-Eighteenth Century’, pp. 35-39.

312 Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné...de feu Antoine de La Roque*, lot 500, p.153; lot 510, p. 155; lot 515 p. 156.

313 ‘Un Tiroir rempli de plusieurs Coquilles univalves & bivalves, dont plusieurs sont dépareillées.’ Ibid., lot 500, p. 153.

314 Idem. The price paid is also mentioned in Glorieux, *À L'Enseigne de Gersaint*, p. 573.
examples among them. These included two *Arches de Noé*, as well as a selection of *Limas* and *Eguilles*. This last group of shells is of particular interest as they can be traced to a single lot of six *Eguilles* purchased by La Roque at the 1736 sale for thirteen *livres* and five *sols*. Thus, while provenance may have played a part in Boucher’s decision to purchase these shells, it is likely that the amateur collector was struck, just as La Roque had been before him, by the unusual shape of the *Eguille*, which according Gersaint, resembled an ‘obelisk’ on account of its ‘pyramid shape’.

The third and final lot of shells purchased by Boucher at the La Roque sale were also visually appealing. Of the nine ‘jolies’ shells in this lot, two were listed as extremely rare, namely the *Casque rayé* and the *Casque payé*. The lot also included a *Couronne impériale*, possibly the same one bought by La Roque for approximately twelve *livres* at the 1736 sale. Writing in the 1736 catalogue, Gersaint noted that this particular cornet shell, known in Latin as a *Voluta coronata*, ‘is very beautiful and rare’ and therefore considered by collectors to be of ‘great value’.

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315 Writing in the 1736 catalogue, Gersaint remarked on the inferiority of bivalves to univalves. See Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 74. According to Dance, despite the fact that there are many interesting examples of bivalves, this view still persists among amateur shell collectors today. S. Peter Dance, *Rare Shells* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 23.

316 ‘Un Tiroir rempli de plusieurs Coquilles les tant bivalves qu’univales, parmi lesquelles il y en a de belles & singulières, entr’autres: Deux Arches de Noé: Quelques Limas: Quelques Eguilles, &c.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné...de feu Antoine de La Roque*, lot 510, pp. 155-6.

317 Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 103-104.

318 ‘Ce mot d’Eguille que l’on donne à ces Coquilles pour les distinguer des autres, ne doit pas être pris ici pour le petit morceau d’Acier dont les femmes se servent ordinairement pour coudre, mais pour Obelisque, Pyramide, ou Clocher que ce mot signifie quelquefois. Ce nom ne leur est donné que dans ce sens & parce que leur forme est piramidale.’ Ibid., p. 103.

319 ‘Neuf jolies Coquilles, scàvour.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné...de feu Antoine de La Roque*, lot 515, p. 156. Boucher paid ten *livres* for this lot. The price paid is mentioned in Glorieux, *À L’Enseigne de Gersaint*, p. 573.


321 ‘Deux grand Ecorchées, & une Turbinite connü sous le nom de Couronne impériale; en latin *Voluta coronata*; cette derniere est fort belle, rare & très-estimée des Curieux.’ Idem.
and La Roque were aware of the shell’s significance in an amateur collection. Indeed, Boucher would go onto acquire another *Couronne impériale* during his lifetime, both of which were sold at his estate sale in 1771.\(^{322}\)

In addition to the shells, Boucher also purchased a piece of red lacquer mounted on a wood base finished with black varnish at a cost of fifty-two *livres*.\(^{323}\) At the same sale, he successfully acquired a notebook containing approximately 300 loose engravings after different Italian masters for which he paid further thirty *livres*.\(^{324}\) Having paid twenty-six *livres* for the shells, this brought the total amount to 108 *livres*. Although Boucher had retained a number of lucrative commissions by the time of the La Roque sale, it was still significant sum for an artist whose modest pension of 400 *livres* per annum had only recently been increased to 600 *livres* the previous year.\(^{325}\)

**Jean de Jullienne (1767)**

The fact that Boucher spent approximately eighteen percent of his annual pension on objects at one sale, suggests that the artist regarded himself as a serious collector as early as 1745. Furthermore, that in acquiring these objects, he was following in the footsteps of collectors whom he admired. As Boucher’s sale catalogue reveals, the artist also possessed curiosities that had once belonged to his former employer, the celebrated amateur collector Jean de Jullienne.\(^{326}\) The ability to

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323 ‘Une autre pareille Boëte que la précédente, & montée également sur Pied de bois noir verni.’ Gersaint was referring to the previous lot, which lists a red piece of laquer that opened in multiple parts, also mounted on a wood base and finished with black varnish. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné…de feu Antoine de La Roque*, lot 371, pp. 104-5.
324 Ibid., lot 371, pp. 104-5; and lot 605, p. 181.
325 Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 22.
326 Boucher’s estate catalogue lists one of the two Chinese lanterns that the artist purchased at Julienne’s estate sale for 736 *livres*. This is confirmed by Rémy who noted that this ‘morceau curieux’ came directly from the ‘Cabinet de M. de Julienne.’ See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné…..le cabinet de feu*
trace this particular transfer in ownership is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it confirms that Boucher was present at the Jullienne sale, which began on March 30 1767. This is important not only as a further contribution to existing Boucher chronologies, but it also lays claim to Boucher’s continued interest in the estate sale process.

Secondly, the purchase of the Jullienne curiosities is relevant in that it reveals something of Boucher’s ambitions as a collector. In many ways, Jullienne represented the type of collector Boucher had always aspired to be, perhaps since 1720s, when Jullienne had hired the young Boucher to engrave no less than 119 of the 351 plates after original drawings by Watteau. Like Boucher, Jullienne was seen as someone who possessed an inherent taste for the modern aesthetic, a perception that was extended to his selection of objects and their arrangement within the collection. As Gersaint explained:

_Monsieur de Jullienne des Gobelins, a well known Curieux for his beautiful choices that he has made of Paintings, Drawings and Engravings of various grand Masters, and for the care he has taken to enrich the public with a number of engravings after the celebrated Vatteau, commenced his Natural History Collection of which Shells are the principal ornament, and which he adds to on occasion all that he can find which is beautiful._

According to Gersaint, it was Jullienne’s sense of ‘natural taste’ and a ‘love of the Arts’ that drove him to choose only ‘the most beautiful things…for his famous

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_M. Boucher, lot 941, pp. 134-135; Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue raisonné.........Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, lot 1627, p. 66._

_details of Jullienne’s sale are found in the preface to his posthumous catalogue, published in 1767. The artist’s presence at the 1767 sale is not mentioned in any of three most widely accepted chronologies on Boucher, namely those by Alaistar Laing (1986), Alexandre Ananoff (1976) and Pierrette Jean-Richard (1978). ‘Monsieur de Jullienne des Gobelins, connu des Curieux par le beau choix qu’il a fait de Tableaux, Dessins & Estampes de divers grands Maîtres, & par les soins qu’il a pris d’enrichir le public d’une nombreuse suite d’estampes gravées d’après le célèbre Vatteau, a commencé une Collection d’Histoire Naturelle, de laquelle les Coquilles font le principal ornament, & qu’il augmente, dans l’occasion, de ce qu’il peut trouver de beau.’ Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, p. 36._
Indeed, Jullienne owned a number of paintings and drawings by the artist, all of which were sold under the watchful eye of Boucher, whose presence at the 1767 sale underscores the fluidity of his identity as both an artist and collector.

Jullienne’s collection of shells was not among the items listed at the 1767 sale, although it is tempting to think that if they had Boucher certainly would have been among the buyers. Boucher was no doubt aware of the collection’s existence through his work for Gersaint and d’Argenville, both of whom discussed Jullienne in their respective chapters on the principal shell cabinets in eighteenth-century Europe. The artist was also familiar with Jullienne’s collection of Oursin shells, which he loaned to d’Argenville for the purpose of being engraved for the 1742 edition of La Conchyliologie (appendix 1). As an amateur collector well versed in the arts and sciences, Boucher found in Jullienne a model of connoisseurship that was akin to his own approach to collecting. Moreover, by purchasing objects that had been chosen specifically by Jullienne and La Roque, Boucher was not only aligning himself with these collectors, but also the great aristocratic tradition of collecting.


331 For a list of works by Boucher in the collection, see Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue raisonné............. Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, lot 270-273, pp. 106-7; lot 316, p. 117; lot 934, pp. 223-4; lot 952, p. 226; lot 1180, p. 260. The same catalogue lists two drawings by Boucher’s only son Juste-Nathan (1736-1782), who had recently won the Academy’s second prize for architecture. See Ibid., lots 988 & 989, p. 233.
Madame Dubois-Jourdain (1766)

While Boucher’s ambitions as a collector drew him to objects once owned by celebrated amateur collectors, the artist was equally motivated by the desire to pursue a more intellectually rigorous and social mode of collecting. Such efforts would bring him into contact with amateur naturalists and collectors like Madame Dubois-Jourdain, from whom Boucher would purchase a large number of shells, minerals and other decorative objects at her estate sale in May 1766. Boucher would have been aware of this ‘perfectly chosen’ collection, which was discussed in the 1757 edition of d’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie*, the same volume where Madame Dubois-Jourdain also received an honourable mention as the owner of an extremely rare *l’Écriture Chinoise* shell.

It was not just the contents of Madame Dubois-Jourdain’s collection to which Boucher and his contemporaries were drawn. Like Jullienne, Madame Dubois-Jourdain embodied many of the characteristics that Boucher respected in a collector. As the widow of a well known natural history collector and courtier, she had continued her late husband’s interests with great enthusiasm. According to Rémy, she took courses in physics, chemistry and natural history, in order to further her own understanding of their collection. Madame Dubois-Jourdain would later share this

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335 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné des curiosités...... le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain*, p. vi.
knowledge with other collectors during the imitate gatherings she hosted regularly in her natural history cabinet.\textsuperscript{336} Although it is not known if Boucher attended this particular collector’s events, his young apprentice Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822) has revealed that when he was not required at Versailles, the Opera, or the Gobelins, Boucher spent much of his time visiting ‘the homes of dealers and amateur collectors of natural history’ whose work he admired.\textsuperscript{337}

Presumably, the type of intellectual and social exchanges offered by these intimate cabinet gatherings appealed to Boucher. Not only was the artist able to view objects that belonged to some of Europe’s finest collectors, but he was also able to discuss the merits of collecting with the other amateurs and naturalists in attendance. While Boucher’s reputation as the recently appointed premier peintre du roi and directeur de l’Académie royale was important to this process, it was ultimately his status as an amateur collector that provided him with unfettered access to these events.\textsuperscript{338} As Gersaint explained, a perceived dedication to this type of activity gave the amateur collector,

\textit{entrée into the most celebrated Cabinets where he may also pursue recreation. As a Curieux, he becomes by virtue of a common passion the equal of those superior in rank and condition: as such, he is welcome at gatherings of theirs whose common purpose is to share news of recent discoveries and acquisitions: he may partake of their pleasure as he profits from the discussion, increasing his knowledge and amusing himself with the result.}\textsuperscript{339}

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., p. vii.
\textsuperscript{337} ‘M. Boucher ne sortoit guére, et ses courses se bornoient a aller de temps en temps a Versailles, aux gobelins dont il etoit le Directeur. A l’opéra, dont il dirigea également les costumes et les Décorations et chez les marchands et amateurs d’histoire naturelle.’ Mannlich, \textit{Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822)}, vol. 1, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{338} Following the death of Carle Vanloo, Boucher was appointed premier peintre du Roi on August 8 1765. Vanloo’s death also made way for Boucher’s appointment as Director of the Academy, on August 23 that same year. Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{339} ‘lui donne entrée dans les Cabinets les plus fameux, & il peut aller s’y recréer: en qualité de Curieux, il devient égal à ceux-mêmes, qui livres à cette noble passion, se trouvent au-dessus de son état par leur rang ou par leur condition: comme tel, il est appelé & reçu avec plaisir dans leurs
For an artist of somewhat humble origins, the nature of this acceptance must have vindicated Boucher’s personal vision of success, which in his later years would become increasingly defined by the accumulation of his natural history collection.  

Entrance to these and other types of social events, such as Madame Geoffrin’s (1699-1777) ritual Monday night dinners, not only brought Boucher into contact with like-minded artists, writers, collectors and travellers, but it also gave him the opportunity to reciprocate in kind. It was at one such dinner in December 1765 that Boucher was introduced to the English writer and collector Horace Walpole (1717-1797), who he invited to visit him in his studio during Walpole’s extended stay in Paris. Accompanied by Madame Geoffrin and the Italian chemist Count Marco Carburi (1731-1808), Walpole visited Boucher in his studio in February the following year where he noted the ‘great quantities of shells, mosses, ores, Japan, china, vases, Indian arms, and music’ that Boucher had on display.

Madame Geoffrin was also responsible for introducing Boucher to the Polish aristocrat Count Michel Mniszech (1742–1806), who visited the artist in his studio in

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As Antoine Bret noted in 1771: ‘Il avait employé les derniers années de sa vie à se faire un Cabinet d'Histoire naturelle.’ See Bret, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi’, pp. 47-70.

As Boucher was a regular at Madame Geoffrin’s Monday night dinners. His interest in the dinner salons is discussed in Desbouhiers, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi et directeur de l'Académie royale de peinture & sculpture, mort le 30 mai 1770’, pp. 188-189. On the culture of the eighteenth-century salon, see Dena Goodman’s article from 1989. As Goodman has argued, the eighteenth-century salons were not ‘schools of civilité’. Rather, they represented a new and enlightened network of intellectual and social opportunity, one that was altogether separate from the seventeenth-century salon and its culture of précieuses. To this end, the eighteenth-century salons can be understood as part of the wider cultural base on which the Enlightenment was founded. See Dena Goodman, 'Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22 no. 3 (1989): 329-350.

Also in attendance was the Marquis de Marigny, a Polish countess, a Danish envoy and artists Vernet and Cochín. See W.S Lewis, ed., *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 283.

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Ibid., p. 304.
1767. Madame Geoffrin had recently returned to Paris after visiting her old friend the king of Poland, Stanislas II August Poniatowski (1732-1798). The trip, which resulted in the king’s commission of *The Continence of Scipio*, would significantly increase the frequency of Boucher’s contact with the Madame Geoffrin, who was acting as an intermediary on the king’s behalf. According to Diderot, however, Madame Geoffrin’s constant interference would later cause Boucher to abandon the project altogether.

Despite this, Boucher was indebted to Madame Geoffrin, as she would continue to facilitate introductions with those like Mniszech, who was clearly in awe of Boucher’s collection:

> His cabinet is composed of several pieces, it is an immense storehouse of curiosities from art and nature, uniquely arranged for the pleasure of the eye and offering nothing more, but a multitude of rare and well conserved pieces.

While Mniszech and Walpole were both interested in viewing the machinations of this popular artist’s studio, their comments speak to the importance of Boucher’s collection and his success in creating an *atelier* and *cabinet d’histoire naturelle* that like *chez Dubois-Jourdain*, was a destination in its own right.

344 On the long standing friendship between Madame Geoffrin and the king, including details of her trip to Poland, see Charles de Mouy, ed., *Correspondance inédite du roi Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et de Madame Geoffrin 1764-1777* (Paris: E. Pion, 1875).

345 For a discussion regarding the commission of *The Continence of Scipio*, see Ibid., pp. 214-221.


347 Evidence for this is also suggested in a letter from the king of Poland to Madame Geoffrin dated January 7 1767. In it, the king thanked Geoffrin for inviting Mniszech to her Salon. See Ibid., p. 264.

Madame Dubois-Jourdain and the return of the 1736 frontispiece

The link between the sociability of Madame Dubois-Jourdain’s cabinet and Boucher’s own vision of collecting was formally articulated by Rémy, whose decision it was to reuse the artist’s 1736 frontispiece as the title page for the Dubois-Jourdain catalogue in 1766 (plate 31). Boucher’s design had not been seen since 1745, when it was used by Gersaint as the frontispiece for the Bonnier de la Mosson catalogue. Rémy’s actions can be explained in part by the similarities of the two sales, both of which featured shells as their primary showcase. However, with increasing competition between dealers, it can also be understood as an attempt by Rémy to draw a connection with legacy left by Gersaint. Like his predecessor, Rémy realised the commercial value in promoting the market for naturalia and the need to ensure that his own efforts within this new economy continued to be seen as both tasteful and chic.

For Rémy and his clients, Boucher’s frontispiece still retained its visual potency, carrying with it a certain currency in an otherwise diluted marketplace. The image spoke to a generation of amateur collectors by locating their own pursuits within a specific visual tradition, one that signified the pleasures of collecting. Such expression, according to Rémy, was also the primary aim of Madame Dubois-Jourdain in maintaining her natural history cabinet. Thus, it seems fitting that the dealer would choose an image capable of articulating this rhetoric.

Rémy’s decision to reuse Boucher’s design was also linked to the artist’s emerging identity as a collector. Indeed, Boucher’s collection was well known among

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349 Madame Dubois-Jourdain’s collection of shells were the first items listed in the catalogue. At the sale, they raised 13,198 livres of the total 41,684 livres achieved at the auction. For further details, see the annotated copy of the catalogue held in the BnF, département Estampes et photographie, YD-2061 (A)-8.

350 Rémy, Catalogue raisonné des curiosités...... le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain, pp. iii-xii.
the dealer’s clientele, many of whom, like Jullienne, were also patrons of his work. During this period, Boucher’s reputation as a collector was strengthened further when he was named by d’Argenville as one of Europe’s top fifty natural history collectors.\(^{351}\) Such praise is evidence of Boucher’s passion for natural history, particularly in the years immediately prior to his death in 1770, when he appeared to be more interested in his collection than in the progression of his art making.

The use of Boucher’s iconic image was underpinned by the artist’s unmistakable presence at the Dubois-Jourdain sale. According to annotated notes found in the accompanying sale catalogue, Boucher purchased more than 200 different objects at the 1766 sale at a cost of 1,254 livres and 79 sols.\(^{352}\) Among the items were three glass vials each containing a different type of petrified snake, as well as twenty-nine shells and madrepores, including two \textit{Buccin} shells considered ‘superb in colour’.\(^{353}\) Boucher also purchased a large number of minerals for which Madame Dubois-Jourdain was particularly known.\(^{354}\) They included a ‘beautiful’ piece of gold from Peru, along with samples of copper, silver, iron and spath collected from mines in Spain, Germany and Switzerland.\(^{355}\) These minerals were complimented by a further 106 precious stones and agates, some of which were already engraved, while

\(^{351}\) Dezallier d'Argenville, \textit{Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative}, pp. 312-313.
\(^{352}\) This is based on the BnF’s copy of the Dubois-Jourdain catalogue (1766).
\(^{353}\) ‘Deux Buccins, l’un nommé \textit{la Thiare}, de quatre pouces & demi, & l’autre \textit{la Mitre}, de quatre pouces, elles sont superbes pour la couleur.’ Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné des curiosités…… le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain}, lot 48, p. 7. The remainder of shells and madrepores purchased by Boucher at this sale are as follows, lot 139, p. 25; lot 326, p. 41; lot 593, p. 51. For the vials of snakes, see lot 475, p. 64.
\(^{355}\) Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné des curiosités…… le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain}, lot 482, p. 66; lot 511, p. 70; lots 513 & 516, p. 71; lot 535, p. 74; lots 591 & 595, p. 81; lot 633, p. 85.
others like the amber were sold as pre-prepared plaques, ready to be transformed by Boucher into more artful presentations of nature.\textsuperscript{356}

According to Rémy, Boucher’s ability ‘to choose only what interested him by form or by colour’, would lead him to purchase several other visually striking objects at the Dubois-Jourdain sale.\textsuperscript{357} The most notable among these items was a ‘beautiful Bowl of a pretty shape, on feet; all of red jasper, mounted in gold enamel’.\textsuperscript{358} Presumably, the tensions between the bowl’s natural and humanly wrought properties appealed to Boucher, who paid seventy-two \textit{livres} to secure it. The largest purchase by far was for a collection of ‘Clothing, Furniture, Weapons, and everyday objects used by Indians, Savages and Chinese’.\textsuperscript{359} This alone cost Boucher 601 \textit{livres}, approximately twenty-two times more than the average price paid for the remaining lots.

Boucher’s strong presence at the Dubois-Jourdain sale, combined with a general awareness of his collection, raises questions as to how the reuse of his design for the 1766 catalogue was understood by his contemporaries. His once fanciful vision of natural history was now capable of articulating a generation of collecting practices, including Boucher’s own. The Dubois-Jourdain catalogue thus marks a development in the visual rhetoric of the 1736 frontispiece in that it simultaneously communicated his approach to collecting in both the real and fictive realms. Indeed, for those attending the Dubois-Jourdain sale in 1766, the knowledge of Boucher’s collection,

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid., lot 651, p. 87; lot 667, p. 89; lot 708, p. 92; lot 778, p. 97; lot 819, p. 100; lot 871, p. 107; lot 923, p. 112; lot 927, p. 113; lot 978, p. 119; lot 1045, p. 126; lot 1328, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{357} ‘dans chaque genre il ne choisissoit que les choses qui pouvoient plaire, ou par la forme ou par les couleurs.’ Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné..... le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers). On Boucher’s method for selecting objects of natural history, see chapter four of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{358} ‘Une belle Coupe d’une jolie forme, sur son pied; le tout de Jaspe sanguin monté en or émaillé.’ Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné des curiosités..... le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain}, lot 927, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{359} ‘Habits, Meubles, Armes, & ustensiles d’Indiens, Sauvages & Chinois; que l’on détaillere, lors de la Vente.’ Ibid., lot 1162, p. 136.
fused together with the sight of him purchasing such a significant number of objects, must have shaped their understanding of the design and, moreover, their perception of this artist-turned-collector.

**The Low Countries: Randon de Boisset (1766)**

While 1766 was marked by the estate sale of Madame Dubois-Jourdain, it was also the year that Boucher travelled to Flanders and Holland in the company of royal tax administrator and amateur collector Pierre-Louis-Paul Randon de Boisset (1708-1776). An enthusiastic patron of Boucher’s, Randon de Boisset had invited the artist to accompany him in search for fine and decorative arts, as well as shells and other objects of curiosity. It was not unusual for Randon de Boisset to seek advice on his collection from Boucher, or other artists and dealers for that matter. However, the first time that Boucher had accompanied a collector abroad, not to mention the first time in thirty-four years that Boucher had left the country. Notwithstanding this, the trip would prove highly successful for Randon de Boisset and Boucher, with both finding new curiosities to add to their expanding collections.

The first stop on the journey was to the now destroyed Benedictine abbey St Winoc in the fortified town of Bergues. There, Randon de Boisset and Boucher successfully negotiated the sale of an altarpiece by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), featuring a scene from the *Adoration of the Magi*. The Bergues altarpiece (293 x

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361 On Randon de Boisset’s reliance on Boucher and artists and dealers, see chapter five of this thesis.

362 In his *Catalogue Raisonné* from 1830, John Smith provided a description of the Bergues altarpiece: ‘The Virgin, with the infant Saviour in her lap, is seated on the right, and St. Joseph stands behind her, leaning on a stick, and observing with emotion one of the magi, who is on his knees, presenting the child a bowl of money; behind the latter stands a Moorish king with a gold vase in his hand (his head is
232 cm) was one of several Magi scenes executed by Rubens during his lifetime. According to Peter Sutton, Rubens was very interested in the subject matter, painting it more times than any other story from the narrative cycle of the life of Christ. Like Rubens, Boucher was also drawn to works that depicted scenes from or relating to the Adoration of Magi. Evidence of this interest can be found in Boucher’s sale catalogue from 1771, which lists fourteen paintings, drawings and engravings by various artists (including Boucher) on the subject. By comparison, Randon de Boisset’s sale catalogue reveals that he owned very few religious works, preferring instead the lighter and more decorative works produced by Boucher and other artists of his generation. At the time of his visit to Bergues in 1766, Randon de Boisset had only one other work depicting a scene from the Magi cycle in his collection. It is therefore tempting to think that Boucher’s personal interest in the subject played a

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366 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 66, p. 18; lot 178, p. 39; lot 191, p. 41; lot 208, p. 43; lot 224, p. 46; lot 232, p. 47; lot 333, p. 56 and lots 446 & 447, p. 68. His 1771 sale catalogue also lists two *grisailles* by Boucher, entitled *L’Adoration des Bergers* and *L’Adoration des Rois*, as well as a drawing from the same series. See Ibid., lots 79 & 80, pp. 20-21 and lot 395, p. 63.

367 Around one half of Randon de Boisset’s collection of drawings were by Boucher. He also owned nineteen paintings by the artist, including *Hercules and Omphale* (c.1731-1734, Moscow, Pushkin Museum). See Rémy & Julliot, *Catalogue.....de feu M. Randon de Boisset*, lots 188-201, pp. 95-98. Randon’s patronage of Boucher’s drawings is mentioned in Ronald Freyberger, ‘The Randon de Boisset Sale, 1777: Decorative Arts’, *Apollo* April no. 111 (1980): 298-303, p. 298; and Bailey, *Patriotic Taste: Collecting Modern Art in Pre-Revolutionary Paris*, pp. 26-27.

368 Rémy and Julliot, *Catalogue.....de feu M. Randon de Boisset*, lot 9, p. 6. Annotated notes reveal that the two other magi scenes in the collection were bought by Randon de Boisset in 1773, seven years after his trip to the Low Countries with Boucher. See Ibid., lots 185 & 187, pp. 94-95.
significant role in drawing Randon’s attention to the Bergues altarpiece and his subsequent advice on securing its purchase.\textsuperscript{369}

Following the visit to Bergues, the pair moved on to Amsterdam, where they met with the art dealer J. Lubbeling. With Boucher’s help, Randon de Boisset purchased several Dutch and Flemish works from the dealer. They included paintings by Jan Wynants, David Teniers, Willem van de Velde, Philippe Wouwermans, and Adrian van der Velde.\textsuperscript{370} In addition to this, Randon de Boisset also bought another painted version of the \textit{Adoration of the Magi} (St. Petersburg, Stroganov Palace) by Liège artist and theorist Gerard de Lairesse (1641-1711).\textsuperscript{371} The acquisition of this particular work is a testament to the successful relationship between Randon de Boisset and Boucher, as the painting would prove to be the subject of much excitement, which in turn reflected positively on its new owner. Writing about the work in Randon de Boisset’s 1777 sale catalogue, Rémy noted that the ‘painting is of a wise composition and is executed in such a way that it flatters all Connoisseurs’.\textsuperscript{372} He later added that no greater work had come from Lairesse. Rémy, however, was not alone in his praise for the picture. As the nineteenth-century art critic Charles Blanc (1813-1882) argued in \textit{Le trésor de la curiosité} (1857-1858), Lairesse’s painting was very much ‘appreciated by connoisseurs’ of Boucher and Randon de Boisset’s

\textsuperscript{369} Comparative analysis of several annotated copies of the Randon de Boisset sale catalogue confirm that the Bergues alterpiece was sold to the art dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre LeBrun in 1777 for 10,000 \textit{livres}. These notes also reveal that Randon de Boisset had originally paid 30,000 \textit{livres} for the work and not 60,000 \textit{livres} as LeBrun would later claim. While the price paid to the church is uncertain, the fact remains that the money raised from the sale went towards much needed repairs in the church. See Smith, \textit{A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch, Flemish, and French Painters}, p. 41 (no. 119).

\textsuperscript{370} This information is provided by Rémy in his description of the lots listed for auction in Randon de Boisset’s sale catalogue. See Rémy & Julliot, \textit{Catalogue....de feu M. Randon de Boisset}, part 1, lot 54, pp. 28; lot 58, pp. 30-31; lot 73, pp. 38-39; lot 87, pp. 45-46; lot 136, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{371} Ibid., lot 145, p. 75.

\textsuperscript{372} ‘Ce tableau est d’une composition sage & d’une exécution qui flatte tous les Connoisseurs; on ne peut rien trouver de ce Maître qui soit porté à un plus haut degree de perfection; il vient du Cabinet de M. d’Heer Lubbeling.’ Idem.
Such comments suggest that it was not just the work itself that impressed period audiences, but also the good taste and judgment of Randon de Boisset, who together with Boucher, brought it to Paris.

Rémy’s praise of the Lairesse painting, and by extension the late Randon de Boisset, proved to be a successful marketing strategy for the dealer, who went on to sell the work at the 1777 sale to Count Alexander Stroganoff (1733-1811) for 13,001 livres. It seems the Count also thought highly of the work, ensuring that it received a prominent place in the main hall of his three room picture gallery. This was confirmed by way of a visual record when it was captured in Andrei Voronikhin’s (1759-1814) watercolour design from 1793, entitled *The Picture Gallery of Count Alexander Stroganoff* (plate 32). According to Militsa Korshunova, who has been able to identify the works courtesy of Voronikhin’s skills as a miniaturist, Lairesse’s *Adoration of the Magi* was hung in the centre of the main hall. It was flanked by two paintings by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), namely *The Portrait of Nicolaas Rockox* (1621, St. Petersburg, Stroganov Palace) on the left, and *Young Woman with Her Child* (c.1618, St. Petersburg, Stroganov Palace) on the right. While Voronikhin’s inclusion of real figures shown admiring the works is a reference to the artifice of spectatorship, it also calls attention to the Count’s desire to be recognised (both in the real and fictive realms) as a connoisseur of Flemish masters, just as Randon de Boisset had before him.

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374 This confirmed by way of a handwritten note in the 1777 catalogue. See Rémy and Julliot, *Catalogue...de feu M. Randon de Boisset*, part 1, lot 145, p. 75.

375 Korshunova also noted that van Dyck’s *Young Woman with Her Child* was mistakenly identified at the time as *Princess of Orans with Her Son*. See Penelope Stiebel-Hunter, ed., *Stroganoff: The Palace and Collections of a Russian Noble Family* (Harry N. Abrams Inc, 2000), p. 215 (no. 82).
Although Randon de Boisset’s purchases during his trip to the Low Countries received attention from period commentators, he was not the only one to take advantage of the exposure to Dutch and Flemish masterpieces. An annotated note found in the 1801 sale catalogue of works belonging to François-Antoine Robit the Elder (c.1752-1815), reveals that Boucher purchased a painting by Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712) during the 1766 journey (whereabouts unknown). According to the dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun (1748-1813), it depicted one of the many streetscape views of Cologne that Van der Heyden painted during his career. Featuring a number of ‘beautiful buildings that lead the eye to the most agreeable line of trees’, the work triumphantly captured seventeen figures, which Le Brun noted was ‘distributed with admirable intelligence’.

Boucher’s purchase of the Cologne painting is significant in that speaks to his ambitions towards furthering his own collection whilst abroad—a fact that is supported by the relative financial freedom the artist enjoyed during these later years. Boucher’s interest in expanding his collection presumably led to the procurement of shells and other objects of natural curiosity. With its trade links to the Far East, Holland was a rich source of rare and exotic shells. As Gersaint had observed more than three decades earlier, ‘the number of ships that they send to the

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376 Robit was forced to sell works in 1795 and 1801. The sale was organised by the dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun. The description of the lot claimed that it was, ‘acquis par Boucher lors du voyage qu’il fit en compagnie de M. Randon de Boisset en 1766.’ As cited in Ananoff, *François Boucher*, p. 113.

377 ‘Le point de vue, très exact de perspective, d’un place de Cologne, offrant les details les plus précieux et en même temps les plus vrais; de beaux edifices occupent toute la partie gauche, et conduisant l’oeil à une avenue d’arbres qui fait la plus agreeable richesse, sur la droite on y compte dix sept figures distribuées avec art et de la plus admirable intelligence d’optique sur les differentes plans. Ce tableau est du meilleur choix et de cette touche légère et achevée qui contribue à l’illusion parfaite de la nature; 14 sur 12½ pouces.’ Ibid., p. 113.

378 It is also possible that during the visit to Lubbeling’s gallery, Boucher purchased a folio of 209 engravings by Gerard Lairesse, the same artist who painted Randon de Boisset’s newly acquired *Adoration of the Magi*. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 595, p. 82.

ends of the world provides them with abundant riches of the sea’. \footnote{le nombre de vaisseaux qu’ils envoient jusqu’aux extrémités du monde leur procure, avec plus d’abondance les richesses de la mer.’ Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, pp. 17-18.} This, he argued, contributed to the nation’s ‘wealth in this area’. \footnote{& je crois, que c’est la Nation la plus opulence dans cette partie.’ Idem.} While there is no record of Boucher purchasing shells in Holland, the trip provided him with the opportunity add to his own collection, either by purchasing shells directly through specialist dealers, or possibly by trading duplicates brought with him from his own collection.

**The barter system: A gift economy**

In addition to acquiring shells through the more conventional practices associated with the *commerce de la curiosité* in Paris and abroad, Boucher also traded objects with other amateur collectors and dealers. Indeed, it was through the process of exchange that Boucher acquired the majority of his shell collection, trading well into his final years. Recalling a moment when Boucher was presented with a case of natural history objects, his student Mannlich noted that,

> of all the case he kept only seven pieces for his cabinet, putting the rest aside to barter with the collectors and dealers with whom he had spent his life doing business.\footnote{De toute la caise, il ne garda cependant que sept morceaux pour son cabinet, le rete fut mis de coté pour le troquer a des amateurs ou des marchands, avec lesquels il passoit sa vie a négocier.’ Mannlich, Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822), vol. 1, p. 156.}

As Mannlich’s comments suggest, it is unlikely that Boucher’s restraint in this instance was financially motivated. Rather, his decision to keep only seven pieces was based on the confidence he placed in the exchange process. The ability to trade duplicate shells with other amateur collectors would prove to be a valuable resource for Boucher, whose collection displayed very little repetition, something he would have worked hard to avoid.
While Boucher used the barter system to alleviate some of the problems surrounding duplication, he also traded shells as a way of securing the best possible example of its kind. As Mannlich explained, Boucher told him he had shells which,

*without being very rare had cost him more that six hundred livres each,*

*having bartered them again and again against more beautiful examples of the same species; and giving each time one or two gold Louis’s in addition.*

It was Boucher’s ability to choose only what pleased him that provided a unifying approach to his process for selection. According to Rémy, Boucher possessed a ‘natural talent’ for ‘everything that is agreeable’ and thus ‘he rarely refused the challenge of seeking out things that appealed to his desires’. This goes some way in explaining the diversity of what Rémy’s described as Boucher’s ‘rich and immensely pleasing’ collection.

Boucher’s reliance on less conventional modes of acquisition also saw him take part in another ritual of exchange, namely the process of gift giving and receiving. By their very nature, these gifts are more difficult to trace. Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that Boucher’s collection of natural history was acquired partly through the process of gift exchange. The practice of gifting shells and other objects of *curiosité* was commonplace among eighteenth-century amateur collectors across Europe. A visit to a contemporary’s cabinet, for example, might result in a gift being sent from the guest’s own personal collection. This specially chosen gift acted as a reminder of their encounter, binding together the collections of both the giver and receiver.

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383 ‘Il m’a avoué qu’il avoit des coquilles, qui sans être tres rares lui avoient couté plus 600 livres piece, en les rétroquent toujours contreune belle de la même espèce; et donnent chaque fois un ou deux Louis de retour.’ Idem.


385 ‘Ce goût que la nature avoit donné à M. Boucher pour tout ce qui est agreeable, faisiot qu’il desiroit avec la plus grande vivacité tout ce qui lui plaisoit & que rarement il se refusoit au defit de posseder ce qui le flattoit.’ Ibid., ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers).

386 ‘De là, cette collection riche; immense & sur-tout agreeable qu’il a laissée après son décès.’ Idem.
This type of exchange, however, was not just about the object in question. Rather, there was a complex negotiation of the social codes attached to the gift giving process. Typically, this had to do with aristocratic notions of honour, prestige, power and status, all of which could be achieved in a proper handling of the exchange. For instance, writing in his instructive treatise on court conduct in 1630, Nicolas Faret (1596-1646) listed the art of giving presents among the essential skills to be mastered by the *honnête homme*. The author duly encouraged his readers to ‘observe what will be pleasing to those whom we desire to oblige’.

He later added that ‘since it was our own choice to give what we please, it is better if the present is durable and in some sense immortal…so that even the ungrateful are constrained to remember favours received’. Given the enduring quality of shells and their status as luxury objects, it is no wonder they were considered suitable gifts among noble eighteenth-century collectors and indeed, all those that aspired to be.

As Boucher’s design for the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie* suggests, this genteel manner of giving was also employed as a way of concealing the often arduous or mundane facts surrounding the object’s acquisition. This was certainly the case when the marquis de Lassay (1652-1738) gave his mistress the marquise de Bouzoles, a very beautiful shell. In the note that accompanied the gift, the marquis explained that this once treasured shell had been given to him by a sea nymph who warned: ‘Here is the shell which once housed Cleopatra’s pearl, give it to her, whom you love

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388 ‘& puis qu’il est à notre choix de donner ce que bon nous semble, ayons soin que ce que nous désirons qu’on reçoive de nous dure long-temps, afin que notre présent soit en quelque façon immortel. De cette forte les ingrates mesmes, sont constraints de ne les oublier.’ Idem.
Such gallant gestures of gift giving were also explored in the visual realm. For example, Nicolas Pineau’s (1684-1754) Design for a Chimney-Piece (c.1735-1745) (plate 33), depicts a gift exchange between a triton and a young woman who appears to have wandered to the edge of the shore. As the triton kneels in front of the woman, he clasps her hand, pressing into it a shell or some other kind of special sea treasure. The casual nature of this exchange is emblematic of the genteel style of gift giving that the marquis de Lassay attempts in his note to the marquise de Bouzoles.

Moreover, by proposing that the gift came directly from nature, rather than a more conventional forum, Pineau has subverted any notion of effort being expended by the collector in forming his or her collection— ideas that would have been reinforced to period viewers through the prominent placement of this chimney-piece design.

Modern interpretations of the gift exchange have offered further insight into the characteristics of this cultural phenomenon. Most notable is Marcel Mauss’s examination of gift giving in the regions of Polynesia, Melanesia and North West America. In The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies (1925), Mauss identified the act, or acts of gift giving, as an ritualised form of labour,
one that was practiced at all levels of the primitive and archaic societies that formed focus of his research.\textsuperscript{391}

Mauss’s findings offer an important counterpoint for further study of gift giving in non-archaic societies. In particular, his theory of reciprocity is useful in understanding the non-monetary transfer of objects between amateur collectors of natural history in mid eighteenth-century France. As Mauss discovered, although gift giving is theoretically a voluntary activity, these objects are in fact given and ‘repaid under obligation’.\textsuperscript{392} Thus, the exchange goes beyond the material realisation of the object received and can therefore be understood as an expression of involuntary procurement.

The material and immaterial gain that participants in the gift exchange stood to benefit from goes some way in explaining the reasons why natural history objects so often accompanied the correspondence between eighteenth-century amateur collectors. For example, Rémy noted that many of the visitors to Madame Dubois-Jourdain’s natural history cabinet were so impressed by its contents that upon their return, they sent gifts from their own collections in the hope that she would respond in kind.\textsuperscript{393} According to Rémy, Madame Dubois-Jourdain ‘always responded to their generosity’.\textsuperscript{394} He added that ‘it was through these multiplied exchanges that she

\textsuperscript{392} On giving as a form of obligation, see Ibid., pp. 10-23.
\textsuperscript{393} ‘Les Estrangers qui l’avoient vue, lorsqu’ils étoient de retour chez eux, avoit grand soin de recommander à tous ceux de leur Patrie qui voyageoient en France, d’aller voir ce Cabinet. Pour marquer plus particulièrement leur reconnaissance à Madame Dubois-Jourdain ils entreroient avec elle un commerce de letters relatives à l’Histoire Naturelle, & lui envoyoient avec emprressement les productions de leur Pays & les choses rare qu’ils pouvoient rencontrer.’ Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné des curiosités...... le cabinet de feu Madame Dubois-Jourdain}, pp. vii-viii.
\textsuperscript{394} ‘Madame Dubois-Jourdain a toujours répondu à leur générosité par des envois réciproques.’ Ibid., p. viii.
acquired the most beautiful pieces in her rich Collection of minerals’. As Jonathan Simon has pointed out, this type of transaction is an example of how a legitimate gift economy of naturalia grew alongside more conventional market forces, in particular, those that regulated the auction system.

Like Madame Dubois-Jourdain, Boucher also received gifts in the form of natural history objects from visitors to his collection. Most notable was the case of natural curiosities given to him in 1764 by Mannlich’s patron Christian IV, Count Palatine of Zweibrücken-Birkenfeld, (1722-1775). The gift was the result of a promise made by the Duke of Zweibrücken when presenting Mannlich to Boucher for the first time in February the previous year. As the young student recalled:

> At the beginning of the Lent, Mgr le Duc presented me one morning to M. Boucher the painter of the French graces. He was in his cabinet of natural history which, by the beauty and the choice of objects it contained, and above all by its arrangement was unique. Le Duc who had a lot of knowledge in mineralogy discussed this matter with him for a long time and promised him quicksilver minerals of a particular formation found only in the Duchy of Deuxponts. (He said) “This young man whom I introduce to you and recommend, who seeks a career in the Arts and whom I am very fond of, will bring you a case from there on my next trip in Paris. He has only to remind me of my promise upon my return to Deuxponts, I will ensure that he delivers it”.

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395 ‘C’est par ces échanges multiplies qu’elle avoit acquis les plus beaux morceaux de sa riche Collection de mine.’ Idem.


397 Christian IV was the Duke of Zweibrücken from 1733, until his death in 1775. It is for this reason that Mannlich referred to him as ‘Mgr le Duc’.

398 ‘Au commencement du carême Mgr le Duc me présenta un matin a M. Boucher le peintre des graces françaises. Il était dans son cabinet d’histoire naturelle qui, par la beauté et le choix des objets qu’il renfermait et surtout par son arrangement était unique. Le Duc qui avait beaucoup de connaissance dans mineralogy s’entretint longtemps avec lui sur cette matière et lui promit des mines de vif-argent d’une formation particulière qui se ne trouvait que dans le Duché des Deuxponts. Ce jeune homme que je vous présente et recommande, qui court la carrière des Arts et que j’aime beaucoup, vous en apportera une caisse à mon prochain voyage à Paris. Il n’a qu’a me rappeler ma
Mannlich’s recollection of this first meeting is significant, as it suggests that the Duke’s offer of a case of natural history objects was in fact a gift in exchange for Boucher’s agreement to accept Mannlich into his studio. Presumably, the Duke knew that for a passionate collector of natural history objects like Boucher, the offer of such well chosen and rare minerals would be too tempting to refuse.

The Duke’s promise of a present that he believed would bring Boucher the greatest joy highlights what Mauss has described as the paradox of the gift: For on one hand, the gift is presented as ‘free’ and ‘disinterested’, when in actual fact it is ‘constrained’ and motivated by ‘self-interest’. Thus, like the visitors to Madame Dubois-Jourdain’s cabinet who sent gifts from their own collections in the hope of procuring a return, the Duke’s offer was given with the intention of securing an obligation from Boucher, in the form of an apprenticeship for Mannlich. It seems that Boucher understood what was necessary to meet this obligation, with the artist agreeing to accept Mannlich as a student the following year. However, while Mannlich noted that Boucher made every effort to ‘welcome’ him into his studio, he also added that the artist ‘beseeched’ him ‘not to forget it’. Indeed, Boucher knew that if he were ever going to take receipt of the gift promised to him by the Duke of Zweibrücken, he would have to ensure that his new student was comfortable and well cared for.

Mannlich would go onto to spend two years as a student in Boucher studio. Although he would later criticise his teacher’s ‘false and made-up charms’,

400 ‘M. Boucher m’accueillait fort bien, et me conjura de ne pas l’oublier, que de son côté si le Prince voulait me confier a ses soins, il me donnerait sa bénédiction qui valait bien du Pape.’ Mannlich, Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822), vol. 1, p. 56.
Mannlich’s initial impression of the experience was a happy one. This fact did not escape the attention of the Duke, with the artist receiving his gift shortly after Mannlich joined his studio in 1765. Not surprisingly, Boucher was extremely pleased with what he received. As Mannlich concluded:

*The case of minerals that I delivered to M. Boucher, which Mgr le Duc had promised him the previous year, made him so happy, for as weak and decrepit as he was, he couldn’t wait to undo it. At each rare and well chosen piece, he cried and was happy as a child.*

Boucher’s reaction to the Duke’s gift signals the end of the exchange and similarly, legitimises what Mauss described as the institution of gift giving. For the seemingly voluntary and indiscriminate nature of their interaction was in fact codified within a very specific cultural milieu. In this particular exchange, it was the power vested in these objects by both parties that governed the rules of engagement, rather than economic or social pressures placed on the institution of gift giving, as was the case between Madame Dubois-Joudain and her guests.

The Duke’s attempt to choose a gift that Boucher would consider worthy of such an exchange confirms the artist’s commitment as a collector of natural history. However, it also raises questions about the perceived value of the objects in question and power they held over participants engaged in this process. As Boucher’s response indicates, the importance he placed on his collection went beyond its monetary status. For Boucher, the value the object was determined by the experience of collecting, a

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401 ‘Mes yeux s’habituerent insensiblement aux graces factices et fardées de M. Boucher…..C’est ainsi que je m’éloignois de plus en plus du vrai et du beau.’ Ibid., p. 173. On Mannlich’s reaction to Boucher’s teachings, see Ibid., pp. 195-196. For a discussion on the context of this criticism and its relationship to Boucher’s wider artistic reputation, see Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics*, p. 181.

402 ‘La caisse de mineraux que je rémis a M. Boucher, que Mgr le Duc lui avoit promi l’année précédente, lui fit tant de plaisir, que foible et decrepit comme il etoit, il ne put achever de la déballer. A chaque morçau rare et bien choisi, il s’ecrioit et se réjouissoit comme un enfant.’ Mannlich, *Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822)*, vol. 1, p. 156.

culmination of negotiated acts that Rousseau would have perhaps described as a form of ‘Conchyliomanie’.404 As Rémy noted, Boucher’s manie for his collection grew to such a point where ‘everything that pleased his eye became worthy of his research, he wished for nothing else’.405 Thus, in recognising Boucher’s apparent weakness for such curiosities, the Duke was able to procure a favourable outcome for his young friend, one that would see him become an apprentice to the newly appointed premier peintre du roi.

Boucher’s willingness to trade the acceptance of Mannlich into his studio for a small selection of the Duke’s minerals opens up the possibility that the artist may have used his own artworks as an opportunity to expand his collection of art and nature. Indeed, records indicate that Boucher gave artworks as gifts, such as the pastel portrait he did in 1761 for his friend and patron Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul (c.1720-1781).406 Boucher is also known to have received a gift from the artist Jean-Baptiste Massé (1687-1767) in the form of a painting by Etienne Parrocel (1696-1775), after he admired the work during a visit to Massé’s home.407 What, if anything, Boucher, Sireul and Massé gained from these transactions is not mentioned. However, the nature of these exchanges speaks to power of Boucher’s authority as an artist and collector. Moreover, they highlight the potential for this authority to act as a form of non-monetary currency, one that allowed Boucher to further indulge his passion for collecting.

404 Rousseau, Les Confessions, II: VIII, p. 365. On Rousseau’s use of the term Conchyliomanie, see chapter two of this thesis.
405 ‘enfin tout ce qui pouvait plaire à la vue, devenoit un objet digne de ses recherches, & il n’en voulut point d’autres.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné...le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, ‘Avant-propos’ (no pages numbers).
406 On Boucher’s Portrait of Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul (private collection), see Laing, The Drawings of François Boucher, p. 174 (no. 65). For further discussion on the relationship between Sireul and Boucher, see the conclusion to this thesis.
407 Massé’s gift to Boucher is discussed in Brunel, Boucher, p. 52.
Of course, there were those who criticised collectors for allowing such passions to impact on their economic and social well-being. Writing about Boucher’s patron Randon de Boisset, the banker Louis-François Metra (1738-1804) noted that his collection offered nothing but ‘terrible temptations for the amateur’.\(^408\) Similarly, in reaction to Antoine La Roque’s 1745 estate sale, the French politician Louis-Marie Stanislas Fréron (1754-1802) asked if ‘it is really necessary to live in sad and strained circumstances, to be badly lodged to renounce all the comforts of life…in order to accumulate curiosities, drawings etc without ceasing’.\(^409\) Indeed for some, the passion for accumulation proved too great, with collectors like the comte de Tessin being forced to sell his collection to avoid financial ruin.\(^410\)

Such criticisms in the context of described responses to Boucher’s own collecting practises raise questions about the extent to which the artist’s passion for shells and other curiosities affected his career as an artist. Boucher, to be sure, was a prodigious artist, reportedly producing more 10,000 drawings and paintings during his lifetime.\(^411\) As scholars have suggested, Boucher’s output was based on an omnipresent demand for his work, even during the later years, when the mainstream

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\(^410\) On Tessin’s financial decline, see chapter one.

tastes had turned away from the artist’s lighthearted and playful aesthetic. This was confirmed by his apprentice Mannlich, who claimed that even in the last five years of his life: ‘He could never produce enough to satisfy the demands of either collectors or dealers’.

Yet as Mannlich also noted, the demand was not without its price:

"He kept us busy for a long time, copying those of his finest drawings that he wanted to retain in his portfolio. It was these copies, which we were told simply to lay in, without finishing them, that he reserved to himself the task of retouching in his lunch hour, and out of which he made originals that he also sold for two louis apiece."

If Mannlich is to be believed, then it is not only Boucher’s prodigy as an artist that was called into question, but also his motives for financial gain. According to Antoine Bret (1717-1792), who published a eulogy on the artist in 1771, Boucher was forced to accept commissions ‘in order to meet his spending and his different tastes’.

As Bret’s comments imply, Boucher’s seemingly continuous supply of works was not solely motivated by the demand from patrons, but rather was generated to some extent by the artist himself as a way to fund his passion for collecting.

In order to assess this issue further, it is necessary to consider Boucher’s financial records, specifically the deed drawn up by the lawyer François Derbais for Madame Boucher in April 1773. The document, which details the liquidation of Boucher’s assets, reveals that Boucher’s estate was worth an impressive 152,600

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412 On the critical backlash against Boucher during the second half of the eighteenth century, particularly in relation to the pictorial representation of gender, see Hyde, Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics, passim.

413 ‘Le matin en prenant son chocolat dans son cabinet, il s’amusoit a faire ou a retoucher un dessein. Il n’en pouvoit faire assez tant pour les amateurs que pour les Brocanteurs, qui les lui payoient deux louis piece.’ Mannlich, Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822), vol. 1, p. 157.

414 ‘Il nous occupa longtemps a copier de ses plus beaux desseins qu’il voulloit garder dans son portefeuille. Ce sont ces copies que nous ne devions que preparer sans y mettre les derniers touches qu’il retouchoit pendant son dejener, en fit des originaux et les vendit deux louis piece.’ Idem.


416 This was most likely the son of the French lawyer François Derbais (d. 1743), who commissioned Boucher in 1733 to paint Rape of Europa and Mercury Confiding Bacchus to the Nymphs (London, Wallace Collection).
Of this, however, three quarters of the total amount was raised by the sale of his collection. This would suggest that during the course of his lifetime, Boucher spent at least 100,000 *livres* on his collection—possibly more given the subsequent depreciation in the value of certain objects such as shells.

By comparison, the collection of Boucher’s fellow premier peintre du roi Jacques-André-Joseph Aved (1702-1766) was sold through Rémy in 1766 for 69,010 *livres* and 25 *sols*. While this was a significant figure for the artist and amateur art dealer, further analysis of the catalogue reveals that decorative objects and assorted curios made up only 3.9 percent of the total amount, with the rest achieved by the sale of his collection of paintings. Similarly, the sale of Boucher’s son-in-law Pierre-Antoine Baudouin’s (1723-1769) estate raised a comparatively lesser amount of 9,468 *livres*. From these rather crude comparisons, it becomes abundantly clear that the majority of money Boucher made during his career was spent furthering his passion for collecting all manner of art and nature.

In addition to confirming the amount Boucher spent on his collection, the 1773 deed also shows that following his death in 1770, Boucher had outstanding debts totaling 14,643 *livres* and 13 *sols*. These debts, which were a direct result of Boucher’s interest in collecting, fell into two distinct categories. The first relates to the sale of his collection in 1771, with 9,400 *livres* owed to Rémy and his assistant J.

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418 For a breakdown on the amount raised at Boucher estate sale, see the handwritten notes in the 1771 sale catalogue.
419 This figure is based on information found in the 1773 deed to Boucher’s estate, AN MCXXXV 775; and on the annotated notes in the 1771 catalogue.
420 This is my estimate based on the annotated notes found in the BnF’s copy of Aved’s estate sale catalogue. Pierre Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné de tableaux de différents bons maîtres des trois écoles, de figures, bustes & autres ouvrages de bronze & de marbre, de porcelaines, & autres effets qui composent le cabinet de feu M. Aved, peintre du Roi & de son Académie* (Paris: Didot, 1766). YD-2060 (2)-8.
421 Brunel, *Boucher*, p. 34.
422 1773 deed to Boucher’s estate, AN MCXXXV 775, pp. 8-11.
Guillot for costs associated with the organisation of the sale.\textsuperscript{423} The remaining debt of approximately 5,243 \textit{livres} was spread across a variety of mercers, collectors, framers, and engravers—the type of people that Boucher had spent his life doing business with.\textsuperscript{424}

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that during his lifetime, Boucher financially indebted himself for the sake of his collection. According to the records of the mercer Lazare Duvaux (c.1703-1758), between 1749 and 1757 Boucher purchased a number of imported decorative Asian porcelains from the dealer, along with other collectable objects at a cost of 3,215 \textit{livres}.\textsuperscript{425} Unlike Duvaux’s other clients, Boucher had a rolling account with the dealer that allowed him to pay in instalments when necessary. A footprint of Boucher’s debts to Duvaux can be traced throughout the mercer’s \textit{Livre-journal}, which incidentally Louis Courajod (1841-1896) chose to reuse Boucher’s design for \textit{À la Pagode} as the journal’s frontispiece when it was published in 1873.\textsuperscript{426} That Boucher needed to go to such lengths to obtain objects for his collection distinguishes him from Duvaux’s more wealthy clients like Madame de Pompadour. Yet at the same time, it also attests to the nature of their relationship, which in addition to being forged in good faith, was dependant on shared clientele and thus was most likely regarded as mutually beneficial by both parties.\textsuperscript{427}

Unfortunately, the extent to which Boucher’s own art making was driven by his passion for collecting cannot be measured with any exactitude. What is clear,
however, is Boucher’s willingness to further his interest in collecting, either by purchasing items outright at estate sales, indebted him to mercers, trading them for objects in his own collection, or by exchanging them in return for a service— as was the case with Mannlich. That all of these avenues (and possibly more) were pursued by Boucher at one point or another during his lifetime reaffirms the artist’s underlying desire and dedication to his collection. Moreover, it suggests that for Boucher, his identity as an artist-turned-collector was part of a broader strategy, one that offered him the potential to benefit both professionally and personally.
Chapter IV

A Universe of Shells: Boucher’s Collection at the Louvre

In June 1752, Boucher and his family moved into their new and long awaited lodgings in the Louvre. Located on the first floor of the aile de l’Oratoire in the northwest corner of the Cour carrée (plate 34), this spacious apartment had become available following the death of its former resident, the director of the Academy and premier peintre du roi Charles-Antoine Coypel. According the artist Jean-Baptiste Massé, the apartment consisted of ‘several large rooms’ and promised to be a ‘very comfortable’ residence for the Boucher family. The apartment also offered Boucher a large studio where he could work, and importantly, display his growing collection of art and nature.

Boucher’s desire for larger accommodation was first raised in March 1746, when a petition in the form of a poem by Alexis Piron (1689-1773) had attempted to secure Boucher a place at the Louvre from the new director-general of the Bâtiments du roi Charles-François Paul Le Normant de Tournehem (1721-1764). Written in the guise of Boucher, Piron’s poem appealed to Tournehem on the grounds that ‘I have children and needs/ To please is my taste, and there one run less/ To Michael Angelo than to Albani’. Despite his suggestion that Boucher’s ‘needs’ required that he be given a more appropriate lodging for an artist of his standing, Piron’s appeal was denied.

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428 In a letter dated June 25 1752, Jean-Baptiste Massé informed his correspondent the former Danish Legation secretary to the French court in Paris, Justitsråd Joachim Wasserschlebe (1709-1787) that: ‘M. Bouché a obtenu l’Atelier place dans le Vieux Louvre. Il y pourra loger très commodement la famille. Car il est compose de plusieurs pieces très vastes.’ As cited in Ananoff, François Boucher, p. 54.

429 Piron’s petition was delivered one month after the death of the sculptor and resident of the Louvre, Guillaume Coustou (1677-1746). See Laing, ‘Chronology’, p. 25.

430 ‘J’ay des enfants et des besoins/ Plaire est mon gout, et l’on court moins/ A michel Ange qu’à l’Albane.’ A complete version of the poem is reproduced in Ananoff, François Boucher, p. 29.
Shortly after this Boucher took matters into his own hands. In 1748, he moved his family into a recently renovated three-floor apartment on the rue de Richelieu. The apartment was conveniently located near the studio that had been granted to Boucher two years earlier in the form of a stipend while he completed a series of tapestry designs for Louis XV’s château la Muette.\footnote{Ibid., p. 43; and Bailey, ‘Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher (1716-96’}, p. 225. Boucher’s studio, which was in the Bibliothèque du Roi was bequeathed to the painter Jean Restout II, in July 1752. See Christine Gouzi, Jean Restout, 1692-1768: peintre d’histoire à Paris (Paris: Arthena, 2000), p. 442. On the work carried out at La Muette, see Scott, ‘Playing Games with Otherness: Watteau’s Chinese Cabinet at the Château de La Muette’, passim. Despite this, Boucher was not satisfied with the apartment, which he described as ‘extremely small’ in a letter to the French dramatist Charles Simon Favart (1710-1792), dated July 2 that same year.\footnote{‘Il est vray mon cher amy que Batiton n’est plus ches moi depuis quelque tems par la raison que l’apartement que j’ai a present est extremement petit.’ As cited in Laing, ‘Trois lettres de François Boucher et de sa femme à l’auteur dramaticque Favart’, p. 21.} The cramped conditions also meant that Boucher was forced to rent an additional room to accommodate two of his students.\footnote{Ibid., p. 20.} This, combined with the lack of a studio for Boucher to work and display his collection, meant that the artist was once again forced to look elsewhere.

With a comparatively more spacious layout and studio on site, the Louvre apartment provided Boucher with an opportunity to consolidate his personal and professional needs. Coypel’s requirements, however, would prove to be somewhat different from Boucher’s. As Coypel’s 1753 sale catalogue reveals, the former premier peintre du roi was not, by Boucher’s standards, a prolific collector. Moreover, of the 582 items listed for sale, 434 of these were made up of paintings, drawings, and engravings.\footnote{Pierre-Jean Mariette, Catalogue des tableaux, dessins, marbres, bronzes, modèles, estampes et planches gravées, ainsi que des bijoux, porcelaines et autres curiosités de prix, du cabinet de feu M. Coypel (Paris: 1753), passim. By comparison, Boucher’s catalogue lists 1,865 lots for sale, many with multiple listings. See Pierre Rémy, Catalogue raisonné le cabinet de feu M. Boucher. (Paris: Musier, 1771), passim.} In other words, items that could be hung or stored flat. Thus, it quickly became apparent to Boucher that in order to accommodate the 13,000 plus objects in
his collection, he would need to make a number of significant modifications to the Louvre apartment.

Accordingly, sometime between July and December 1752, Boucher carried a series of renovations at a cost of 9,000 livres, only half of which was reimbursed by the Crown during his lifetime.\footnote{Bailey, 'Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher (1716-96)', p. 226.} The renovations included the replacement of non-bearing walls, the mezzanine floor, and the kitchen staircase, as well as installing several new windows and doors. In addition to the structural work, he also made a number of aesthetic improvements in the way of ‘cupboards, panelling, veneering, pieces of marble and limestone for the fireplace mantles, mirrors, and other adjustments and ornaments’.\footnote{‘les boiseries en armoires, lambris, plaquages, portes et fenêtres, cheminées de marbre et de pierre de liair, glaces et autres ajustements et ornements.’ Boucher deed, 1773. AN MCXXXV 775, p. 7.} According to Boucher’s estate records, the cosmetic changes cost the artist 4,900 livres alone— a significant amount more than the annual pension of 1,000 livres he had been awarded earlier that year following the death of Jean-François de Troy.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 7-8. The last significant increase Boucher received from the Crown was in March 1752, when he was awarded 1,000 livres per annum, following the death of Jean-François de Troy. See Laing, 'Chronology', p. 28. The raise is also mentioned in E & J. Goncourt, French Eighteenth-Century Painters, p. 87, (note 42).}

The results of Boucher’s renovation were captured in the fourth volume of Jacques-François Blondel’s Architecture Française (1752-1756), which featured an updated plan of the first floor of Louvre (plate 35). In an accompanying note, Blondel confirmed that the ‘celebrated artist has renovated a very handsome lodging’, which he added, ‘contains an infinite amount of curiosities that merit the attention of connoisseurs’.\footnote{Boucher’s apartment is marked by the letter I. ‘Atelier de feu M. Coypel, premier Peintre du Roi, occupé aujourd’hui par M. Boucher & dans lequel ce célèbre artiste s’est pratiqué un fort beau logement, contenant une infinité de curiosités qui méritent l’attention des connoisseurs.’ Jacques-Françoise Blondel, Architecture Française, ou Recueil des plans, elevations, coupes et profiles des}  

While the renovations guaranteed a more comfortable and practical...
layout for the family, as Blondel’s comments suggest, it seems they were carried out by Boucher with his collection firmly in mind.

**The collection**

In order to better understand the rituals surrounding the display of Boucher’s collection at the Louvre, it is necessary to first consider the objects he selected in more detail. While there are no known examples of Boucher’s natural history collection in existence today, a complete list of the artist’s shells, corals and other marine plant life is recorded in the auction catalogue that accompanied the sale of the artist’s estate in February 1771. The catalogue reveals a diverse collection, rich in understanding of the both the scientific and artistic qualities of these objects. This is demonstrated in the overall variety of the collection, which reveals many fine examples from each of the twenty-five families of shells recommended for collection by d’Argenville in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*.  

While the precise nature of the collection suggests that Boucher was interested in adopting a pedagogical approach to collecting, his efforts were also tempered by his love of ornament and passion for display. This perspective would provide a unifying approach to his process for selection. As Rémy argued, although Boucher ‘chose from every genre, he only selected the things that were pleasing because of their form or colour’. Rémy’s comments explain the diversity of Boucher’s natural history collection, which according to Mannlich ranged from many rare and

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440 ‘dans chaque genre il ne choisissoit que les choses qui pouvoient plaire, ou par la forme ou par les couleurs.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers).
expensive shells and minerals down to plain pebbles he had collected from the street.\footnote{See Mannlich, \textit{Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich (1741-1822)}, vol. 1, p. 156.}

As the 1771 catalogue demonstrates, Boucher’s natural history collection was spread across 700 separate lots, some of which contained upwards of thirty different items.\footnote{For example, lot 1752 held thirty-nine different Petoncles shells from the coast Spain. See Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, p. 241. For Boucher’s natural history collection, see lots 1116-1814, pp. 156-249 and lots 1864-1865, p. 262.}

Of this, shells, corals and madrepores made up over half of the number of lots in the artist’s natural history collection. While Rémy undoubtedly made some accommodations in preparation for the sale, the majority of the collection was preserved in its original condition.\footnote{Boucher’s estate sale commenced at 3.30pm on February 18 1771, and lasted for several days. According to list of buyers in the BnF’s annotated of the catalogue, the sale was well attended by the city’s fashionable elite.}

This was later confirmed by Wille, who recorded his impressions of Boucher’s collection after a visit to the artist’s studio during the sale:

\begin{quote}
The remainder of his curiosities, which are still in situ, deserve the closest attention on account of their choice and their variety. My wife and Frédéric were surprised by this, when they viewed the porcelain, minerals, shells, precious stones, lacquer, weapons, instruments, and other works of nature and art, collected for many years by this famous and gracious painter.\footnote{‘J’ay mené ma femme et mon fils Frédéric voir le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, dont on commence la vente depuis le 18, en commençant par les tableaux, terres cuites, etc. Le reste de ses curiosités, étant encore en place, mérite la plus grande attention par leur choix et variété; ma femme et Frédéric en furent supris, en voyant des porcelaines, minéraux, coquilles, pierre précieuses, laques, arms, instruments, et autres productions de la nature et de l’art, rassemblés depuis nombre d’année pas ce fameux et gracieux peintre.’ Wille, \textit{Mémoires et Journal}, p. 470.}
\end{quote}

As a record of the sale, Rémy’s 1771 catalogue is therefore an invaluable resource, as it not only reveals Boucher’s collecting practices, but it also allows the reader to experience the collection as the artist had intended.
The highlight of Boucher’s natural history collection was a ‘very rare and well conserved’ *Buccin* shell, known to period collectors as *le Pavillon d’orange* (*Buccinum aurantium*). Measuring approximately five and a half centimetres in length and one and a half centimetres in width, this highly sought after shell belonged to a family of marine gastropods commonly found on the coast of Java, Indonesia.

As Jacques Christophe Valmont-Bomare (1731-1807) explained in his *Dictionnaire raisonné d’histoire naturelle* (1764), the *Pavillon d’orange* was considered ‘a rare shell’ of great beauty among its genre, remarkable for its tailless ovate shape, whirled body, indented mouth, rich orange colour, and knobbed spire. The French zoologist and conchologist, Louis Charles Kiener (1799-1881) also commented on the ornamental exterior of the *Pavillon d’orange*. In particular, he noted the shell’s ‘numerous longitudinal folds’, each one ‘intersected’ by evenly spaced and well defined grooved bands.

The rare status of Boucher’s *Pavillon d’orange*, combined with its unique visual qualities and excellent condition, meant that it sold for an impressive 191 livres, the highest price achieved for an individual shell at the 1771 sale. It was most likely purchased by the dealer J.-B.-Pierre Le Brun, who listed a similar shell for sale in the

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448 ‘Shell very small, ovate, oblong, attenuated at its extremities, of an orange yellow color; spire pointed, composed of seven sub-convex whirls, bearing upon their whole surface numerous longitudinal folds, intersected by fine transverse and approximate striae. The striae of the lowest whirl a little more distinct towards the base. The sutures ornamented, near the edge, with a row of small granulations, separated by a transverse furrow. Aperture whitish, ovate, narrow, contracted at its base; right lip denticulated.’ See Kiener, *Recent Species and Iconographie of Shells*, pp. 49-50.
449 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1628, pp. 227-228.
catalogue that accompanied his 1791 auction of a collection of rare and curious objects. For instance, lot 344 reveals that Le Brun had for sale, ‘a very beautiful Pavillon d’orange. This rare shell is of a very rich colour and of many pouces’.450 While the description is not exact, Le Brun’s comments speak to the rarity and singularity of the Pavillon d’orange. Moreover, they provide some explanation as to why it achieved such a high price in 1771—a time when the French market for shells was in serious decline.451

In addition to the Pavillon d’orange, there were many other notable shells in Boucher’s collection. Among the univalves, there was a ‘very beautiful’ snail shell (Limaçon), known to period collectors as the Bouche d’or on account of its brilliant golden interior.452 The artist was also in possession of the highly prized Admiral (Conus ammiralis) shell, which Linnaeus had singled it out in 1758 for its rarity alongside the Scalata— the same shell that had brought Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson much of his widespread acclaim.453 Indeed, the presence of this and other well chosen shells in an amateur collection, such as the one belonging to Boucher, was sufficient to have earned the collector the mark of a connoisseur among his contemporaries.

When Boucher was unable to obtain extremely rare and expensive shells like the Scalata, the artist purchased their ‘false’ equivalents. These shells were not artificial replicas, rather they were representatives from the same family that closely

450 ‘Un fort beau Pavillon d’orange. Cette rare coquille est de la plus riche couler, & a plus de a pouces.’ Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun, Catalogue d’objets rares et curieux... provenant du cabinet de M. Le Brun (Paris: 1791), p. 44. Other examples of the Pavillon d’orange were found in the collections of Blondel d’Azincourt and M. de Damery, Chevalier de l’Ordre Militaire de Saint-Louis. See Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1780), vol. 1, p. 245 and p. 249.
451 On the collapse of the shell market in France, see Dietz, ‘Mobile Objects’, pp. 378-382.
452 Limaçons were also referred to during this period as Limas. Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1619, pp. 225-226. For a description of the Bouche d’or, see Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), p. 254. The Bouche d’or is marked D on plate 9.
453 Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1684, p. 233. On the status of the Admiral shell (conus ammiralis) during the eighteenth century, see Dance, Rare Shells, p. 27.
resembled their respective counterparts. The *fausse Scalata*, for example, was similar to the *vrai Scalata*, with its delicately formed mouth, tapered body, and distinctive ridge markings. However, as the author of *The British History of Shells* (1799) explained, the *fausse Scalata* differed from the true original in that each of these distinguishing traits was of a comparatively lesser quality. In particular, he pointed to a slight ‘swelling’ in the spires that caused the elevated ridge markings to ‘appear more remarkable and prominent’. While these imperfections meant that the *fausse Scalata* would never achieve great heights at a sale, their nature was subtle enough for the shell to act as an acceptable substitute for an amateur collector like Boucher.

The artist also owned a number of other false shells, most notably from a family of cowries, known to period collectors as *les Porcelaines*. Admired for their naturally smooth glossy exteriors and decorative effects, *Porcelaines* shells were highly sought after by eighteenth-century amateur collectors. Writing in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*, d’Argenville identified forty-six different species in this group of molluscs, of which Boucher owned thirty-five. The most valuable in this group of shells was undoubtedly the *Porcelaine argus* (*Cypraea argus*), which Gersaint declared to be ‘the rarest and most precious’ of the *Porcelaines*, on account of its slightly elongated form and detailed exterior.

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455 On the relationship between the naturally formed *Porcelaines* shells and the ceramic material known as porcelain, see chapter five.


457 ‘L’Argus est la plus rare et la plus précieuse de cette espece, on l’appelle ainsi pour la distinguer des autres par rapport à la quantité des grands & petites taches rondes semblables à des yeux, qui sont semées au hazard sur sa superficie. Le fond en est ordinairement petit gris, & les taches d’un canelle vif: cette Coquille est estimée des curieux. Celle-ci en est une des plus belles, on ne la trouve qu’au fond de la mer, ce qui fait la difficulté d’en avoir aisément.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 63-64.
The unique aesthetic qualities of the *Porcelaine argus*, combined with its perceived rarity, meant that collectors often turned to its substitute the *faux Argus* (*Cypraea exanthema*). Like the *fausse Scalata*, the *faux Argus* was similar to its true counterpart (*vrai Argus*) in that it displayed the same lightly patterned enameled surface, partially concealed spire, and distinctive ridged aperture. However, as the authors of *Dictionnaire des sciences naturelles* (1826) explained, the *faux Argus* differed from the original in that each of these distinguishing marks were considered relatively inferior. In particular, they noted its cylindrical form and plainer markings that presumably caused the shell to be less desirable to the sensations of sight and touch.\(^{458}\)

The very nature of these false shells meant that they were commonplace among amateur collectors. Although curiously, Rémy’s 1771 catalogue reveals that Boucher owned both a *vrai* and a *faux Porcelaine argus*. One logical explanation for this is that Boucher purchased the *faux Argus* in the absence of its true equivalent. However, given Boucher’s active involvement in the exchange process and the care he took to avoid repetition, it seems unlikely that he did not find a way to dispose of it once he was in possession of the more superior *vrai Argus*. A more likely explanation is that Boucher was not concerned by owning duplicates in this instance. Rather, the interplay between the real (*vrai*) and fake (*faux*) *Argus* may have appealed to his artistic sensibilities. This is further evidenced by the fact that Boucher also owned both a *vrai* and *fausse Écriture chinoise*, as well as two different examples of the *fausse Scalata*.\(^{459}\) Thus, it is possible that in owning these particular multiples, Boucher revealed something of his interest in the inventiveness of nature.


Specifically, that nature, like the artisan, displayed a sense of humour in its ability to self-consciously deceive, whilst at the same time re-present what was absent from the collection.

In addition to his fine collection of univalves, Boucher also owned several interesting bivalves, including a ‘very beautiful’ red and white marbled oyster shell, known to period collectors as a *Feuilles de persil*.\(^{460}\) This striking bivalve would later sell for 150 *livres*, a significant price for a class of shells that Gersaint had once deemed inferior to its single valve counterparts.\(^{461}\) Boucher had also managed to acquire several different examples of the *Conque exotique*, a particularly hard to find sub-group of shells from the *Coeur* family.\(^{462}\) As Valmont de Bomare explained in the 1776 edition of *Dictionnaire raisonné universel d’histoire naturelle*, the exterior surface of this ‘spherically formed’ shell was identified by its distinctive serrated edges and evenly spaced ridged markings.\(^{463}\) He later added that the ‘most beautiful’ example of the ‘rare’ *Conque exotique* was found in cabinet of Louis-Henri de Bourbon, Prince de Condé (1692-1740) at Chantilly.\(^{464}\)

\(^{460}\) ‘*dont une très belle à feuilles de persil, marbée de rouge & blanc.*’ Ibid., lot 1707, p. 237.

\(^{461}\) On the preference for univalves over bivalves, see Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 74.

\(^{462}\) ‘*Une conque exotique bivalve. On sait la difficulté qu’il y a de s’en procurer de telles.*’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné…..le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1764, p. 243. The difficulty in obtaining this particular shell is also mentioned in Pedro Francisco Dávila, *Catalogue systématique et raisonné des curiosités de la nature et de l’art, qui composent le cabinet de M. Dávila*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Briasson, 1767), lot 803, pp. 350-351. On Dávila as a collector, see chapter five of this thesis.

\(^{463}\) ‘*Coquille bivalve, étrangère, & de la famille des cœurs, de forme presque sphérique, blanche tant au dedans qu’au dehors, excepté quelques parties qui font d’un cannelle plus ou moins foncé; à côtes formées de trois stries, dont celle du milieu est mince, élevée en vive arête & creuse intérieurement en forme de tuyau; à bords dentelés , laissant entr’eux un jour quand la coquille est fermée; & à charniere composée dans l’une & l'autre valve de deux dents sous les fommetts, & d'une très-grande latérale.*’ Jacques-Christophe Valmont de Bomare, *Dictionnaire raisonné universel d'histoire naturelle* (Lyon: 1776), p. 600.

\(^{464}\) ‘*Cette coquille est très-rare à trouver complete. S. A. S. Mr. le Prince de Condé possede dans son coquillier, la plus belle & la plus grande conque exotique.*’ Idem. For a description of the Prince of Condé’s collection, see Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 31; and Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), pp. 210-211.
Arguably, the most visually spectacular bivalve in Boucher’s collection was the rare and very fragile *Watering-Pot* shell (*B. vaginiferus*), known to period collectors as l’*Arrosoir*. As the name suggests, the shaft of this unusual tubular shaped shell was fitted with a naturally perforated head that acted as a filter feeder for the marine animal that had once inhabited it. According to Rémy, Boucher’s *Watering-Pot* shell was a particularly ‘handsome’ example, measuring sixteen and half centimetres in length. It would later sell for 160 *livres*, making it the second most valuable shell in Boucher’s collection.

To compliment his collection of univalves and bivalves, Boucher also purchased a significant number of multivalves, many of which were extremely fragile. His ‘beautiful’ *Oursin à baguette*, for example, was considered unique insofar as it had managed to retain ‘all of its points’. The fragility of this particular multivalve led Boucher to store it in a customised glass box, one of several objects conserved in this way. The effort to preserve the organic integrity of this and other natural curiosities like it not only speaks to Boucher’s dedication as a collector of natural history, but it also emphasises his passion for display.

In addition to his collection of shells, the 1771 catalogue reveals that Boucher acquired a further 320 examples of corals, madreporas, and other marine plant life. The collection, which was valued at 4,366 *livres*, was comprised of a number of

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465 For an explanation of the *Arrosoir* shell, see Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, lot 405, p. 131.
467 ‘Un bel arrosoir de six pouces de longueur.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1598, p. 223.
468 ‘Un bel oursin à baguette, conservant toutes ses pointes.’ Ibid., lot 1785, p. 246.
469 ‘Il est sous une cage de verre.’ Idem. Other examples included a ‘beautiful piece’ of magnetic iron, which Boucher preserved in similar a glass box. Ibid., lot 1221, p. 172.
‘irregularly’ shaped and ‘brightly’ coloured items. For example, Boucher owned several striking pieces of red and white coral trees, flat ‘mustard hill’ coral (*P. astreoides*), maze coral (*M. meandrites*), fire coral (*M. alcicorni*), as well as a small selection of *tubipores* (*T. musica*)— otherwise known as the organs pipes of the sea. Rémy noted that Boucher was also in possession of a ‘beautiful’ white *Seeing Eye* coral (*Corail blanc oculé*), which measured just over forty-one centimetres in height.

While Boucher’s *Seeing Eye* coral was certainly impressive, according to d’Argenville the highlight of this particular collection was piece of red stony coral (*Corail articulé rouge*) that ‘stood more than two feet high’. Boucher’s stony coral should not to be confused with its more commonly found red counterpart the *Corail rouge*. As the eighteenth-century naturalist Michel Adanson (1727-1806) explained in his entry on *Corail articulé rouge* for the *Encyclopédie*:

This coral differs from the common one in that its stony structure is articulated or knotty (and) grooved longitudinally, although not as hard as coral: the branches are arranged in the same fan pattern and is evenly covered with an earthy, thick and hard red bark, sown with polyp cells….Its colour is a very pleasant red, speckled with yellow dots.

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471 Ibid., lot 1461, p. 204; lot 1495, pp. 207-8; lot 1525, p. 212; lot 1533 & 1535, p. 213.
473 This is incorrectly labelled as a madrepore. Ibid., lot 1472, p. 205. For an explanation of *Corail blanc oculé*, see Michel Adanson’s entry in Diderot and d’Alembert, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 17 vols., vol. 9 (Paris: Lausanne, 1782), p. 426.
475 According to Rémy, Boucher owned a spectacular piece of ‘bright red coral’ approximately 32cm in height and 16.6cm in width. It was sold in 1771 for 120 livres and 2 sols. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1461, p. 204.
476 ‘Ce corail diffère du commun en ce que sa charpente pierreuse est comme articulée ou noueuse, sillonnée longitudinalement, mais moins dure que celle du *corail*: ses ramifications sont disposées sur un même plan en éventail; il est recouvert de même d'une écorce rouge, terreuse, assez épaisse, plus dure, & semée de cellules de polypes. Il y en a de trois à quatre pieds de hauteur sur deux pouces & plus de diametre. Sa couleur est d'un rouge très-agréable, piqueté de points jaunes. Il est commun dans la mer de l'île de Madagascar.’ Diderot and d'Alembert, *l'Encyclopédie*, vol. 9, p. 425.
The shimmering effect created by the tiny yellow flecks dancing across the surface of the thick branches of the red coral must have appealed to Boucher, who in order to highlight its natural beauty, fused it together with the relatively smoother ‘branch of a white madrepore’. The conflation of these two objects is an example of the fertile exchange taking place between art and nature under Boucher’s direction at the Louvre during these years. Furthermore, it points to Boucher’s ability to think aesthetically about nature, whilst at the same time pursue a pedagogical approach to the natural sciences.

Boucher’s purchase of the _Corail articulé rouge_ is also significant in that it is similar in appearance to the one he imagined in his design for d’Argenville’s La _Conchyliologie_. Indeed, there is a clear stylistic affinity between the described responses to Boucher’s red stony coral and the thick polyped version that is presented in 1742 frontispiece (plate 3). Further evidence for this is suggested in Malesherbes’s hand-coloured copy of the 1757 edition (plate 25), which features a similar dark red coral (minus the yellow flecks) to the one described by Adanson in the _Encyclopédie_. While Jacques de Favanne’s hand-coloured frontispiece and plates aimed to ornament the text in a tasteful way, the fact that the artist had access to the original pieces loaned to d’Argenville for the purpose of engraving suggests a certain degree of authenticity was apparent in Favanne’s handling of this privately owned edition. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say if Boucher was in possession of his _Corail articulé rouge_ before 1742. Rather, it is more likely that the model he imagined for d’Argenville inspired him to purchase a piece for his collection and, moreover, that

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477 ‘Un grand & bel arbre de corail articulé rouge, de deux pieds hauteur, auquel adhere un madrepore branchu blanc.’ Rémy, _Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher_, lot 1576, p. 218. Rémy later sold the object for an impressive 140 _livres_, making it one of the more valuable items in Boucher’s collection.
the relationship between the real and fictive versions of the coral provided Boucher with a source of amusement.

Although visually pleasing, the range of corals available to Boucher and other amateur collectors during this period were somewhat limited in colour. The artist therefore supplemented the collection with a number of brightly coloured coral fungi, known to period collectors as *faux corail*. Grown on the forest floor rather than in the sea, these spongy fungi came in a variety of curious shapes, clustered forms and luminous colours. As Rémy has revealed, Boucher experimented with different groups of coral fungi, creating spectacular mixes of red, yellow, white and purple, in a manner that allowed him to demonstrate his sense of artistic taste.  

Boucher’s corals were complimented by an equally impressive collection of madrepores, sea sponges, algae, and other marine plant life. The collection included a rare *Sea Tree* (*L’Ile de mer*) valued at 171 *livres*, as well as several of the well-formed *Banana Leaf* (*Plantain*) variety of madrepore. Additionally, Boucher acquired a selection of round madrepores, some of which, like the *Grand Cabbage of the Sea* (*Chou de mer*), measured more than thirty-three centimetres in diameter and over twenty-five centimetres in height.

The rest of the collection was made up of ‘well chosen’ and ‘precious’ minerals, shells, corals and other natural curios that satisfied both d’Argenville’s method for forming an abstract taxonomy and Boucher own desire for the visually spectacular.

Shells like ‘Dog’s teeth’ (*Dents de chien*) and ‘Pig’s ears’ (*Oreille de cochon*), for

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479 Ibid., lots 1487-1489, p. 207 and lot 1512, p. 209.
480 Ibid., lot 1522, pp. 210-211 and lot 1487, p. 207.
example, were a species recommended by d’Argenville for collection. As their names suggest, however, they were also capable of amusing the mind and delighting the eye.\footnote{Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, lot 1649, p. 230 and lot 1672, p. 232.} As Gersaint explained, the criteria for naming shells in this era of conchology was based on the vernacular expression (\textit{noms de guerres}) of the object’s formal aesthetic character:

\begin{quote}
\textit{by saying that I have seen a large and well conserved Spiny Woodcock I make myself understood, and the person to who I am speaking forms for himself, on the spot, an image of the piece which I want to describe to him, because I have formerly agreed with this person to give that name to a Shell which completely resembles a woodcock’s head in shape, and add the term Spiny because it is covered all over with very sharp points, and to distinguish it from another species also named Woodcock, for a like resemblance, but which has no spines.}\footnote{‘qu’en disant que j’ai vû une grande Becasse épineuse bien conservée, je me rends intelligible, & la personne à qui je parle se forme, sur le champ, une image de la piece dont je lui veux faire la description, parceque je suis convenu auparavant avec cette personne de donner ce nom à une Coquille qui ressemble tout à-fait par la figure à la tête d’une Becasse, & d’y ajouter le terme d’épineuse, parcequ’elle est pleine par tout de pointes très-aiguës, & pour la distinguer d’une autre espee ce que l’on nomme aussi Becasse à cause de la pareille ressemblance, mais qui n’a aucune épine.’ Gersaint, \textit{Catalogue raisonné de coquilles}, pp. 3-4. In this particular instance, I have used Emma Spary’s translation of this important, but somewhat confusing passage, which outlines Gersaint’s reasons for his continued use of the \textit{noms de guerres}. Spary, ‘Scientific Symmetries’, p. 22-23.}
\end{quote}

Following Gersaint’s logic, a cohesive picture of Boucher collection starts to emerge when considering the list of names that appear in the 1771 catalogue. For instance, Boucher had shells that resembled strawberries (\textit{Fraise}), apricots (\textit{Abricot}), tulips (\textit{Tuilpes}), lemons (\textit{Citron}), thistles (\textit{Chardon}), cabbage (\textit{Chou}), turnips (\textit{Navet}), and ostrich eggs (\textit{Oeuf d’autruche}).\footnote{Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, lot 1765, p. 243, lot 1758, p. 242, lot 1638, p. 228, lot 1750, p. 241, lot 1788, p. 246, lot 1766, p. 244, lot 1686, p. 234 and lot 1789, p. 244.} The semiotic relationship that existed between these types of objects is evidence of the fact that shells continued to operate symbolically for much of the eighteenth century, despite attempts by naturalists such as Michel Adanson and Georges-Louis Leclerc the comte de Buffon (1707-1788) to
introduce a more formal taxonomic approach to the study of natural history in France.\footnote{485} Moreover, it is an example of how mid-eighteenth-century French conchology was caught between the Renaissance system of natural history and the increasingly rational methods of classification of the Enlightenment.

For Boucher and other amateur collectors of his generation, the relationship between these shells and the objects they appeared to represent was understood as a form of aesthetic rather than scientific lusus.\footnote{486} Indeed, the playful nature of a shell’s external character was at the heart of eighteenth-century collecting. As Gersaint concluded:

*There are (here), singular accidents, in which Nature appears to take her sport, sometimes by an outlandish and limitless bizarrerie, sometimes by a symmetry so precise and well judged that the most refined Art could not equal it.*\footnote{487}

Gersaint’s comments recall Pliny’s earlier discussion of shells, in which he argued that the ‘great variety’ of colours and shapes pointed to ‘Nature’s sportive mood’.\footnote{488}

Pliny’s belief in nature’s propensity to exhibit a playful sense of self was central to the understanding of lusus in early and mid-eighteenth-century conchology. This underlying sense of innuendo, however, would ultimately provide fuel for a backlash led by Michel Adanson, who claimed that the amateur collector’s interest in such


\footnote{487} ‘Il y a dans cette suite, des accidents singuliers dans lesquels la Nature paroit se joüer, tantôt par une bizarrerie outré et sans bornes, tantôt par une simetrie si juste et si precise, que l’Art le plus rafiné ne pourroit y atteindre.’ Gersaint, *Mercure de France* November 1735, 2461. In this instance, I have used Katie Scott’s translation. See Scott, *The Rococo Interior*, p. 173.

matters represented a serious obstacle to the development of eighteenth-century
French conchology.489

While the majority of shells, corals, and other marine plant life in this era of
conchology were given names that satisfied their external characters, others like the
Concha veneris and the Char de Neptune conveyed a deeper allegorical and cultural
significance. As their names suggest, the Concha veneris and the Char de Neptune
both recall the artistic and literary paradigms associated with the mythological stories
of Venus and Neptune. For instance, the Char de Neptune was the name given to the
‘grand’ madrepore that resembled the mythological chariot that drove Neptune into
the sea. Inspired by his own Char de Neptune, Boucher would develop the theme of
the shell chariot further through his treatment of the subject in the various marine
mythologies that appear after 1740, and later as an emblem of Venus in the shell-
shaped sled that features in Winter from 1755 (plate 36).490

Other shells in the collection were also capable of communicating more
complex cultural concerns. Boucher’s Conque exotique, for example, signified all that
was associated with the idea of an exotic elsewhere. For Boucher and other amateur
collectors of his generation, however, the Conque exotique did not refer to a generic
brand of exoticism. Rather, it was located within a specific cultural milieu, namely the
mid eighteenth-century preoccupation with the Middle and Far East. This was also the
case for shells in Boucher’s collection such as the Pyramid (la Pyramide), the Turban
(le Turban), the Chinese Script (la Écriture chinoise), the Chinese Button (le Bouton
de la chine), and the Little Chinese Roof (le Petit toît chinois), also known to

489 Adanson, Histoire naturelle du Sénégal, preface (no page numbers).
490 Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1516, p. 210. For further discussion
of Boucher’s collection, particularly as it relates to these and other works, see the conclusion to this
thesis.
collectors as the Pagoda (la Pagode). The presence of these particular shells actively reinforced the exoticism of Boucher’s collection, a necessary measure for amateur collectors intent on forming a collection that met the standards of modern taste. Writing about the process for sourcing shells in the 1736 catalogue, Gersaint noted that ‘the most beautiful and the most singular’ examples did not come from Europe, but rather from regions in the East. D’Argenville would later agree, citing Bonanni when he wrote that not all seas can produce ‘beautiful shells’. It was for this reason, he argued, that collectors must turn to the East.

Whilst ownership of these types of shells reaffirmed Boucher’s identity as a tasteful and knowledgeable collector, they are also significant in their relationship to objects in the artist’s wider collection. Many of the exotic items featured in works by Boucher can be linked to objects found in the artist’s own collection. For example, the artist had an extensive collection of armour from Turkey and Arabia, as well as a large number of oriental porcelains, bronzes, ivories, lacquer, jade, silver, earthenware, Chinese musical instruments, fireworks, clothing, and lanterns. Such objects provided Boucher with an aestheticised experience of the East, further stimulating his already fertile imagination.

As Jo Hedley has pointed out, Rémy’s description of these objects for the 1771 catalogue reads like a ‘prop list’ for Boucher’s chinoiseries and other works depicting

491 Ibid., lot 1663, p. 231; lot 1656, p. 230; lot 1758, p. 242; lots 1620 & 1624, pp. 226-227. For a discussion of pagode shells, see Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, lot 358, pp. 124-125.
492 ‘les plus belles & les plus singulieres ne se croissant par sur nos côtes & venant la plûpart des Indes Orientales & Occidentales, ou d’autres pais fort éloignés.’ Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, p. 15.
493 ‘Ces belles Coquilles viennent de la mer, mais toutes les mers n’en fournissent pas, non omnis fert omnia tellus, nous tiron les plus belles Coquilles, des grandes Indes, de Indes Orientales, & de la mer rouge.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), p. 168. The phrase in Latin comes from the 1684 edition of Bonanni’s Recreatio mentis et oculi.
494 Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, passim.
exotic themes. For example, the *magot* that sits on top of the Asian lacquer cabinet in *À la Pagode* (plate 13), can be traced to one of forty-five magots in Boucher’s collection, some complete with spring-loaded heads that allowed them to wobble and move about. The figure of the *magot* also appears in the red chalk drawing, *Fire* (plate 19), from 1740 and later in *The Chinese Gallant* (plate 37), where he presides over scene of courtship in a rural setting that could have just as easily been adapted from the design on the lacquer cabinet in *À la Pagode*. Although the magots were most likely collected by Boucher after these works were produced, they can be understood as part of the artist’s broader canon of exotica and thus emblematic of his ongoing relationship with the East in both the real and fictive realms.

**The arrangement**

While Boucher’s collection of more than 2,000 carefully chosen shells, corals, and other marine plant life was admired by many of the period’s leading writers and collectors, it was the overall arrangement of the collection that attracted the most attention. To be sure, the manner in which Boucher chose to arrange these objects was as remarkable as the collection was itself. Both his student Mannlich and Count Mniszech, for example, referred to the arrangement as ‘unique’. Similarly, the young marquis Henri Joseph Costa de Beauregard (1752-1793), who visited Boucher in his studio in 1768, claimed that the collection as a ‘whole’ was ‘arranged with artistic taste’.

Indeed for Boucher, the arrangements of an enlightened amateur

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495 Hedley, *Boucher: Seductive Visions*, p. 76.
496 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné…..le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 659-683, pp. 89-93.
497 Other similarities between his collection and works from this period include a soft paste porcelain elephant, which instantly recalls the animal that is visible on the far left hand side of Boucher design for the 1742 frontispiece. See Ibid., lot 860, p. 123.
498 For Mannlich and Mniszech’s responses to Boucher’s collection, see chapter three.
499 ‘Mon oncle, étant sorti en chenille, m’a laissé son carrosse qui nous a conduits chez le divin Boucher…..Il a un cabinet d’histoire naturelle immense….. Il a aussi une collection merveilleuse de coquillages…..Le tout est arrangé avec beaucoup d’art et de goût.’ Charles Albert Costa de Beauregard, *Un homme d’autrefois: Souvenirs recueillis par son arrière-petit-fils le marquis Costa de Beauregard*
collector was akin the role of the artist, whose responsibility it was to invent and inspire new sites of cultural exchange where both complimentary and conflicting objects were brought together and enhanced through the mechanism of artifice.

This is not to say, however, that Boucher’s pedagogical aspirations were suppressed by his love of ornament and flare for artistic display. On the contrary, as d’Argenville argued the genius of Boucher’s arrangement lay in the fertile exchange it represented between art and nature. Part scientific and part decorative, this abstract taxonomy was according to the author, ‘as agreeable as it is instructive’. 500 In this way, Boucher’s arrangement was in keeping with that of other amateur collectors of his generation in that it satisfied both the desire for tasteful spectacle and the increasing need for genuine scientific instruction.

As d’Argenville and other described responses from the period reveal, Boucher’s collection of natural history was displayed in three primary locations in his studio at the Louvre. The first was visible on the left when entering the studio. There, Boucher installed a cabinet showcasing his collection of madrepores, minerals and stones, with a combined value of 14,254 livres and 49 sols. 501 Arranged like trophies behind glass, the collection served as a visual reminder of Boucher’s wealth and, moreover, his reputation for selecting only what was considered aesthetically pleasing. This was first suggested by Mannlich, who described the stones in the

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500 ‘Cet émule d’Albane, dont le pinceau guide par les Graces n’offre que des images riantes, possède un cabinet curieux, aussi agréable qu’instructif.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, Conchylologie nouvelle et portative, pp. 312-313.
501 This is my calculation based on the sale prices found in the BnF’s annotated copy of the 1771 catalogue. ‘À gauche en entrant on trouve une armoire de glace richement remplissee de Madrepores Minéraux, Cailloux etc qui sont de toute beauté.’ Ibid., pp. 312-13.
cabinet as ‘unique’, adding that it contained many fine examples of both the ‘raw’ and ‘polished’ variety.\textsuperscript{502}

The second area of display concerned the bulk of the shell collection, which the artist stored in a custom made \textit{coquillier}. Not surprisingly, Boucher’s shell cabinet was work of art in itself. Made from gold plated Kingwood (\textit{bois de violette}),\textsuperscript{503} it had been designed by leading cabinetmaker and \textit{ébéniste du roi} Jean-François Oeben (1721-1763), who Boucher was acquainted with through his work at the Gobelins, among other places.\textsuperscript{504} Oeben’s design was finished with a pair of gilt bronze mounts, executed by royal sculptor and bronze castor Philippe Caffiéri (1714-1774).\textsuperscript{505} The level of craftsmanship was reflected in the price it achieved at Boucher’s 1771 sale, where it sold for 370 \textit{livres}.\textsuperscript{506} This was roughly the same amount paid for David Teniers II’s (1610-1690) \textit{Peasants by an Inn Fire} (c.1740, private collection), which was also in Boucher’s collection at the time of his death.\textsuperscript{507}

Within the drawers of the \textit{coquillier}, Boucher’s arrangement followed the principles set out in the 1742 edition of d’Argenville’s \textit{La Conchyliologie}.\textsuperscript{508} This early approach to taxonomy saw Boucher divide his shells into the twenty-five different families recommended by d’Argenville for collection. Like other amateur

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sa collection de pierres etoit unique, il y avoit des Solitairs brute et polis d’un prix tres considerables ainsi que toute espece de pierres precieuses, marbres, Agaths etc.’ Mannlich, \textit{Histoire de ma vie: Mémoires de Johann Christian von Mannlich} (1741-1822), vol. 1, p. 156.
\item Kingwood is a Brazilian hardwood that was popular with furniture makers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was considered particularly good for veneering. See Alexandre Pradere, \textit{French Furniture Makers: The Art of the Ebeniste from Louis XIV to the Revolution}, trans. Perran Wood (California: Getty Publications, 1990), p. 431.
\item Jean-François Oeben was given residence at the \textit{Manufacture des Gobelins} in 1754, one year before Boucher was appointed director.
\item Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, lot 1863, p. 262.
\item See annotated notes in the BnF’s copy of the 1771 catalogue.
\item My identification of this painting is based on Rémy’s description in the 1771 catalogue: ‘Trois hommes dans une chambre, proche de la cheminée; deux sont assis, dont un allume sa pipe; le troisième est debout, vu par le dos, tenant un pot.’ Rémy, \textit{Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher}, lot 9, p. 4.
\item Dezallier d’Argenville, \textit{La Conchyliologie} (1742), pp. 237-396.
\end{enumerate}
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collectors who followed d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle methode*, Boucher’s shells were separated by an internal wooden framework wrapped in coloured fabric. Shells were then laid symmetrically on a second layer of fabric, possibly in a contrasting colour. Arranging shells in this way enabled Boucher to create a parterre effect, similar to the one Gersaint described in his discussion of Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection.509

The design of the *coquillier* allowed Boucher to demonstrate his knowledge of mid-eighteenth-century conchology, as well as his appreciation of the various artistic qualities that determined their place within the arrangement. However, the drawer system, together with cabinet’s relationship to the physical space of the studio, proved limiting for the artist, who presumably required greater access to the collection. The need to experience the collection as part of a more complete system of viewing led Boucher to create a third area of display in the studio. Indeed, as the 1771 catalogue reveals, in addition to the shells stored in the drawers of the *coquillier*, Boucher also installed sixteen different sized tables covered with mirrored glass.510 Placed strategically around the room, the tables were reserved for the most visually spectacular shells in his collection.

According to d’Argenville, the arrangement of the shells on the tables followed a similar parterre format found in the drawers of the *coquillier*.511 While this confirms that Boucher’s approach to the shell tables was guided by the formal principles that shaped d’Argenville’s *Nouvelle method*, the immediacy of this type of display suggests that Boucher’s scientific concerns in this instance were not strictly

509 On the arrangement of Bonnier de la Mosson’s collection, see chapter one.
510 The existence of Boucher’s shell tables is mentioned in d’Argenville’s mid-century pocketbook guide to shell collecting. See Dezallier d’Argenville, *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative*, pp. 312-313. This was later confirmed by Rémy, who listed sixteen specifically designed shell tables available for purchase at the 1771 sale. Annotated notes in the catalogue reveal that the tables (without shells) sold for 391 livres and 14 sols. Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1021, p. 147.
511 Dezallier d’Argenville, *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative*, pp. 312-313.
pedagogical. Rather, they were representative of his desire to explore the visual pleasures of his collection via the spectacle of his own carefully constructed display.

In terms of form and function, Boucher’s shell tables can be understood as a progression from the large flatbed display case that had once housed the most prized shells in Bonnier de la Mosson’s celebrated collection. However, while Bonnier’s shell table was located within the cavity of the *coquillier* and thus restricted to a single vantage point, Boucher’s shell tables, by comparison, were three dimensional in shape and designed to be seen from multiple viewpoints. Moreover, Bonnier’s shell table was somewhat exclusive in its use, as it could only viewed after the mechanical wooden lid had been opened. Conversely, Boucher’s sixteen shell tables were a permanent installation, meaning that visitors to his studio were instantly included in the experience of his collection.

A similar table can be traced to one of Boucher’s patrons, the celebrated collector and amateur engraver Barthélémy-Augustin Blondel d’Azincourt (1719-1794). Like Boucher, Blondel d’Azincourt installed his shell table as an accessory to his *coquillier*, with the primary aim of highlighting the best examples from his collection. They included shells like the prized *Scalata*, as well as the *Porcelaine argus, vrai Arlequine (Cypraea histrio)* and its ‘rare’ false equivalent. As d’Argenville reported, M. d’Azincourt’s collection was,

> assembled with the most taste possible, with the most precious pieces that one sees in different classes of shells, principally arranged in a table placed in the centre of the room devoted to natural history: this table is white and richly

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512 In addition to the *Scalata* shell, d’Argenville noted that a number of *Porcelaines* were visible on the table, including *la Navette de tisserand, la vrai Arlequine, & la Porcelaine l’Argus*, as well as a ‘espèce très-rare’ example of the ‘imitant l’Arlequine’. Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1780), vol. 1, p. 245.
ornamented with gilding, its form is octagonal; it rises in a pyramid and
turns on a pivot, it is encircled and covered with mirrors.\textsuperscript{513}

On top of this elaborately constructed pyramid, Blondel d’Azincourt placed ‘a
beautiful piece of red coral’, possibly the same piece of gilt mounted coral seen in
Louis de Carmontelle’s (1717-1806) drawing of Madame d’Azincourt from 1760
(plate 38).\textsuperscript{514}

Although different in its overall construction and intended location, Blondel
d’Azincourt’s shell table shared a clear stylistic affinity with those found in Boucher’s
studio.\textsuperscript{515} Indeed, both collectors employed the use of artistic devices, such as mirrors
and gilding, in order to produce a more artful presentation of nature. There are further
similarities in the way in which the tables sought to engage the viewer. For example,
the central positioning of the tables, combined with their ornate additions, suggest that
both collectors aimed to include the viewer in the experience of the collection as a
decorative whole. According to Blondel d’Azincourt, the ability to reveal oneself
through the process of display was the cornerstone of aristocratic propriety. ‘As a
rule’, he argued, ‘a collector should be delighted to show everything to everybody: we
call this the interest on his investment’.\textsuperscript{516} For Boucher, the tables thus presented him

\textsuperscript{513} ‘est rassemblé avec tout le goût possible, par les morceaux précieux qui se voyant dans les
différentes classes de coquilles sont rangées principalement sur une table placée au milieu de salle
destinée à l’histoire naturelle; cette table est blanche & richement ornée en dorure, sa forme est
octogone; elle s’élève en pyramide & tourne sur un pivot; elle est entourée est couverte de glaces.’
Ibid., p. 245. Part of this passage was reproduced in Louis Courajod, \textit{Le Livre-Journal de Lazare
\textsuperscript{514} ‘cette pyramide, sur le haut de laquelle est un beau morceau de corail rouge.’ Dezallier d'Argenville,
\textit{La Conchyliologie} (1780), vol. 1, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{515} As a friend and favoured patron of Boucher’s, Blondel d’Azincourt would have been aware of
Boucher’s collection and more than likely had been to visit the artist in his studio. Indeed, sale
catalogues from 1770 and 1783 reveal that Blondel d’Azincourt owned more than 500 works by
Boucher, some of which he later engraved. While the extent to which this relationship directly
influenced Blondel d’Azincourt’s approach to his own shell collection is unclear, it seems the two
passionate collectors shared similar ideas on the issue of what constituted a tasteful and enlightened
display. On Blondel d’Azincourt’s approach to collecting, see Colin B. Bailey, ‘Conventions of the
Eighteenth-Century Cabinet de Tableaux: Blondel d'Azincourt's La premiere idée de la curiosité’, \textit{Art
\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., p. 438.
with the opportunity to reaffirm and perhaps even consolidate in the minds of others, his identity as both a celebrated artist and respected collector of natural history.

As Kristel Smentek has pointed out, this type of artful display may have also been inspired by the mirrored porcelain rooms of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly Queen Mary II’s (1662-1694) audience chamber at Honselersdijk.\textsuperscript{517} According to the comte de Tessin’s father Nicodemus Tessin (1654-1728), the queen’s chamber was ‘very richly furnished with Chinese work and pictures. The ceiling was covered with mirrors which showed the room afresh’.\textsuperscript{518} He added that this created ‘the most beautiful effect imaginable’ in that ‘the more one gazed into the reflections, the more endlessly it extended the perspectives.’\textsuperscript{519} For a room that was designed to act as a liminal space between the queen and her subjects, the mirrors served two important roles. Firstly, they reflected the reality of what was on display, ensuring that each one of the queen’s tastefully chosen pieces was seen by her audience and, moreover, from multiple viewpoints. Secondly, through the process of reflection, the mirrors constructed the illusion of existence, which in the case of the queen’s collection sought to reinforce in the mind of the viewer the idea of royal magnificence.\textsuperscript{520}

A mirror’s ability to simultaneously create the concept and reality of existence meant that it was a powerful tool for the eighteenth-century amateur collector. Accordingly, there are numerous accounts of mirrors being used to enhance and

\textsuperscript{519} Idem.
\textsuperscript{520} On the subject of creating public and/or private identities through the use of porcelain and porcelain like effects, see Yonan, 'Igneous Architecture: Porcelain, Natural Philosophy, and the Rococo \textit{cabinet chinois}', pp. 67-81.
magnify the contents of the eighteenth-century interior.\textsuperscript{521} As the dealer J.-B.-Pierre Le Brun noted in 1777, mirrors had the ability to be ‘very seductive when they reflect and multiply interesting objects.’\textsuperscript{522} Using mirrors to visually enhance the magnificence of a collection was thus not only important to the viewer’s immediate engagement with these objects, but was also central to creating another mode of reflection in the form of a memory in the mind of the viewer.

While the transformative powers of the mirror were no doubt a factor in the creation of Boucher’s sixteen shell tables, the sheer number of shells in his collection, together with the rituals surrounding their display, suggest that for Boucher, the mirrors served a higher artistic purpose. Boucher’s mirrored shell tables can be understood as part of a wider system of decoration that in its reception, deliberately sought to blur the lines between art and nature. This was confirmed by d’Argenville, who noted that by placing shells on tables covered with mirrored glass: ‘This ingenious painter (Boucher)…. presents to the eyes of the viewer a spectacular enameled parterre that appears to rival nature herself.’\textsuperscript{523} As d’Argenville’s comments imply, the artfulness of Boucher’s shell tables not only called attention to the artifice of nature, but also by extension the inventiveness of Boucher the artisan.\textsuperscript{524}

\textsuperscript{521} Mirrors were more readily available during the eighteenth century. They were also thirty to forty percent less expensive than in the previous century. On the technological advances in mirror production during this period, see Scott, \textit{The Rococo Interior}, pp. 31-32.


\textsuperscript{523} ‘Ce Peintre ingénieux à place ses coquilles sur des tables couvertes de glace; elles présentent aux yeux du spectacteur un parterre émaillé qui semble le disputer à la nature.’ Dezallier d'Argenville, \textit{Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative}, pp. 312-313.

\textsuperscript{524} For further analysis of these comments, particularly as they relate to Boucher’s wider collection, see chapter five.
The Mélanges

If the mirrored shell tables provided Boucher with a more immediate solution to viewing the collection, they also allowed him to experiment with certain groups of prized objects. This involved the fusing together of particular families of shells with interesting, or unusual pieces of coral and other marine plant life. For example, lot 1578 in the catalogue lists a mélange that consisted of,

twenty pieces, including eight small branches of two different varieties of white stony coral fixed to a large base of eight shells charged with a white coral fungus along with three other coral fungi comprised of grainy double forked branches and a small sea sponge of a wide mesh (consistency).\textsuperscript{525}

Another lot shows that Boucher grouped together seventeen different shells, such as the glands de mer, the conques anatiferes, pouce-pieds and moules in their shells, as well as a bits of wood and soft stones that had been bored into by a special type of marine bivalve, known to period collectors as Pholades.\textsuperscript{526}

In creating the Mélanges, Boucher not only experimented with a variety of species, but also variations in colour and texture. For instance, he mixed together three different types of the polyped red fire coral (milliepores) with the smaller spongy stems of fake purple coral (faux corail violet).\textsuperscript{527} Boucher also used this same purple fake coral with other different coloured examples of its kind, creating a spectacular conflux that was reminiscent of his own highly charged palette.\textsuperscript{528}

\textsuperscript{525} ‘Vingt morceaux; savoir, huit petites branches de corail articulé blanc, de deux variétés, dont une à large empatement: huit coquilles chargées de coralloïdes blanc; trois autre coralloïdes, dont un granuleux a branches bifourchues, & un petit répétore a large mailles.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1578, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{526} ‘Dix-sept groupes de différens coquillages, tels que glands de mer, conques anatiferes, pousse-pieds, moules sur leur rocher, Pierre creusée par les dails, des pholades du bois, etc.’ Ibid., lot 1784, p. 246. For a description of pholades, see Dezallier d’Argenville, La Conchyliologie (1742), p. 69-70.

\textsuperscript{527} ‘Trois variétés de milliepores sur l’un desquels sont plusieurs petites tiges de faux corail violet.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1569, p. 217. In this instance, fake coral was similar to fausse/faux shells.

\textsuperscript{528} ‘Trois jolis groupes de coralloïdes; savoir, un composé de faux corail violet, à branches granuleux (sic): un autre composé de faux corail jaune, de faux corail rouge, & d’une autre especes de faux corail
Boucher’s eulogizer Antoine Bret noted, it was this sense of artistic taste that gave Boucher’s arrangements ‘a charming look’, one he argued, could only be ‘the work of a soul sensitive to the harmony of colours’. Such comments speak to the highly aestheticised nature of Boucher’s collection at the Louvre. Moreover, they emphasise that the level of artistic taste displayed could only be achieved by an artist of Boucher’s calibre.

While Boucher was interested in exploring the spectacle of nature through the use of contrasting colours and textures, he also saw the Mélanges as an opportunity to highlight the subtleties of nature’s own palette. For example, in the centre of a group of corals, madreporas and sea tassels, Boucher arranged a sculptural assembly of ‘six other detachable pieces of coral each in a different shades of red’. Reorganising coral in this way suggests that for Boucher, the arrangements of an enlightened amateur collector sought to embrace the principles of harmony and taste as part of the object’s own organic nature, the fulcrum of which was most effectively understood through the collector’s relationship with the object as decorative whole.

Overall, Rémy listed twenty-nine different lots under the heading of the Mélanges. However, further analysis of the catalogue has revealed that the artist owned significantly more. Together with examples found in his mineral collection, the Mélanges made up sixteen percent of his natural history collection. Although

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violet, à branches pointillées. Le troisieme est un faux corail blanc, à branches noucuses & bifourchues.’ Ibid., lot 1581, p. 219.
529 ‘L’ordre & l’arrangement pittoresque qu’il avait mis dans la disposition de chaque morceau, formaient un coup d’oeil ravissant, qui ne pouvait être l’ouvrage que d’une ame sensible à l’harmonie des couleurs.’ Bret, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi’, pp. 47-70.
530 On the issue of a unified aesthetic governing Boucher’s approach to collecting, see chapter five.
531 ‘Un groupe de plusieurs petites branches de corail, rapportées sur un madrepore. Plus, six autres branches ou morceaux détachés, de différentes nuances de rouge; l’un desquels est chargé de glands de mer.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1468, p. 204.
532 Ibid., lots 1256-1273 (minerals), pp. 177-180 and lots 1784-1792 (shells), pp. 246-247.
533 This is based on my calculations of the 1771 sale catalogue.
the *Mélanges* were not unique to Boucher, a comparison with other amateur collectors from this period suggests that Boucher was one of the few collectors of his generation to have two separate sections in the catalogue dedicated to this practice.

This raises some interesting questions as to how the *Mélanges* were understood by Boucher and what they signified in the context of his wider collection of art and nature. To begin answering these questions, consideration must be given to the contrast between the *Mélanges* and the arrangement of shells in the *coquillier*. For if shells in the drawers of the *coquillier* were an example of a pedagogical approach to conchology, then the *Mélanges* were representative of Boucher’s own artistic process. One imagines that Boucher took great pleasure experimenting with different species, colours and textures, particularly in contrast to the effort required in forming an abstract taxonomy such as the one prescribed by d’Argenville in the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*.

To be sure, this does not mean that the *Mélanges* existed only with the paradigm of the artist’s personal expression. Rather, they were an example of one of many modes of representation that took place outside of Boucher’s traditional painted *oeuvre*. As Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury have shown, Boucher’s identity was not only shaped by conventional artistic endeavors, but also through his work at Sèvres, the Gobelins and as a costume and set designer with the Académie royal de musique, Opéra-Comique, and in the infamous theatres of Madame de Pompadour.534 His involvement in these types of activities reveals a multifaceted portrait of Boucher, one that places him outside the more familiar tropes associated with his role as one of the period’s leading contemporary painters. Thus, as an example of a representation by...
Boucher, the Mélanges (and the shell tables in general), conveyed a self-conscious presentation of Boucher’s artistic self, one that pointed to the artist’s singularity of expression. Indeed, if the arrangement of the shells in the coquillier actively communicated Boucher’s interest in the natural sciences and knowledge of the recent developments in eighteenth-century conchology, then the Mélanges, by comparison, promoted the artful inventiveness the Boucher the collector—drawing attention to it through a form of encoded sign.

The rhetoric of the image: The 1736 frontispiece revisited

A revised understanding of Boucher’s design for the 1736 frontispiece has, up to this point, considered the extent to which the image inspired a visual culture of curiosity around shells, and in turn, embodied a generation of amateur collecting practices. Any revision of the 1736 frontispiece, however, must also take into account the role it played in the formation of Boucher’s own collection. While the idealised mode of decoration that Boucher has presented in the 1736 frontispiece prefigured the conceptual reality of his own arrangement, there is nevertheless a striking sense of symmetry between the reports of Boucher’s collection and that which is pictured in his design for the 1736 catalogue. In both instances, the artist sought to engage the beholder through the use of complimentary and contradictory pictorial devices in order to create a favorable impression that strikes the viewer au premier coup d’œil.

There is further continuity in the arrangement of objects in Boucher’s studio and that which is pictured in his design for the 1736 frontispiece. For example, the staid architecture in the background of the 1736 frontispiece is similar in function to the wall cabinet that housed the bulk of the Boucher’s natural history collection. What is more, the Mélanges of shells, corals, and other marine plant life that has broken free
from the architectural constraints of the background to form the centerpiece of the 1736 frontispiece, appears to have materialised from this fictive realm to become a defining aspect of Boucher’s own collection at the Louvre.\footnote{This is particularly the case with a Mélange of twenty shells, corals and other marine plant life that Rémy described in lot 1578 of the 1771 catalogue.}

The conflation of Boucher’s real and fictive visions of collecting is significant in that reveals something about how Boucher wanted his collection to be perceived by his audience, who he regarded primarily as the visitors to his studio. As described responses to Boucher’s collection have confirmed, the artist’s studio at the Louvre was a hub of activity with steady steam of collectors, writers and artists passing through at regular intervals.\footnote{On Boucher’s studio as a space where young artists and amateur collectors gathered together, see Bret, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi’, pp. 47-70. Boucher’s open door policy is also discussed in Goncourt, French Eighteenth-Century Painters, p. 90.} \footnote{This is according to the engraver Wille, who attended Boucher’s sale in 1771. See Wille, Mémoires et Journal, II, p. 470.} This was also true of those who attended Boucher’s estate auction where the collection remained intact for the duration of the sale.\footnote{This is particularly the case with a Mélange of twenty shells, corals and other marine plant life that Rémy described in lot 1578 of the 1771 catalogue.} The majority of these visitors would have been aware of his design for the 1736 catalogue either in its original format, or as a reissued frontispiece for sales in 1737 (Gersaint), 1745 (Bonnier de la Mosson), and 1766 (Madame Dubois-Jourdain). For those visitors to the studio that were familiar with the work, they were confronted with an elaborate and expanded re-presentation of that which is pictured in his design for the 1736 catalogue.

This is not to suggest that Boucher used the 1736 frontispiece as a blueprint to form his collection, but rather that he engaged with the authority of image in order to reassert his identity as both an artist and a collector. When viewed in the context of his design for the 1736 catalogue, the arrangement of Boucher’s natural history collection at the Louvre presented a form of ‘metafiction’ (to use Hyde’s term) in that
it deliberately called attention to his own pictorial sign. Such rich layers of artistic consciousness may have been understood by Boucher as some sort of visual pun. For visitors to his studio, however, the synchronisation of Boucher’s real and fictive visions of collecting invoked an entirely new power, one capable of promoting the duality of Boucher’s identity as both an artist and a collector.

As an image, the 1736 frontispiece thus represents the maturation of Boucher’s artistic signature, particularly as it relates to his involvement in the development of eighteenth-century conchology. Indeed, what had begun as way of enticing a visual culture of curiosity around shells and natural history, had evolved over the years into an image that defined the ambitions of a generation of amateur collectors. Now, through the self-conscious arrangement of his own collection at the Louvre, the rhetoric of Boucher’s image was once again transformed, operating under a new authority that sought to privilege both Boucher and the people he chose to surround himself with.

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I am building here on Melissa Hyde’s discussion on the pictorial representation of Boucher’s artistic self. See Melissa Hyde, ‘Getting in the Picture: Boucher’s Self-Portraits of Others’, p. 17.
Chapter V

‘Le goût de Boucher’: Inventing Artifice and the Game of Nature

Writing in the 1776 sale catalogue of the financier and celebrated collector Augustin Blondel de Gagny (1695-1776), the dealer Pierre Rémy used the term ‘dans le goût de Boucher’ to describe approximately ten different objects in a variety of mediums. The term, which appears only six years after the artist’s death in 1770, has been interpreted by some scholars who specialise in the decorative arts as relating to Boucher’s artistic influence on the production of porcelain at the Vincennes and Sèvres factories during the 1750s and 60s. In its contemporary context, however, the mark of ‘le goût de Boucher’ had much wider implications, the subtleties of which can be understood as an attempt by Rémy to codify a unified aesthetic, one that signalled all aspects of Boucher’s artistic practice at a time when rococo culture was in serious decline. For contemporaries like Rémy, who had organised the artist’s 1771 estate sale, the term was reflective of Boucher’s broader visual and material strategy, one that can be traced back to his collection and the fertile exchange taking place between art and nature in his studio at the Louvre.

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539 The objects are spread across six lots and take the form of either a miniature, pastel, or porcelain. See Pierre Rémy, Catalogue de tableaux précieux: miniatures & gouaches; figures, bustes & vases de marbre & de bronze; armoires, commodes & effets précieux du célèbre Boule; un magnifique lustre de crystal de roche, & plusieurs autres de bronze doré; des porcelaines anciennes & modernes du plus grand choix; des pendules, feux & bras de cheminée de bronze doré, & autres objets curieux & rares qui composent le cabinet de feu M. Blondel de Gagny (Paris: 1776), lots 353 & 355, p. 110 (miniature); lot 359, p. 111 (miniature); lot 376, p 113 (pastel); lot 831, p. 179 (porcelain); lot 922, p. 189 (porcelain). Other items, either by Boucher, or after his designs, are listed as follows, lots 240-241, p. 91; lots 374-375, pp. 112-113; lots 380-383, pp. 113-114; lot 829, pp. 178-179; lot 1061, pp. 214-215; lots 1096-1097, p. 220. On the collections of Blondel de Gagny and his son Blondel d’Azincourt, see Bailey, ‘Conventions of the Eighteenth-Century Cabinet de Tableaux: Blondel d’Azincourt’s La première idée de la curiosité’, pp. 434-446.

540 I am building her on Rosalind Savill’s discussion of ‘le goût de Boucher’ in her article on the artist’s role at Vincennes and Sèvres. See Savill, ‘François Boucher and the Porcelains of Vincennes and Sèvres’, pp. 162-170, p. 162. More recently, the term goût de Boucher was employed by Christie’s auction house to describe the manner in which Boucher’s former student Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s (1732-1806) La Coquette Fixée (1755) was painted. Used in this context, it goes some way in explaining the complexities surrounding the misidentification of some of Fragonard’s earlier works to Boucher. See ’Sale 1620: Important Master Paintings Part 1,’ (London: Christie's, 2006). www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=4684749 (accessed September 15, 2010).
To be sure, Rémy’s description ‘le goût de Boucher’ captures the holistic vision with which his contemporaries viewed this artist-turned-collector of one of the period’s most impressive displays of art and nature. Those who were privy to the activities of Boucher’s studio, such as Rémy and Blondel d’Azincourt (Blondel de Gagny’s son), viewed Boucher’s approach to his collection as an example of his wider artistic practices, processes that were fuelled by his intense curiosity for the arts and sciences. Thus, any consideration of the term ‘le goût de Boucher’ must in fact consider Boucher’s own taste, as it was his predilection for certain objects that would come to inform the style for which he was remembered by those who knew him best.

With more than 13,000 different objects in his collection, a survey of Boucher’s personal taste may seem near impossible. Nevertheless, closer analysis of the 1771 catalogue reveals some interesting patterns. What emerges is a clear stylistic preference for objects that engaged both visually and conceptually with the representation of nature. Indeed, Boucher gravitated towards objects that encouraged those viewing the collection to make new and informed visual connections. Whether it was by selecting objects of natural history that had been pressed into the service of decoration, or by choosing artificial collectables that sought to imitate their natural counterparts, Boucher’s collection as a whole emphasised the materiality of nature in both its real and replicated forms. This goes to the heart of the tensions that exist at the core of rococo visual culture and, moreover, reveals something of the unified style that Rémy alluded to in his reference to ‘le goût de Boucher’.

In Boucher’s wider collection, decorative objects that playfully engaged with the representation of nature were as varied in number as they were in material effect. What these items all had in common, however, was a relationship to the artist’s
natural history collection. In particular, his assemblage of shells, corals and other marine curios, which provided a visual and conceptual bridge for unifying the artificial and natural elements of the collection overall. As the 1771 catalogue reveals, Boucher owned a selection of *objets d’art* that took their inspiration from the sort of natural curiosities found in the artist’s own collection. These included several different artificially formed shells and corals, which the artist displayed in his studio alongside his natural history collection. As individual items, these decorative curios operated as agents of *luxe*, communicating the artist’s wealth and refinement. Yet as objects in a wider collection of curiosity, the presence of these humanly wrought shells and corals was emblematic of the artist’s taste for exploring the relationship between the spectacular effects of nature’s artifice and the inventiveness of the artisan’s creations.

*Une coquille en porcelaine*

Boucher’s collection of decorative objects inspired by shells and other marine plant life was relatively small in comparison to the number of real shells and corals in his possession. Nevertheless, his collection is significant in that it contained several rare and highly sought after items. The first among these was a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century Japanese porcelain shell, mounted on a ceramic branch that possibly resembled a piece of coral. As Rémy’s description for the 1771 catalogue suggests, Boucher’s porcelain shell had no specific design function assigned to its use, rather it sat somewhere between sculpture ornament and decorative vessel for

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display. This distinction is important as it sets the object apart from other utilitarian shell and coral-shaped porcelain in circulation during this period.

While the details surrounding Boucher’s purchase of the porcelain shell along with the object’s current whereabouts is unclear, it is likely that it originated from the Arita porcelain factory in Japan, where the majority of decorative porcelains were produced during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The most popular porcelains manufactured at Arita were those decorated in the style known Kakiemon. Often compared to Chinese Famille Verte porcelain, Kakiemon wares are distinct for their asymmetric overglaze enameled designs drawn from a signature palette of red, yellow, blue, and green. Taking their inspiration from motifs found in nature, these colourful enameled designs were applied with careful restraint in order to strike a contrast with the customised white background (nigoshide).

With its smooth opaque surface and playful enameled designs, Kakiemon porcelain was highly prized in France during the eighteenth century and a likely source for Boucher’s shell. Indeed, Boucher’s shell may have been similar in appearance to a late seventeenth-century Kakiemon shell, now housed in Residenzmuseum in Munich (plate 39). Cast from hard paste glazed white porcelain, the Munich shell takes the form of swollen asymmetric conch. The body is supported by three roughly shaped ceramic feet, which give the impression they have grown out of the shell in an effort to resemble barnacles. The Munich shell’s playful form is

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544 *Nigoshide* is the term given to white Japanese porcelain that has been finished with an opaque glaze.
545 Kakiemon porcelain is found across eighteenth-century sale catalogues and inventories. However, unlike other porcelains, which have been grouped by material effect, Kakiemon wares are usually listed under the more general heading of *Porcelaines du Japon*. This is also the case for Boucher’s shell, giving further weight to the idea that it was decorated in the Kakiemon style. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 745-763, pp. 106-108.
continued through the marine-themed polychrome enamelled designs that capture the light-hearted aesthetic of the Kakiemon style of decoration.

That Boucher was attracted to this type of object is not altogether surprising. The main characteristics of Kakiemon porcelain are similar to the formal qualities of the rococo style for which Boucher is best known. Specifically, the use of naturalistic decorations, such as birds, fish, shells and other objects of nature, often without regard to their proper proportions; the employment of sibilant ‘S’- and ‘C’- shaped curves in the conception of the design; a light palette that appears deliberately artificial in its handling; and an overwhelming disregard for symmetry. All of these elements are present in the Munich example and presumably resonated in Boucher’s version as well. What is more, in its period reception, Kakiemon porcelain functioned in a similar way to that of rocaille ornament in that both sought to privilege the viewer with an artful presentation of nature, one that eighteenth-century audiences would have understood and enjoyed.

The formal stylistic relationship between Kakiemon porcelain and the rococo was no accident. Boucher’s shell, along with the Munich example, belonged to an exclusive group of decorative hard paste porcelains made in Japan and China specifically for export to the West from the late seventeenth century. They included a range of medium to large sized monochrome and polychrome enamelled vessels such as urns, jars, and other ornamental vases. A number of these were modelled after specific objects, the most popular in France being fish and shells. These objects

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546 This definition is in keeping with the ideas raised in Fiske Kimball’s groundbreaking study on the rococo. See Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo Decorative Style*, passim.

547 While there are no examples of mounted carp fish in Boucher’s collection, his 1771 sale catalogue reveals that he owned a green pot with fish scales in relief, produced at the porcelain factory at St Cloud. Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 875, p. 125. Boucher’s fish scale pot is mentioned in Savill, ‘François Boucher and the Porcelains of Vincennes and Sèvres’, p. 169.
were among the barrage of items brought to Europe by the Dutch East India Company from the end of the seventeenth century. Unlike smaller ceramic table wares, however, the relative size and fragility of the shells would prove too costly for this burgeoning commercial enterprise and by the beginning of the eighteenth century they were in limited supply.548

The apparent rarity of such objects among amateur collectors, combined with a growing enthusiasm for shells and luxury oriental porcelains in general, compounded demand for these objects. This was particularly true of Japanese porcelain, which was severely restricted after 1681, with importation ceasing altogether in 1745.549 For this reason, officers aboard the supercargoes began to ship these items privately. In 1738, for example, just two years after Gersaint’s successful first sale, a lieutenant of the French ship the Prince de Conty reportedly brought with him ‘24 coquilles de porcelaines’, along with a number of other large decorative items.550 Like other legally imported porcelain that passed through French ports during this period, the lieutenant’s shells were most likely purchased by luxury merchants, such as Thomas Joachim Hérbert (1687-1773) or Lazare Duvaux, who distributed them among their eagerly awaiting clients.

As various sale catalogues and inventories from the period reveal, porcelain shells, along with other decorative Asian wares, were considered ‘indispensable’ to

548 The company’s focus on smaller utilitarian wares is highlighted in a postscript to a list issued to the Loyal Bliss for a shipment in 1712. In it, officers were instructed not to purchase ‘large pieces, such as Jars, beakers or great dishes or bowles (sic).’ The Company’s original records have been reproduced in Geoffrey Godden, Oriental Export Market Porcelain and its Influence on European Wares (London: New York: Granada, 1979), p. 72.
549 On the problems surrounding the commercial trade of Japanese exports during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see Impey, Japanese Export Porcelain, pp. 13-33.
the contemporary French collector. Their perceived ‘singularity’ and ‘beauty’ meant they were ideal for displaying in both large and small apartments. According to the expert Claude-François Julliot (1727-1794), the dazzling brilliance (éclat) of these types of Asian porcelains lent a ‘tone of nobility’ to the contemporary French interior and in some cases provided relief from the comparatively more sombre effect of bronzes. For Julliot, the sophisticated effects of Asian monochrome and polychrome glazes had the ability to elicit a specific response, which he called tact flou. Writing in Jean de Jullienne’s posthumous sale catalogue in 1767, Julliot described tact flou as a ‘certain sensation that connoisseurs become aware of at the sight of these porcelains’. The promise of a unique and privileged viewing experience not only heightened the interest surrounding these objects, but also confirms that in their reception, Asian porcelains communicated a decidedly French rhetoric.

These artful presentations were served even further by the addition of French gilt mounts and in particular, Asian monochromes, which according to Rémy were considered the most desirable porcelains for mounting. While mounted oriental porcelain has a long history in the European tradition of the decorative arts, the

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551 ‘Les Porcelaines anciennes ont été de tout temps la passion des Curieux; on les a toujours regardées comme indispensables pour la variété nécessaire dans une Collection.’ Rémy & Julliot, Catalogue raisonné.......Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, p. 5. Used in this context, the term ‘anciennes’ is a reference to the value of the porcelain, rather than its age. The desirability of Japanese and Chinese porcelain during this period meant that it was often referred to as ‘antique’. See Smentek, Rococo Exotic, pp. 12-13.
552 ‘aussi remarquable par la singularité des formes, que par la beauté.’ Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue raisonné.......Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, p. 5.
553 ‘Elles ornent, avec un ton de noblesse.’ Idem. For Julliot’s discussion on the relationship between Asian porcelain and bronzes, see Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue des tableaux & desseins précieux des maîtres célèbres des trois écoles, figures de marbres, de bronze & de terre cuite, estampes en feuillets & autres objets du cabinet de feu M. Randon de Boisset, receveur général des finances. (Paris: Didot, 1777), part 2, p. 32.
554 ‘On entend par ce tact flou, une certain sensation que les Connoisseurs ressentent à la vue de ces Porcelaines.’ Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue raisonné.......Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, p. 6.
555 ‘On y trouve un grand nombre de ces morceaux anciens si difficiles à rassembler, principalement de ces vases d’une seule couleur, auxquels la richesse des montures donne un si grand relief.’ Rémy and Glomy, Catalogue raisonné...... le cabinet de feu Monsieur le duc de Tallard, p. 157.
practise of mounting Asian porcelains during the eighteenth century was almost exclusively for the purpose of naturalising the object.\footnote{I am building here on Sir Francis Watson’s discussion of the eighteenth-century practice of mounting decorative Asian porcelains. See Watson’s introduction to Gillian Wilson, Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. Paul Getty Museum (California: Getty Museum, 1982), pp. 1-20.} For instance, when applied to pieces of Asian porcelain, elegantly cast double scrolled and foliated chased mounts instantly transformed these objects into superior products of French *luxe*. As Sir Francis Watson has stated, the process of mounting Asian porcelain in France during this period underscores their status as non-functioning decorative objects, even when ascribed light duties such as vases, pot-pourris, and other types of perfumes holders.\footnote{Ibid., p. 18 (note 6). On popular uses of decorative porcelains during this period, see Somers-Cock, ‘The Nonfunctional Use of Ceramics in the English Country House during the Eighteenth Century’, pp. 195-216.}

One of the finest examples of a gilt mounted Asian porcelain shell from this period belonged to Boucher’s patron, Madame du Pompadour (1721-1764). Now a part of the Wrightsman collection in New York, Madame de Pompadour’s porcelain shell (plate 40) can be traced back to the Kangxi period (1662-1722). Decorative porcelain objects executed in China during this period were often compared to those produced at the Arita factory in Japan. However, unlike the conch shapes that were popular at Arita, the Wrightsman shell takes the form of a trumpet shell, similar to those seen in Boucher’s *Triumph de Venus* from 1740 (plate 4).\footnote{On the representation of the trumpet shell in Boucher’s *Triumph de Venus*, see chapter two.} The marine theme of the Wrightsman shell is continued through the rock and shell ornamentation that appears in low relief across the object’s surface. The presence of this patterning, which is made more visible by the use of a green celadon overglaze, highlights the playful engagement between the shell’s form and its material effect. This is not only indicative of the trend towards a more self-conscious style of representation, but also
supports the notion that these types of decorative objects were not indigenous designs. Rather, like the Munich shell, they were made specifically for export to the West.

An avid collector of porcelain, Madame de Pompadour purchased the shell from the mercer Duvaux in September 1756 for 1,440 *livres*. This figure also included the cost of the additional French gilt bronze and ormolu chased mounts, which enabled the shell to be suspended in a vertically upright position. While the interlaced gilt laurel branches give support to the trumpet shell, their asymmetric and irregular form give the impression that they have spontaneously sprung from the comparatively more solid base. This artful conceit is emblematic of the contemporary taste for a mode of embellishment that engaged with the relationship between the natural and the artificial. What is more, the apparent ease with which these mounts were skilfully applied points to a level of precision once thought only possible in nature.

To be sure, the process of mounting porcelain shells was not restricted to monochromes. For example, a gilt mounted Kakiemon shell (plate 41) thought to have once belonged to Louis-Henri de Bourbon, Prince de Condé (1692-1740),

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559 ‘Un grand vase de porcelaine céladon, à coquille, monté en bronze doré d’or moulu, de 60 louis, 1,440 l.’ Courajod, *Le Livre-Journal de Lazare Duvaux*, vol 2, lot 2581, p. 294. For other examples of shell or marine-themed objects bought by Pompadour between December 1751 and September 1757, see lots 982, p. 107; lots 1495 & 1499, p. 168; lots 1688 & 1690, pp. 190-191; lot 2759, p. 313; lot 2877, p. 331.

560 A similar mounted celadon shell is pictured in Henri Danloux’s (1753-1809) portrait *The Baron de Besenval in his Salon de Compagnie* from 1791 (London, National Gallery). The work depicts a relaxed looking Besenval (1722-1794), surrounded by his collection of art and decorative objects. On the mantle above the fireplace are three mounted Asian porcelains, the surfaces of which Danloux has skilfully imbued in order to mimic the lustrous qualities of the green celadon glaze. Mounted in a vertically upright position, the central ewer bears a striking resemblance to Madame de Pompadour’s Chinese shell both in form and in material effect. While this lays further claim to the attempt by Besenval to associate himself with the agency of the ancien régime, it also provides some visual insight into provenance of the sitter’s porcelain, which in this case were likely to be of Chinese rather than Japanese origin.

561 Gersaint, for example, attributed the invention of the brass hinge to the bivalve shell. Yet he also noted that not even the most skilled craftsman would ever be able to master the fit as perfectly as it appeared in nature. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 26
reveals the spectacular results achieved through the addition of French metals.\(^{562}\)

Measuring twenty-three centimetres in height, the delicate body of this polychrome shell has been transformed by the presence of gilt mounts, which are concentrated primarily around the lid and the base.\(^{563}\) Like the Wrightsman shell, the double scrolled and foliated mounts are designed to give the impression they have grown organically out of the rock, shell, and coral-shaped base. The genesis of this growth centres on a single gilt vine that weaves up the side of the shell, forming a connective tissue between the base and the lid of the shell. It is here that the mounts take on a more florid, but no less frenetic pace, as they snake around the original ceramic lid. Indeed, the lid of the Condé shell appears to be strangled under the weight of French gilt. This mode of embellishment signals the French trend for a more playful engagement with the object’s own organic form, whilst still ensuring that it met with eighteenth-century ideals of elite representation.

Similar in appearance to the Munich example, the Condé shell gives some insight into how Boucher’s porcelain shell may have looked had it been mounted in French gilt. As the 1771 catalogue reveals, Boucher decided not to mount the shell, choosing instead to preserve the object’s original ceramic branch mount. The reason for this was most likely based on aesthetic preferences, rather than economic constraints. As a prominent artist and collector, Boucher had direct access to specialist craftsmen, such as bronze casters (fonders) and gilders (doreurs), whose

\(^{562}\) ‘un vase en forme de coquille de porcelaine ancienne du Japon de couleur monté sur pied de bronze doré d’or moulu.’ A copy of the duc de Bourbon’s inventory is preserved in the Archives Nationale de France. AN MC XCII, 504, 17 February, 1740.

\(^{563}\) The Condé shell was last sold through Sotheby’s in 1979 from the collection of Akram Ojjeh. See Francis Watson, ed., Sotheby’s Collection Monsieur Akram Ojjeh Monte Carlo 1979 (London: New York: Sotheby’s, 1979), lot 66, p. 92-93. While the additional sale campaign material lists the reserve as $168,000.00, it is likely that it went for much more. On the events of the sale, see Anon, ‘Business: Gilt-Edged Auction in Monaco, Time 114, no. 2 (1979). http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,920469,00.html (accessed 30 April, 2009).
role it was to execute the demands of mercers for the *enjoliver* of such objects.  

Moreover, Boucher was already in possession of several mounted Asian porcelains, the majority of which he purchased from Lazare Duvaux between 1749 and 1757. This included a set of four vases made from bleu-céleste porcelain, which Boucher arranged for Duvaux to have mounted in a foliated design at cost of 1,200 livres.

Boucher’s seemingly conscious decision not to mount his porcelain shell is supported by the presence of several marine-themed mounted Asian porcelains in his collection. Among them were two Chinese celadon vases, both of which were elaborately mounted on gilt bronze bases comprised of intertwining laurel branches and decorated with clusters of gilt turtles and tritons. The artist also acquired a ‘small pot with chopsticks…… made of ancient Chinese porcelain, mounted on three circular feet, with a snail shell lid also fashioned from gilt bronze’. The gilt bronze shell lid combined with the object’s three circular feet suggest that the pot may have taken the shape of a univalve conch and was thus similar in its unmounted form to both Boucher’s porcelain shell and the earlier Munich example.

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565 Boucher’s purchases from Duvaux are listed in chapter three (note 425).
567 ‘Deux vases de la Chine, à bouquets bleu & blanc, montés chacun sur un pied compose de branchages de laurier entrelacé sur quatre tortues; un Triton à chaque côté du haut, portant le revers de la gorge & soutenant une guirlande de laurier, le tout de bronze doré.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 807, p. 115. These vases are listed in the catalogue under the heading ‘Porcelaine Celadon.’ The term celadon refers to both the glaze and the colour. The name was most likely taken from the shepherd Celadon who wore pale green ribbons in Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1627).
568 ‘Un petit pot à baguettes noires, cordon blue & rouge, d’ancienne porcelain de la Chine, monté sur trois pieds, avec cercle & un limaçon sur le couvercle, de bronze doré.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 806, p.114. Used in this context, ‘d’ancienne porcelain de la Chine’ generally refers to decorative porcelains produced prior to 1745, when the cessation of Japanese imports saw the European market flooded with Chinese and imitation Japanese porcelain wares. However, the term is somewhat arbitrary, as the majority of porcelains listed in eighteenth-century sale catalogues (Boucher’s included) were not organised into old/new, rather they were grouped by place of origin and material effect.
In fact, of the 391 porcelain and earthenware objects in Boucher’s collection, more than half were mounted in French gilt—a number of them after Boucher’s own designs. Indeed, the artist owned two porcelain vases with a crackled finished (porcelaine truitée), each ‘expertly’ mounted in gilt bronze ‘after designs by M. Boucher’. Similarly, Boucher arranged for two other creamy pink porcelain vases with the same cracked finish to be mounted in gilded bronze that he too had designed. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that if Boucher had wanted to mount his porcelain shell, then he certainly had the means to achieve such an outcome.

*Laquelle porcelaine?*

Boucher’s decision not to mount his Japanese porcelain shell raises questions as to how the artist viewed this object and, moreover, what its relationship was to his wider collection of art and nature. The absence of mounts suggests that Boucher did not regard the shell solely as a statement of French luxe. Rather, it is more likely that he viewed the shell as artful play on nature, one that could be enjoyed in the context of his collection of real shells like the vrai and faux Porcelaines. Ranging from small to medium in size, these shells were remarkable for their ovate shape, heavily

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569 Boucher’s collection of porcelain and earthenware was distributed across 179 lots, several with multiple listings. See Ibid., lots 659-680, pp. 89-93; lots 745-901, pp. 106-129; lot 936, p. 134 and lot 980, p. 140.

570 ‘Deux vases d’ancienne porcelaine, ornés de deux têtes de belier, dont les cornes servent d’anses, avec guirlande de laurier, piedouche à gorge ornée de bronze doré très-bien exécutées d’après les dessins de M. Boucher. Chacun porte 7 pouces de haut, sur 5 de large.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 817, pp. 116-117. The figure of the ram (belier) also appears on the handle mount of Claude-André Bouchet’s *Mount for a ewer* (c.1738-1749, private collection), which is thought to be a design after Boucher or Meissonier. The connection between Boucher’s design for the mount in the catalogue and the uncredited etching increases the likelihood that Boucher was the latter’s original author. See Peter Fuhring, ‘Boucher and the Ornament Designers’, in *Boucher, Watteau and the Origin of the Rococo: An Exhibition of 18th Century Drawings from the Collection of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, eds. Jane Munro and Terence Maloon (Paris and Sydney: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2005), p. 253. For an in-depth discussion on these mounts see Priore, ‘François Boucher’s Designs for Vases and Mounts’, pp. 2-51.

571 ‘Deux autres vases, couleur ventre de biche, ornés d’anses composées de serpents qui s’entrelacent & d’un masque de satyres avec guirlandes, en bronze doré, de la composition de M. Boucher.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 819, p. 117.
patterned dorsal and porcellenous exterior. Unlike other shells that required regular cleaning and polishing, however, the unique enamelled surface of the shell presented a natural artifice that was, according to d’Argenville, ‘as perfect as that of the most brilliant porcelain’. Thus for Boucher, his collection of Porcelaine shells must have seemed like a jeu de nature, particularly when viewed next to his example in ceramic.

While the conflation of natural and humanly wrought porcelaine shells may have been understood by Boucher and others as a type of visual pun, the relationship between these two objects is emblematic of the long standing analogy between shells and porcelain. Up until the seventeenth century it was still widely believed that hard paste Chinese porcelain was comprised of pulverised shells ground down into a ‘paste’ and returned to the earth for ‘eighty to a hundred years’ to mature under nature’s supervision. Such beliefs were instrumental in the artistic development of sixteenth-century French potter Bernard Palissy (1509-1590), whose interest in the alchemical relationship of art and nature saw him cast real shells into materials such as bronze, plaster, and ceramic. As Glenn Adamson has argued, for Palissy, the process of casting real shells into ceramic was in itself analogues to the transformation of shells into porcelain.

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572 ‘On nomme cette coquille Porcelaine, parce qu’elle porte naturellement un émail aussi parfait que peut l’être celui de la plus brillante Porcelaine.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative, p. 53.
573 The Portuguese traveller Duarte Barbosa is largely responsible for perpetuating this myth. In 1516 he wrote: ‘They make in this country a great quantity of porcelains of different sorts, very fine and good, which form for them a great article of trade for all parts, and they make them in this way. They take the shells of sea-snails, and egg-shells, and pound them, and with other ingredients make a paste, which they put underground to refine for the space of eighty or a hundred years, and this mass of paste they leave as a fortune to their children.’ As cited in Leo Wiener, Africa and the Discovery of America 3vols., vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1922), pp. 206-207.
Although the idea that porcelain could be humanly wrought from nature was dispelled by the middle of the seventeenth century, the theory continued to circulate as a subject of discussion in a number of eighteenth-century French texts. For some commentators like Jacques Savary des Bruslons (1657-1716), correcting the public’s attitude towards the ‘mistakes’ of the past was an opportunity to highlight support for locally produced soft paste porcelain, which he argued was under threat from increasing numbers of ‘foreign’ imports. Savary des Bruslons’s analysis of the term porcelain, published posthumously in his *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (1723), is also significant in that it is one of the first attempts to identify the commercial attributes that separate *Porcelaine* shells from their ceramic counterparts. In particular, he singled out the medicinal properties of *Porcelaine* shells and their availability at various apothecaries in Paris.

However, for those dealers whose businesses were reliant on the trade of imported shells, porcelains and other curiosities, there were obvious commercial advantages in maintaining a link between these objects. Gersaint, for example, felt compelled to draw the public’s attention to the historical links between shells and porcelain. Writing in the catalogue that accompanied the 1736 sale, he reminded readers that some early modern thinkers, such as the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner

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576 ‘C’est une ancienne erreur (peut-être inventée pour faire valoir la porcelain) que la matiere dont elle est composée soit faite de coquilles d’oeufs ou des écaillles d’une espèce d’huître pulvérisées; c’en est encore une que cette matiere soit des cents & deux cents ans à se préparer & à se meurir………qu’il ne manque presque plus aux Porcelaines Françaises pour égaler celles de la Chine que d’être apportées cinq ou six mille lieuë loin, & de passer pour étrangères dans l’esprit d’une Nation accoutumée à ne faire de cas que de ce qu’elle ne possede point, & mépriser de ce qu’elle trouve au milieu d’elle.’ Jacques Savary des Bruslons, *Dictionnaire universel de commerce*, 3vols., vol. 3 (Paris: 1741), pp. 943-944.

577 ‘Les Porcelaines ont aussi quelque usage dans la Médecine, & on les employe broyées ou pilées en forme de perles. Ce sont les Marchands Epiciers-Druguistes qui sont à Paris le commerce de ce coquillage medicinal.’ Ibid., p. 942. In the 1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*, d’Argenville claimed that the Célique shell was used to treat the illness by the same name. It is likely he is referring to Coeliac disease, also spelt Celiac in English and Coeliale in French. See Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), p. 309.

(1516-1565), had even gone so far as to suggest that porcelain could be made directly from *Porcelaine* shells.\(^{579}\) This argument was reiterated in d’Argenville’s *La Conchyliologie* when it was published six years later in 1742.\(^{580}\) Thus, in an effort to establish a new luxury market for shells in mid eighteenth-century France, both Gersaint and d’Argenville drew on the relationship between shells and porcelain, the best of which, they argued, originated from the exotic East.\(^{581}\)

The connection between *Porcelaine* shells and collectable Asian porcelain is further revealed in Gersaint’s analysis of the spectacular visual effects of the shell. Drawing on stylistic vocabulary more commonly used to describe the lustrous sheen of Asian monochromes, Gersaint stressed the ‘beauty’ (*beauté*), ‘dazzling brilliance’ (*éclat*) and ‘freshness’ (*fraicheur*) of the *Porcelaine* shell.\(^{582}\) Such comments belie the fluidity of Gersaint’s role as dealer of both objects of art and natural history and, moreover, his ambitions to ensure that these objects met with mid eighteenth-century ideals of representation.

In what is a much later interpretation of the subject, Anne Vallayer-Coster’s (1744-1818) *Still Life with a Porcelain Vase, Pieces of Coral, Shells and Various Mineralogical Specimens* from 1776 (plate 42), serves as a visual reminder of the

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\(^{579}\) According to Gersaint: ‘Gesner, qu’on leur a donné ce nom, parce que de leur matiere on faisoit la Porcelaine à la Chine.’ Ibid., p. 63.


\(^{582}\) Gersaint is recalling the argument made by the Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1606), who argued, ‘d’it qu’on les nomme Porcelaines, par rapport à leur beauté, leur éclat, & leur fraicheur, qui sont les attributs de Venus.’ Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, p. 63. For Aldrovandi’s discussion of the *Porcelaine* shell, see Ulisse Aldrovandi, *De reliquis animalibus exanguiibus libri quattuor, post mortem eius editi: nempe de mollibus, crustaceis, testaceis, et zooophytes* (Bologna: 1606), p. 552.
relationship between shells and porcelain as decorative objects for display.\textsuperscript{583} As the title suggests, the work depicts a carefully staged arrangement of shells, minerals and corals on a table in front of a heavy green curtain. These objects are paired with a spectacular gilt mounted red monochrome vase that reflects the natural objects around it, as well as an unseen window off to the left. The artful engagement between the natural and humanly wrought objects rejects the spectacle of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century traditions of collecting.\textsuperscript{584} Nor is there any suggestion of Linnaean taxonomy that dominated the natural sciences across Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century. Instead, Vallayer-Coster presents a celebration of the amateur collector’s attachment to these types of objects and their ability to elicit a shared aesthetic response, which according to Gersaint, made them equally complicit in their duties of elite representation.

While the majority of Gersaint and d’Argenville’s readers would have long dismissed the idea that collectable hard paste porcelains from the East were born directly from a material that it now appeared to represent, Boucher and others no doubt took pleasure in discussing the etymology that underscored this relationship. For instance, the French word for porcelain, which is borrowed from the old Italian ‘porcellana’, was originally the name given Porcelaine shells on account of the resemblance between the object’s narrow aperture and the genitals of a female pig (‘porca’).\textsuperscript{585} Towards the end of the thirteenth century, however, the term ‘porcellana’

\textsuperscript{583} On the artistic style and agency of Anne Vallayer-Coster, see Eik Kahng and Marianne Roland Michel, eds., Anne Vallayer-Coster, Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette. (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 2002).

\textsuperscript{584} For discussion of these earlier traditions of collection, see Daston and Park, Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750, pp. 255-301.

took on dual meaning when it was used by Marco Polo in 1298 to describe the Chinese ceramic ware he had discovered during his travels to the East. For Polo, the smooth translucent quality attached to the glaze of the Chinese porcelain instantly recalled the nacreous sheen of Porcelaine shell.\textsuperscript{586}

The term ‘porcellana’, or \textit{porcelaine} as it would be known in France, continued to carry dual meaning in most parts of Europe until 1758, when the publication of the tenth edition of Carolus Linnaeus’s (1707-1778) \textit{Systema Naturae} put in place a taxonomic framework that effectively rendered d’Argenville’s 1742 class of Porcelaines obsolete.\textsuperscript{587} Under the Linnaean system of binomial nomenclature, shells belonging to the Porcelaine group were organised into a new taxonomic family known as ‘Cypraeidae’ or ‘Cowries’, a term by which they are more commonly referred to today.\textsuperscript{588} Within this familial unit, the shells were to be recognised by their binomial name, a combination of their genus ‘Cypraea’, followed by a single specific name that uniquely identified each of its species.\textsuperscript{589} Yet despite the effectiveness of the Linnaean system of classification, eighteenth-century French collectors, dealers and even some naturalists like Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) continued to refer to shells in the cowrie family as \textit{les Porcelaines} until well into the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{590}

\textsuperscript{586} Marco Polo, \textit{The Book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East} ed. Sir Henry Yule (London: 1929), p. 74.
\textsuperscript{588} The term \textit{Cypraeidae} is associated with the Latin \textit{Cypria} one of the names given to Venus who descended from Cythera, the mythological island of love. See John Craig, \textit{A New Universal Etymological, Technological, and Pronouncing Dictionary of the English Language}, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: 1849), pp. 464-465; and W. L. Hildburgh, ‘Cowrie Shells as Amulets in Europe’, \textit{Folklore} 53 no. 4 (1942): 178-95, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{589} For example, \textit{Cypraea argus}.
\textsuperscript{590} Lamarck used the term \textit{Porcelaine} to describe the Linnaean system of Cypraeidae. See Jean-Baptiste de Monet de Lamarck, \textit{Histoire naturelle des animaux sans vertèbres}, 7 vols., vol. 7 (Paris: Guiraudet, 1822), pp. 372-409.
**Re-presenting nature**

The lack of a formal semantic distinction separating natural and humanly wrought *porcelain* shells by eighteenth-century amateur collectors and dealers is an important counterpoint to the aesthetic relationship of these objects. As the Munich, Condé and Wrightsman shells all reveal, the process of representation was not a literal, but imaginative interpretation of nature, one aimed at pleasing European tastes. To be sure, amateur collectors like Boucher, Madame du Pompadour and the duc de Bourbon were not interested in owning an exact copy of a shell. Nor were they necessarily interested in the Palissy inspired shell casts that were being produced across the channel in the porcelain factories at Derby, Chelsea, and Bow. Rather, the consumption of hard paste Asian porcelain shells by eighteenth-century French collectors was driven by the desire to experience an artful presentation of what real shells like the *vrai* and *faux Porcelaine* seemed to achieve so effortlessly in nature.

The dazzling effect produced by these imaginative visions of nature is realised in a pair of ormolu mounted Chinese shells, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore (plate 43). Dating from the Kangxi period, the Baltimore pair each takes the form of a snail shell, complete with a large turban spire that tapers out of the porcelain body. In what is further evidence of a playful engagement with the object’s shell-shaped form, smaller turban spires have been added as supporting feet and as a finial on the lid of each shell. Similarly, the deep lustrous blue achieved through the application of a monochrome glaze has been offset by the addition of French ormolu chased mounts on the base and lid. In both instances, the double scrolled plinth and pierced gilded collar serve to elevate the shell, giving it a renewed sense of grandeur.

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The visual and conceptual challenge to produce a more artful presentation of nature was even more pronounced in French hands. Indeed, the sustained interest in Asian porcelain shells that emerged in the 1730s and 40s would eventually spread to other French porcelain factories, where replica soft paste porcelain shells would reach a wider audience. At Vincennes, for example, the rough uneven surface of the Munich shell (plate 39) finds a more cohesive and refined visual style in Jean-Claude Duplessis’s (1695-1774) polychrome Saucière from 1756 (plate 44). When compared to the Munich shell, Duplessis’s the sauceboat takes on a more graceful and elongated form. It is as if the artist has stretched the Munich shell in order to exaggerate the stylistic syntax of the shell’s natural shape. Duplessis has also engaged with the idea of the Munich shell’s marine-themed polychrome overglaze designs, which he reduced to a single piece of coral and a few scattered barnacles drawn from the signature Kakiemon palette of red, yellow, blue, and green. In this way, the sauceboat’s reference to the Kakiemon aesthetic suggests an attempt by Duplessis to create viewing experience that privileged the eighteenth-century amateur collector, who would have appreciated the subtleties of such a self-conscious representation in soft paste.

Similarly, at Sèvres, the translation from hard to soft porcelain shells results in a more highly charged monochrome enamel effect, seducing the viewer with the same ‘fraicheur’ and ‘éclat’ that Gersaint referred to in his discussion of real Porcelaine shells for the 1736 catalogue.\(^{592}\) For instance, a pair of gilt mounted bleu-céleste snail shells from the mid 1760s (plate 45) present an electrified version of the earlier Baltimore pair (plate 43) on which they appear to have been modelled. While the Boston shells are similar in number and form, the material effect of pair is more

\(^{592}\) See this chapter (note 582).
deliberate in its appeal to a contemporary French audience, many of whom, like Boucher, were enthusiastic collectors of real shells like the prized Porcelaine argus. Thus it seems that the most direct challenge to the natural artifice of shells from the Porcelaine family lay in the French handling of Asian porcelains, either by the addition of rocaille inspired gilt mounts, or through entirely new representations such as those produced at Vincennes and Sèvres.

The decision to reproduce the Baltimore pair may have been inspired by Boucher, whose influence at Sèvres during this period was arguably at its peak. As Rosalind Savill has shown, between 1757 and 1766, the manufacture of porcelain at Sèvres was without question shaped by the authority of Boucher’s pictorial imagery. Under the direction of Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716-1791), Boucher’s designs were translated into decorative scenes on all manner of service porcelain, as well as taking on new plastic qualities in the form of free-standing figurines. This was a continuation of Boucher’s previous work at Vincennes, where engravings after designs by the artist were used by the factory’s modellers as their primary source. As Antoinette Faÿ-Hallé has argued, Boucher’s involvement at Vincennes and later at Sèvres was integral to establishing a French alternative to Germany’s Meissen factory, which had dominated the production of European porcelain since the early part of the eighteenth century.

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593 On Boucher’s collection of real Porcelaine shells, see chapter four.
595 For examples of Boucher’s designs, see Laing, Rosenberg and Marandel, François Boucher, 1703-1770, p. 370 (nos. 11-113).
596 On the confluence of Boucher’s designs at Vincennes during the 1750s, see Savill, 'François Boucher and the Porcelains of Vincennes and Sèvres', pp. 162-168.
Whether Boucher himself oversaw the production of the Boston pair, or it was the result of his authority over the factory’s design mandate, it seems that a discussion of the Boston pair cannot dismiss the likely influence of Boucher and his collection of natural and ceramic porcelain shells. For Boucher, the transformation of his own designs into porcelain was akin to the reproduction of hard to soft paste shells. In both instances, the transference of artistic authenticity called attention to the materiality of the objects in question, forcing the viewer to make new and informed visual connections. Such practices, in light of Boucher’s demonstrated interest in the relationship between his design for the 1736 frontispiece and the display of his own collection at the Louvre, suggest that any such reproduction of the original Baltimore pair at Sèvres (plate 43) would have appealed directly to his artistic sensibility.

The return of Randon de Boisset

Boucher’s interest in the representation of porcelaine shells, both real and in ceramic, was almost certainly behind the acquisition of pair of mounted celadon shells by his friend and patron Randon de Boisset. As his 1777 estate catalogue reveals, Randon de Boisset owned a pair of late seventeenth-century Japanese shells (plate 46), which he bought for 610 livres at the Jean de Jullienne sale in March 1767. This was the same sale where Boucher purchased a pair of Chinese lanterns for his own collection and, it seems, also acted as Randon de Boisset’s unofficial artistic to the rise of Meissen, see Howard Coutts, *The Art of Ceramics: European Ceramic Design 1500-1830* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 85-104.

596 At the very least, it is likely he discussed the reproduction of the original Baltimore pair with Falconet, whose success at Sèvres, as Fay-Hallé has argued, was heavily dependent on Boucher. See Fay-Hallé, ‘The Influence of Boucher's Art on the Production of the Vincennes- Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory’, pp. 345-350.

599 ‘Deux coquilles couvertes, de belle sortie, à rebords coloriés d’un beau fond rouge, nuancé de bleu celeste foncé; elles sont de la plus grande perfection, & chacune garnie de gorge, & de trios petits pieds en rocaille de bronze doré.’ Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue....de feu M. Randon de Boisset, part 2, lot 603, p. 68. For the price paid by Randon de Boisset, see the annotated notes found in the BnF’s copy of Rémy & Julliot, Catalogue raisonné.........Après le décès de M. de Jullienne, lot 1403, p. 19. Yd-67a-8. The Getty Museum has established provenance for the shells. See Wilson, *Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, pp. 80-84.
Randon de Boisset’s decision to seek external advice was not unusual. Throughout the years the collector had engaged a number of artists and dealers, including Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) and Pierre Rémy, who was introduced to Randon de Boisset by none other than Boucher. However, as Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul argued in his obituary on Randon de Boisset, published in two separate notices in 1777, the collector’s reliance on Boucher was ongoing and ubiquitous:

*He (Randon de Boisset) sought out the great artists of our School and became particularly friendly with M. Boucher. This painter of the Graces was without arrogance, disdain, or vanity; he was exactly suited to be the friend of an amateur whose disposition was of the gentlest and most aimable; one can see what interest, affection and pleasure he spent and took in forming M. de Boisset’s knowledge of painting.*

As Sireul’s comments suggest, the relationship between Boucher and the notoriously private collector existed beyond the limits of a standard commercial arrangement. Rather, their alliance was forged through a mutual interest in art and a passion for collecting. Thus, it seems fitting that Randon de Boisset would continue to seek

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600 For details of Boucher’s Chinese lanterns, see Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 941, pp. 134-135. On Boucher’s presence at the Jullienne sale, see chapter three of this thesis.

601 On Boucher’s trip abroad see chapter three.

602 This is mentioned in Rémy & Julliot, *Catalogue....de feu M. Randon de Boisset, ‘Avertissement’* (no page numbers).

603 ‘Il chercha les grands artistes de notre Ecole et se lia d’une amitié particulière M. Boucher. Ces peintre de Grâces était sans morgue, sans dédain et sans orgueil; il était bien fait pour être l’ami d’un amateur dont le commerce était le plus doux et le plus aimable; M. Boucher foulait aux pieds cette jalousie qui ne cesse faire au mérite une guerre de chicane; on sait combien il mit d’intérêt, d’affection et de plaisir à former dans M. de Boisset les connaissances relatives à la peinture.’ Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul, ‘Éloge de M. de Boisset’, in *Almanach historique et raisonné des architectes, peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs et ciseleurs*, ed. Jean-Baptiste-Pierre LeBrun (Paris: 1777), pp.153-156. A revised version of Sireul’s obituary appears as the preface to Randon de Boisset’s sale catalogue, published the same year.

604 On Randon de Bossiet’s attitude towards his collection, see Chatelus, *Peindre à Paris au XVIIIe siecle*, p. 291.
advice from Boucher, whose extensive collection of art and nature not only distinguished him from every other artist of his generation, but also gave him a unique perspective on such issues.

The purchase of the Getty shells at the 1767 sale represents a definitive moment in the relationship between Randon de Boisset and Boucher. It comes at a time when they appear to be pursuing a collegial interest in their collections. Just as Randon de Boisset had given Boucher the opportunity to travel with him to the Low Countries, where the artist made several of purchases his own, Boucher had also assisted his friend by helping acquire the works for which he would build his ‘grand reputation’ as a collector. The collaborative nature of their relationship is reflected in the acquisition of the Getty shells, which are in keeping with the light-hearted and playful aesthetic patronised by Randon de Boisset and more widely embodied by Boucher through the choices he made in his own collection and in his approach to art making.

Boucher’s influence in the purchase of the Getty shells is further realised in the formal aesthetic qualities of the objects themselves. Taking the form of a univalve conch, the Getty shells display an artful conceit of the organic. While the asymmetric shape and rough textured surface of the shells seeks to mimic the fluted body of the conch, any attempt to provide a naturalistic impression is subverted by the addition of small shell and rock formations that appear in decorative relief across the body and ceramic feet. The presence of this patterning, which is made more visible by the use of a green celadon overglaze, supports the fact that like the Wrightsman shell, these

605 Writing about the 1766 journey to the Low Countries, Siruel noted: ‘C’est dans ce voyage qu’il prit le goût le plus vif pour l’école flamande et hollandaise. Lorsqu’un tableau était connu pour être de la plus grande reputation, il en faisait l’acquisition et le payait en souverain.’ Rémy and Julliot, Catalogue...de feu M. Randon de Boisset, ‘Avertissement’ (no page numbers).
objects were not indigenous designs, rather they were made specifically for export to the West.606

The Getty shells were served even further by the addition of French gilt bronze mounts, mostly likely added around 1750 when they were acquired by Jullienne.607 A comparison with a similarly shaped Kakiemon shell from the Miyoshi Museum in Japan (plate 47), confirms that the once solid lids of the Getty shells have been replaced by delicate pieces of gilt bronze cast in the pattern of a coral leaf. The gentle arch of the coral lid is echoed in the curvature of the seaweed branch handle that stands in place of the small porcelain finial of the Miyoshi shell. Gilt bronze clusters of rock, shell and coral have also been added to each of the supporting feet, offering the viewer a more defined and elaborate version of the original shell and rock ornamentation that exists in ceramic underneath. In this way, the mounts serve as a playful reminder of the tensions that exist between real and imagined visions of nature; the same tensions that lie at the heart of Boucher’s aesthetic and of rococo visual culture in general.

It is worth noting that the Getty shells were not only sold to Randon de Boisset as a pair, but that they remained a set as they passed through subsequent sales to their present location in California. This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it confirms the existence of a serial design of porcelain shells at the Arita factory, evidence for which is also suggested in the clear stylistic affinity shared by the Munich, Miyoshi, and Condé Kakiemon shells. While to some extent this was dictated by the limitative production costs of this relatively small industry, it was moreover, governed by the French demand for serialised objects that could be

606 This was the conclusion drawn by the Getty Museum. Wilson, Mounted Oriental Porcelain in the J. Paul Getty Museum, p. 80.
607 1750 is the date established by the Getty Museum. Idem.
mounted and displayed together as matched sets. As Mimi Hellman has shown, despite the privileged position occupied by singularity during the period, the formal dynamics of the eighteenth-century French interior was shaped by seriality and the overriding desire to display decorative objects in coordinated multiples.608

In the case of the Getty shells, it is likely that they were bought by Jullienne as a serialised pair, with the intention to mount and display them as a matched set. This explains not only the identical nature of the gilded mounts and pierced lids, but also why they continued to be sold as a pair. Moreover, Jullienne’s effort to transform this particular serialised design into a matched set is an example of eighteenth-century French attempts to naturalise imported objects. By pairing the Getty shells, Jullienne therefore successfully renegotiated the aesthetic relationship between these objects. As Hellman has argued, however, within the serialised interior, matched objects not only forged new relationships with other members of their group, but also to the wider interior through the subtle repetition of similarly themed motifs.609 Thus, for Jullienne and Randon de Boisset, the Getty shells represented part of a coordinated effort to establish a visual dialogue through the repetition of various rocaillé motifs and ornaments—both painted and real.

Boucher’s universe

By comparison, the display of Boucher’s collection of real and ceramic shells offers a different view to that of the serialised interior. Indeed, the artist’s collection at the Louvre was not shaped by the dynamics of seriality. Rather, it emphasised the

608 The use of the term ‘singularity’ in relation to objects of status can be found throughout sale catalogues and inventories during this period. For an example, see this chapter (note 552). On matching as a formal design strategy of the eighteenth-century French interior, see Mimi Hellman, ‘The Joy of Sets: The Uses of Seriality in the French Interior’, in Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the French and American Past, eds. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 130. I am grateful to Mary Sheriff for her suggestion of a connection between these objects and those discussed in Hellman’s essay.

609 Ibid., pp. 132-140.
visual and conceptual links between the artificial and the natural. This would provide
a unifying aspect to the overall logic of his collection. As the marquis de Beauregard
recalled during a visit to the studio in 1768, Boucher surrounded himself with,

\[ \text{his tremendous cabinet of natural history. I saw some butterflies that measured half a foot across their extended wings. He has also a wonderful collection of shells, stuffed birds, minerals, corals, and bits of china . . . the whole is arranged with artistic taste.} \]

Thus, instead of acquiring pieces that belonged to a set, or functioned as part of wider interior program, Boucher focused on arrangements that drew attention to the object’s capacity for improvement, either via a thoughtful placement (in the case of the butterflies), or through the artful arrangement of seemingly disparate groups of art and nature. Such artistic tethering ensured that Boucher’s collection remained the object of display, rather than being marginalised by the totalising interests of the serialised interior.

The absence of a serialised display is also evident in Boucher’s arrangement of his ceramic branches, which according to Beauregard mingled alongside his collection of real corals and other marine plant life. Three of these branches were particularly valuable, having been cast from *Famille Verte* Chinese porcelain and decorated with polychrome enamel leaves. Similar to the Kakiemon style of decoration, these ceramic branches playfully engaged with the idea of a representation of nature, challenging the beauty of their natural counterparts both in form and in material effect. The fact that Boucher displayed these ceramic branches alongside his

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610 ‘Il a un cabinet d'histoire naturelle immense. J’ai vu là des papillons qui,les ailes étendues, ont un demi-pied de large. Il a aussi une collection merveilleuse de coquillages, d'oiseaux embaumés, de minéraux, de coraux et de morceaux de la Chine. Le tout est arrangé avec beaucoup d'art et de goût.’ Costa de Beauregard, *Un homme d'autrefois*, p. 41.

611 Ibid., p. 41.

612 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné...le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 876, p. 126. For other examples of porcelain branches in Boucher’s collection, see lot 763, p. 108; lot 814, p. 116; lots 821-822, p. 117-118; lot 829, p. 119; lots 861-862, pp. 123-124.
collection of real corals and other marine plant life not only speaks to a conscious
departure from the serialised interior, but also highlights the emphasis he placed on
the materiality of the collection and, moreover, the importance of achieving subtle
and pleasing visual effects by his own hand.

In this respect Boucher was not alone. The staging of real shells and corals,
together with those made of porcelain can be found across a number of eighteenth-
century amateur collections. As d’Argenville noted in his discussion of the principal
 cabinets in mid eighteenth-century Europe, respected amateur collectors of natural
history, such as Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson and the academician Louis-Léon Pajot,
comte d’Ons-en-Bray (1678-1754), artfully displayed real shells and corals next to
objects of art, including mounted porcelains.613 Similarly, Louis-Pierre-Maximilien de
Béthune, the duc de Sully (1685-1761) filled his four room suite on the first floor of
his left bank residence with objects of art and nature, reserving the largest room for
his collection of mounted shells and corals, both real and porcelain.614

To be sure, the practice of mixing the natural with the artificial was encouraged
by eighteenth-century by connoisseurs and dealers. D’Argenville, for example, urged
amateur collectors to display natural curiosities (shells, corals, birds, and animal
skeletons), with decorative objects such as busts and porcelains.615 Writing in the

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613 The collections of Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson and the comte d’ons-de Bray are discussed in
Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 32-33. A more detailed description of these collections
and their various arrangements is provided in Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), pp.
203-206. For further analysis of the collection of the comte d’ons-de Bray, see Jean-Dominique
Augarde, 'The Scientific Cabinet of Comte d'Ons-en-Bray and a Clock by Domenico Cucci', *Cleveland
614 Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), pp. 200-201. More recently, the duc de Sully’s
collection has been discussed in Dietz and Nutz, 'Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity
and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris', p. 44.
615 On the need to vary the type of objects when forming a cabinet of curiosity, see Dezallier
d'Argenville, 'Lettre sur le choix et l'arrangement d'un Cabinet Curieux', pp. 1295-1296. For examples
of when the fusing together of art and nature was an acceptable form of display, see d’Argenville’s
discussion of the prominent shell collections in Europe. Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie*
(1742), pp. 198-230.
1764 edition of his *Dictionnaire raisonné d’histoire naturelle*, Valmont de Bomare also recommended that amateur collectors fuse the natural with the artificial. He argued that it was appropriate ‘to decorate the tops and cornices of armoires with very large shells… urns & busts of alabaster, of jasper, marble, porphyry……antique bronze figures, large sea fans or sea shells, animals made from shells, globes & spheres.’ For Valmont de Bomare, the convergence of such objects served to highlight the thinly veiled line between nature wrought and nature caught.

At the duc de Bourbon’s collection at Chantilly, the relationship between natural and artificial representations of nature was not just linked visually and conceptually through display, but also to the overall production of objects at the Chantilly porcelain factory. As collective inventories from 1740 and 1793 reveal, the duc de Bourbon acquired an impressive collection of Japanese porcelain shells, including the aforementioned gilt mounted Condé shell (plate 41). In addition to his Kakiemon collection, the duc was also in possession of four other Japanese porcelain shells, each covered with the same celadon glaze seen in the Wrightsman and Getty shells. Inside the château at Chantilly, they were displayed along a passageway that connected the duc’s collection of real shells and corals to the rooms that housed his

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616 ‘On est aussi dans Tissage de garnir le dessus des corniches des armoires, de très grandes coquilles, de guépiers étrangers, d'une corne de rhinocéros, d'une dent d'éléphant, d'une licorne; des urnes & bustes d'albâtre, de jaspe, de marbre, de porphyre ou de serpentine: on y met aussi des figures de bronze antiques, de grands lithophytes ou panaches de mer, des animaux faits de coquilles, des globes & sphères.’ Jacques-Christophe Valmont de Bomare, *Dictionnaire raisonné universel d'histoire naturelle*, 6 vols., vol. 3 (Paris: Didot, 1764), p. 23.


618 ‘quatre compotiers de porcelaine celadon ancien Japon forme de coquilles et de feuilles de deux grandeurs.’ Duc de Bourbon, AN MC XCII, 504, 17 February, 1740.
wider collection of porcelain and other objects of art. As visitors to the château passed from one room to the next, the porcelain shells served as a reminder of the playful exchange taking place between real and imagined visions of nature under the Bourbon reign at Chantilly.

These same tensions were a source of inspiration for the producers of rocaille porcelain at Chantilly during the 1730s and 40s. Indeed, surviving examples of Chantilly porcelain from this period suggest that the duc’s collection of Kakiemon shells provided modellers with the inspiration for reinterpretations in soft paste. Like the translation of natural to humanly wrought shells, the transition from hard paste to soft paste porcelain shells relied on an imaginative interpretation of nature. For example, a Chantilly porcelain shell from around 1740 (plate 48), represents a more fluid contemporary French version of original Kakiemon shells such as the one in the Munich collection (plate 39). While the heavier body of the Munich shell rests unconvincingly on its fragile ceramic support, the Chantilly shell, by comparison, has been compressed to allow for a more elaborate and graceful wave shaped porcelain base. The sense of movement that is achieved through this process is heightened by the rhythmic application of polychrome enamel paint in a range of colours drawn from the Kakiemon palette.

The duc de Bourbon’s collection of Kakiemon porcelain may also have been the inspiration for a handsome tin-glazed soft paste shell (plate 49) produced at Chantilly sometime between 1737 and 1740 and now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The Boston shell’s imitative hard paste finish and marine-themed overglazed

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619 On the display of these objects, see Duc de Bourbon, 1740; and Smentek, Rococo Exotic, p. 27. The arrangement of the duc de Bourbon’s collection of real shells is discussed in Gersaint, Catalogue raisonné de coquilles, p. 31.
620 A possible connection between these objects was originally proposed by Munger. See Munger, ‘Some Possible Sources for a Chantilly Pot-Pourri’, pp. 81-89.
enamelled designs in the signature Kakiemon colours reveals a clear stylistic affinity with the Munich and Miyoshi shells (plates 39 & 47). Like the previous Chantilly example, however, the exaggerated form and highly charged enamel effect of the Boston shell is more representative of contemporary French tastes. This is particularly evident in the shell’s soft paste porcelain base which, unlike the rough organic barnacles that appear on both Munich and Miyoshi shells, is supported by an elegant wave and shell motif-plinth. Indeed, its asymmetric form and fluid ribbed surface give the porcelain mount a sense of movement that was more in keeping with the elaborate rocaille inspired shapes found in the designs of Boucher and his contemporaries.

**Inventing artifice**

Boucher’s selection of natural and ceramic shells and corals provided a unifying element to the visual and conceptual logic of the collection. However, the relationship is also emblematic of a broader exchange taking place between art and nature in the artist’s studio at the Louvre. As the 1771 catalogue reveals, Boucher was in possession of a number of naturally produced materials that had been transformed into the service of decoration, expressly for the purposes of art. Listed in the catalogue under the heading ‘Morceaux curieux’, these objects confirm Boucher’s continued interest in the role of art in nature and with it the human capacity for creativity and artistic invention.621

Arguably, the most spectacular among these objects was Boucher’s ‘coquille d’aventurine’, which was mounted (possibly by the artist himself) ‘with handles and decorated with leaves in with gilded silver’.622 Measuring twenty centimetres in height, this ‘beautiful’ shell was carved from an iridescent form of green quartzite

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621 Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 902-996, pp. 129-142.
622 ‘Un belle coquille d’aventurine montée à anses & feuilles d’ornemens en vermeil.’ Ibid., lot 930, pp. 131-132. I am grateful to Michael Yonan for his suggestions on what this object may have been.
known as aventurine. Derived from the Italian ‘a ventura’, meaning by chance, the mineral takes its name from aventurine glass which was discovered during the seventeenth century when a worker at the Murano factory accidentally dropped a batch of copper filings into the melt during the fusing process. The result was a stunning composite that gave the glass its signature sparkling effect, known as aventurescence.

Despite the fact that both the mineral and the glass were listed separately in Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel* from 1690, the inability for aventurine glass to be successfully reproduced outside of Venice for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries meant that its use was limited to a handful of objects such as snuff bottles and beads. Conversely, the quartz variety was a popular choice for lapidary work during the period, particularly for fashioning gemstones, figurines, and other decorative ornaments. It is possible that Boucher commissioned the shell from one of the many examples of cut and uncut aventurine in his natural history collection, a

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624 Aventurine glass is sometimes referred to as goldstone.


626 As Victor Graham and others have shown, the proliferation of aventurine glass objects would not emerge until the middle of the nineteenth century. Graham, ‘Aventurine: The Mineral and the Glass’, p. 4.
notion that is supported by the large number of decorative objects in his collection cast from various light diffusing minerals and stones.\(^{627}\)

The fact that aventurine quartz takes its name from the glass goes some way towards explaining the confusion surrounding the material and its decorative uses during the eighteenth century. For instance, the term aventurescence was also used to describe the shimmering effect that occurred naturally in the mineral. Writing about the effects of aventurine, Norwegian geologist Olaf Andersen (1884-1941) defined aventurescence as ‘a play of light and colours caused by strong reflections emanating from within the substance itself’.\(^{628}\) For collectors of cut and uncut aventurine quartz like Boucher, the special appeal of the mineral lay in the unpredictability of its effect. Unlike the glass, which provided a more uniform shimmer, the aventurization of the mineral could only be measured on certain planes and from no one particular angle.\(^{629}\)

In Boucher’s case, the capacity for his aventurine shell to produce the light dispersing effects of aventurescence was significantly improved following the removal and replacement of several windows in the artist’s studio and adjacent apartment. The work, which took place in conjunction with the other refurbishments carried out by Boucher in 1752, played an important role in the artist’s vision for the redevelopment of his studio.\(^{630}\) Just by replacing the existing panes with new glass, Boucher dramatically increased the amount of natural light in his studio— not to mention the addition of several new windows, which according to Colin Bailey,

\(^{627}\) Boucher’s aventurine shell belonged to a sizable collection of light tracing minerals that had been transformed into decorative ornaments. The collection included a number of vases, plates, urns and pot pourris, made from various semi precious minerals and stones such as rock crystal, jade, and amber. See Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 902-940, pp. 135-134. For examples of cut and uncut aventurine minerals, see lot 1288, p. 182 & lot 1450 pp. 201-202.


\(^{629}\) Idem. This is also mentioned in Graham, 'Aventurine: The Mineral and the Glass', p. 4.

\(^{630}\) On Boucher’s renovations at the Louvre, see chapter four.
were so important to Boucher that he offered to pay them for himself.\textsuperscript{631} While this undoubtedly assisted him in his artistic production, particularly when his eyesight failed him in later years, it also gave Boucher the opportunity to experiment with the various effects of his collection of more than fifty different light diffusing ornaments.\textsuperscript{632}

There is one further complicating factor to a definitive study of Boucher’s aventurine shell. For in addition to owning pieces of cut and uncut aventurine minerals, the artist was in possession of a significant number of Japanese lacquer objects decorated with a powdered metal, also known as aventurine.\textsuperscript{633} A less costly alternative to polish on gold-ground, aventurine lacquer was formed when flecks of gold, bronze or tin powder were applied to wet varnish. Used in this context, aventurine lacquer refers to the process of aventurization, thus revealing the collector’s (in this case Boucher’s) ambition for the object to elicit a similar aesthetic response to the one that occurs naturally in aventurine mineral.\textsuperscript{634}

The ability for aventurine lacquer to self-consciously engage with its artificial (glass) and natural (mineral) counterparts was not lost on Boucher, whose collection reveals a number of striking objects decorated in this manner. One of the more spectacular examples was a green and gold-flecked aventurine lacquer box formed in

\textsuperscript{631} Bailey, 'Marie-Jeanne Buzeau, Madame Boucher (1716-96)', p. 226.
\textsuperscript{632} Rémy, Catalogue raisonné...le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lots 902-940, pp. 135-134.
\textsuperscript{634} The glittering effect of aventurine lacquer meant that it was popular material in France during the eighteenth century. According to Albert Jacquemart, the subtle variations between those produced in Japan and France led the dealer Claude-François Julliot to recognise four different varieties: Gros-grain Aventurine in Gold, Common Aventurine, Deep-Toned Aventurine and Shaded Aventurine. See Jacquemart, A History of Furniture, p. 448.
the shape of a pear and decorated with branches and leaves ‘in gold relief’. Through its pear like shape, the box represented a play on the Japanese art of aventurine lacquer known as Nashi-ji (on account of its resemblance to the speckled skin of a pear). What is more, the inside of Boucher’s decorative pear was lined with ‘aventurine orangé’, most likely a reference to aventurine feldspar, a counterpart mineral to the green quartz variety. The vitreous qualities of aventurine feldspar draws an immediate connection with aventurine glass, which through artifice of aventurization had been transformed in order to imitate minerals as they were found in nature.

In its overall design, Boucher’s Japanese pear brought together a number of different varieties of aventurine, the subtleties of which the artist would have certainly enjoyed. Indeed for Boucher, the conflation of the lacquer and the mineral referred not only to real and replicated processes of aventurization, but also more generally to the invention of artifice as it occurred in both art and nature. In this way, aventurine played a semiotic role in Boucher’s collection in that it provided a visual and conceptual pathway between the artificial and the natural. Moreover, it is tempting to think that in choosing this particular object, Boucher not only appreciated the formal aesthetic qualities of the aventurine pear, but also, much like his Japanese porcelain shell, enjoyed the sense of innuendo it conveyed in its reception.

635 ‘Une boîte d’ancien laque en forme de poire, fond aventurine vert, avec branchage & feuilles en or de relief, le dedans est d’aventurine orangé. Trois pouces 2 lignes de hauteur. Il y a une fêlure au couvercle.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné... le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 703, p. 98.
636 I would like to thank Nishimoto Hiromi for her assistance with the term Nashi-ji.
637 In was not uncommon for collectors to order the unification of several different varieties of the same material, the purpose of which was to emphasise the materiality of the medium. For example, Charles Blanc has revealed that Blondel de Gagny acquired a bleu-céleste Chinese porcelain shell, which he arranged to be fused with pieces of European porcelain from factories at Meissen and Sèvres, at a cost of 1,000 livres. Blanc, Le trésor de la curiosité, p. 345.
The playful engagement with aventurine’s propensity to be both natural and artificial in its construction is found across Boucher’s collection of lacquer. His ‘ancient Japanese box’ carved in the shape of three fruits, for example, featured a silver mounted lid made from natural coral and decorated with leaves applied in gold relief.\(^{638}\) While the aventurine mounted lacquer box would have been considered a luxury object in itself, presumably the inclusion of a coral lid appealed to Boucher as a collector of real shells and corals. Parenthetically, the box appeared in the collection of Boucher’s friend and patron Randon de Boisset, with a note from Julliot attesting to its provenance.\(^{639}\) The fact that the object was not listed among the items for sale in Boucher’s 1771 sale catalogue suggests that the artist may have given it to Randon de Boisset as a gift—further evidence of the strength of their relationship.

Boucher’s aventurine shell and coral mounted lacquer box were complimented by a series of other natural objects transformed for the purpose of decoration. For instance, the artist owned a range of bracelets and necklaces fashioned out of red and white coral.\(^{640}\) Having been sourced from far and distant lands, these objects were representative of Boucher’s continued interest in collecting exotic objects from abroad. Boucher had also managed to acquire a red coral and gold rosary cross that had been worked into a filigree design.\(^{641}\) Coral necklaces and rosaries were highly prized during the eighteenth century as they were not only aesthetically pleasing, but

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\(^{638}\) ‘Trois fruits formant boîte, dont un fort, à petite queue de corail sur leur couvercle, & fond argent à feuillages en or de relief, posés sur un plateau avanturine (sic) en or, de 6 pouces de long.’ Rémy and Julliot, *Catalogue....de feu M. Randon de Boisset*, part 2, lot 764, p. 110.

\(^{639}\) ‘Ces fruits, & ceux de l’article suivant, sont d’un genre très singulier; ils viennent du Cabinet de M. Boucher.’ Idem. The use of the term ‘viennent’ in this context is significant, as it implies that the transfer of ownership was not necessarily financial. In other examples in the same catalogue, the authors have used the term ‘vente’ to clarify objects bought by Randon de Boisset at auction.

\(^{640}\) Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 1469-1471, pp. 204-205.

\(^{641}\) ‘Un chapelet de corail rouge, dont la croix & les dixaines sont d’or travaillé en filigrame.’ Ibid., lot 1469, p. 204.
coral was valued for its mystical origins and powers of protection. This has links to Greco-Roman mythology. In particular, the story of Perseus, who after slaying Medusa and rescuing Andromeda, discovered that the discarded leaves he used to wrap Medusa’s blood soaked head had petrified in the nearby water, forming the first coral reef. According to Ovid, some passing nereids witnessed the event and were so impressed by prodigious growth of the coral that they began to spread it to other parts of the Red Sea, with the aim of providing a protective barrier for travelling mariners.

In what would be a precursor to his collection of decorative and natural corals, Boucher explored the object’s mythological origins in an engraving designed and executed by the artist himself. Announced in the *Mercure de France* in September 1734, Boucher’s *Andromeda* (plate 50) pictures a scantily clad heroine in the moments before her rescue by Perseus. The work owes a great debt to his former teacher François Lemoyne’s (1688-1737) painted version of the subject from 1723 (plate 51). Yet as Herman Voss has suggested, Boucher’s engraving seeks to resolve

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642 In the case of the Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, the comte de Toulouse (1678-1737), one of Louis XIV’s illegitimate sons, the association between coral and its mythical powers of protection was central to the formation of the comte’s legitimate identity as Admiral of France and later Minister of the Navy. Recalling her son’s ascent to the position of Admiral in 1683, Madame de Montespan (1641-1707) noted the king gave him a gift of ‘fine chain of coral mixed with pearls’ and a ‘diamond anchor’. Only five years old at the time, the comte failed to see the ‘importance’ of his ‘decoration of brilliants’. As his mother predicted, however, the comte would in time come to identify with the significance of the necklace, forging his career as the king’s designated protector of France’s maritime fleet. See Madame de Montespan, *The Entire Memoirs of Madame de Montespan* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), book vii, pp. 319-20.


645 Minor refinements (burin) were added by Pierre Aveline. See Jean-Richard, *François Boucher: gravures et dessins provenant du Cabinet des Dessins et de la Collection Édmond de Rothschild au Musée du Louvre*, p. 54.

646 ‘la mise en vente d’une estampe dessinée et gravée par M. Boucher d’après un de ses dessins ayant pour title Andromède.’ *Mercure de France* Sept. 1734, p. 2026.
some of the compositional vexes with Lemoyne’s earlier work, thereby creating a more theatrical setting for the gallant rescue.\footnote{647}

These structural modifications also saw Boucher bring forward and tighten the group of shells and coral scattered in the back of the Wallace picture. Occupying the space between the body of Andromeda and the viewer, the shells and corals are given greater compositional presence. While this signifies Boucher’s early interest in the these objects as pictorial subjects in their own right, they can also be understood as an emblem of the events that take place shortly after Perseus rescues Andromeda. Only thirty-one at the time of its execution, the engraving represents an attempt by Boucher to pursue a more ambitious narrative program, one that aimed to collapse the limits of the Wallace picture in favour of exploring a broader visual interpretation of the subject.

Boucher’s interest in coral, both as a collectable object of natural history and as a subject for pictorial representation, is further revealed in his collection of mounted coral. As the 1771 catalogue reveals, Boucher was in possession of a mounted coral tree, part of which had been ‘stripped of its bark’ in order to be preserved.\footnote{648} Most likely either red or white in colour, Boucher’s coral tree was mounted on a lacquer base that featured gold leaf overlay designs.\footnote{649} Measuring twenty-five centimetres in height by twenty-two centimetres in length, the mounted coral tree was similar to the one pictured in Carmontelle’s watercolour of Madame d’Azincourt from 1760 (plate 38). Unfortunately, there no evidence to suggest where Boucher displayed his piece of

\footnote{647} On the relationship between Boucher and Lemoyne’s treatment of the subject, see Voss, 'François Boucher’s Early Development', p. 85; and Brunel, Boucher, pp. 59-71.\footnote{648} ‘Un autre arbrisseau de corail, dont une partie est dépouillée de son écorce, & l’autre la conserve. Il est sur un pied de laque doré. Hauteur 9 pouces, sur 8 de largeur.’ Rémy, Catalogue raisonné…..le cabinet de feu M. Boucher, lot 1460, p. 20.\footnote{649} Laque doré was a cheaper alternative to the more costly gilt bronze and gold ormolu mounts.
mounted coral. Although it is possible that like Blondel d’Azincourt, he placed it on one of his sixteen mirrored shell tables. Alternatively, Boucher may have chosen to store it next to the collection of unmounted corals that he kept behind glass in the wall cabinet that ran down the left hand side of the studio.

While Boucher’s piece of mounted coral was not incongruous with his wider collection of art and nature, its presence denotes the artist’s interest in owning an object that would have been considered by his contemporaries as an *objet de luxe*. Examples of mounted corals can be found in both aristocratic and royal collections, as evidenced by the branch of white coral sold to Queen Maria Leszczyńska (1703-1768) in November 1749 by the mercer Duvaux for fifty-five *livres*. As his sale journal reveals, Duvaux had arranged for the queen’s coral to be elaborately mounted on a terrace platform base made of ormolu and finely chiselled gilt bronze. Another decorative use for coral was the candelabra. Boucher, for example, artfully displayed his collection of natural and artificial curiosities ‘beneath a carved wood candelabra’, possibly in the form of a low hung chandelier. When lit at night, visitors to the studio could have been forgiven for thinking that the haunting glow emanating from the stony arms of the artist’s coral candelabra was in fact an artful imitation of the formal effect achieved by more traditional metal versions.

*The art of nature*

Boucher’s candelabra, along with his aventurine shell and mounted coral collection, are examples of how real shells, corals and minerals were being transformed during this period into more artful presentations of nature. Arguably the

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651 Idem.
652 Goncourt, *French Eighteenth-Century Painters*, p. 89. Other examples of the coral candelabra can be found in the collection belonging to the duc de Bourbon at Chantilly. The duc’s candelabra is mentioned in Smentek, *Rococo Exotic*, p. 38 (note 119).
most spectacular example that exists today is in the form of a gilt mounted shell from 1740 (plate 52). Using the natural scroll of a polished green turban shell to simulate a porcellaneous effect, the shimmering texture of the shell’s surface could easily be mistaken for a mounted hard paste porcelain shell, or similarly, the naturally glossy exterior of a real *Porcelaine* shell. 653 According to d’Argenville: ‘Assisting nature and making her appear in full glory is the principal goal to which everyone should try to aspire’. 654 Yet in order achieve this, the turban shell had to be first stripped of its outer layer (also known as a *drap marin*) and then gently cleaned and polished until a nacreous sheen began to take hold (plate 53). 655

For some naturalists like Lamarck, this type of treatment was a form of ‘mutilation’. 656 However, for amateur collectors and connoisseurs, it was a necessary sacrifice in order to experience nature at her intended best. As d’Argenville claimed:

> Although several Naturalists wish to have all Shells as they come from the sea, in other words, covered with mud and in a rough condition, one cannot completely agree with them. How much one loses in beauty and variety in the colours and species, if one decides not to clean and uncover Shells, even polish them on a wheel; a Shell is like a rough Diamond which one cannot

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653 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
654 ‘Aider la nature, & la faire paraître dans tout son éclat, est le but principal où chacun doit tâcher d’aspirer.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), p. 185. Gersaint also viewed the existence of the *drap marin* as an unfortunate condition of its marine environment. He argued that its removal was essential to the study and collection of shells, as it allowed collectors to see shells as nature had originally intended. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné de coquilles*, pp. 22-23.
enjoy until it is uncovered, cut and polished; it is by that means that one
acquires new species, and so to speak, a second Shell.657

For d’Argenville, the removal of the *drap marin* was the first step in a rigorous
process that involved cleaning shells with alcohol and other materials, followed by
polishing (preferably on a wheel), and finally painting with egg-whites to ensure they
retained their maximum shine.658 Such practices, argued Gersaint, not only improved
the naturalness of nature, but also allowed a shell’s true character to ‘develop more
fully’.659

Not all efforts to improve shells were considered acceptable. Writing in the
1742 edition of *La Conchyliologie*, d’Argenville criticised the Dutch ‘habit’ of
painting shells in different colours and engraving them with ‘historical subjects… and
a thousand other figures which Nature had not thought fit to give them’.660 This, he
argued, ‘reduced their merit’ and ‘impoverished, so to speak, the subject in attempting
to make it unique’.661 While the reference to shells as ‘the subject’ reinforced the
aesthetic value of these objects and their role in modern connoisseurship, for
d’Argenville a profound disjuncture existed between these artful objects of nature and
the type of artful conceit practised by the Dutch. In the end, such concerns were
reconciled by prioritising nature as the definitive artisan and the true source of all

657 ‘Quoique plusieurs Naturalistes veuillent avoir toutes les Coquilles, telles qu’elles sortent de la mer,
c’est-à-dire, couvertes de leur sange & dans tout leur brut, on ne peut adhérer entièrement à leur avis.
Combien perdroit-on de beautés & de variétés dans les couleurs & dans les espèces, si l’on ne se
déterminoit à neterier les Coquilles & à les découvrir, jusqu’à même les user sur la roué, une Coquille
est comme un Diamant brut, dont on ne jouit que quand il est découvert, qu’il est taillé & poli, c’est par
ce moien qu’on acquiert de nouvelles espèces, & pour ainsi dire de secondes Coquilles.’ Dezallier
d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), pp. 185-186.
658 D'Argenville outlined his method for cleaning shells in Dezallier d'Argenville, *Conchyliologie
nouvelle et portative*, p. 86.
659 ‘Quand on se contente de la netoïer simplement avec ménagement, pour y mettre ensuite une eau de
gomme légère, ou la polir sans en alterer les couleurs loin d'en changer la Nature, on la développe
660 ‘Les Hollandois habiles à travailler les Coquilles……Ceux qui sont graver & cizeler des sujets
d'Histoire sur les Nautilles & sur les Burgau, en diminuent beaucoup le mérite. On y forme des bandes,
des cercles , des étoiles en relief & mille autres figures que la Nature n'avoit point jugé à propos de leur
661 ‘ils apauvrissent, pour ainsi dire, le sujet pour vouloir le singulariser.’ Ibid., p. 190.
beauty and knowledge. For no matter how pleasing a work of art was, argued d’Argenville, it could never ‘efface’ the ‘works of nature’. After all, concluded the Baron d’Holbach in *System of Nature* (1770), ‘art is nothing but Nature acting with the tools she has furnished’.

D’Argenville and the Baron d’Holbach’s comments go some way in explaining the curious absence of mounted real *Porcelaine* shells from eighteenth-century collections. With the exception of a few snuffboxes that appear towards the end of the century, *Porcelaine* shells remained part of the amateur collector’s natural history collection where it is was their role, according to Gersaint, ‘to inspire lofty ideas….. in architects, sculptors and even in painters.’ For Gersaint and others, the ‘limitless’ and sometimes ‘bizarre’ character of shells like the *Porcelaine*, presented the artist with a ‘symmetry so precise that even the most refined art can not attain it’. Thus, for eighteenth-century collectors and artists, the natural artifice of *Porcelaine* shells was more than just a symbol of nature’s enduring perfection. It was point of reference to which all other natural and humanly wrought shells should aspire.

This was most certainly the case when the wealthy Peruvian naturalist Pedro Francisco Dávila (c.1713-1785) purchased two bouquets of flowers made entirely from nacreous shells such as the mother of pearl variety. Dávila had moved to Paris

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662 ‘les ouvrages de la Nature; infiniment au-dessus de l’art, ils doivent effacer tous les autres.’ Ibid., p. 192.
665 ‘Il y a dans cette suite, des accidenst singuliers, dans lesquels la Nature paroit de jouer tantôt par une bizarrerie outré et sans bornes, tantôt par une simetrie si juste et si precise, que l’Art le plus rafiné ne pourroit y atteindre.’ *Mercure de France* Nov. 1735, p. 2461.
in 1745 with the aim of starting a natural history collection. In addition to this, he was also interested in decorative objects that explored the boundaries between the artful and the natural. According to Dávila, the shells used to create the bouquets were ‘arranged and painted with such art that it is difficult to recognise’ them as having once come from the sea. Each shell bouquet was regarded by Dávila as a ‘masterpiece of patience and of craftsmanship’, testing not only the creativity of artistic invention, but also the natural artifice of nature.

For Boucher, the ability to blur the distinction between the artful and the natural provided a unifying aspect to his collection, as it highlighted the fluidity between the study of nature and the productions of art, both of which he was well known for. It also encouraged visitors to his studio to think aesthetically about nature, while at the same time emphasising, particularly in the case of porcelain, the scientific elements in manufacturing fine and decorative objects. If Boucher’s collection of porcelain signified the seemingly mystical transformation from soft (raw) kaolin powder to hard paste (cooked) porcelain, then just as apparent was his natural shell collection, which if the Goncourts are to be believed was ‘arranged like sets of gems in Boule showcases’. Thus, for those that came into contact with Boucher’s collection, the juxtaposition of these objects was more than just a random collision of the artificial and the natural. Rather, it can be understood as a meditation on the already fertile relationship between art and nature that was taking place in his studio.

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667 For a brief introduction to Dávila and his natural history collection, see Dance, Shell Collecting, pp. 86-87.
669 Writing about one of the two bouquets, Davilla noted: ‘Cet ouvrage, qui peut être regardé comme un chef-d’œuvre de patience & d’industrie.’ Idem.
670 Goncourt, French Eighteenth-Century Painters, p. 89.
Such efforts prompt a revision of d’Argenville’s discussion of Boucher’s shell collection for his 1767 pocketbook guide to conchology, where the artist was listed for the first time as one of Europe’s leading amateur collectors. D’Argenville’s description is significant in that it gives some indication as to how the collection was organised. Yet when reviewed in the context of Boucher’s wider collection of decorative shells and other artificial marine curios, d’Argenville’s comments reveal a more sophisticated nuance. By suggesting that Boucher ‘possessed a cabinet so agreeable and instructive……that it rivals nature herself’, d’Argenville called attention to Boucher’s ability to combine his prolific talents as an artist with that of a skilled amateur collector.

Embedded in d’Argenville’s comments lies an all-important clue to how Boucher as an artist-turned-collector was understood by his contemporaries. Whether it was arranging real shells together with those in ceramic, or mixing porcelain branches with marine corals mounted in gilt, the artist’s thoughtful approach to his collection implies a total reordering of art and nature, one that was seen as a quality unique to Boucher. Writing about the arrangement of Boucher’s natural history collection, Rémy argued that ‘one recognises the picturesque style (le goût pittoresque) and graces of M. Boucher, a taste that few people can claim’. As Rémy’s statement implies, Boucher’s talents at mediating the fluid relationship

671 Dezallier d’Argenville, *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative*, pp. 312-313.
672 On d’Argenville’s description of Boucher’s collection for the 1767 guide, see chapter four of this thesis.
673 ‘Premier peintre du Roi, au vieux Louvre. Cet émule d’Albane, dont le pinceau guide par les Graces n’offre que des images riantes, possède un cabinet curieux, aussi agreeable qu’instructif. Ce Peintre ingénieux à place ses Coquilles sur des tables couvertes de glace; elles présentent aux yeux du spectateur un parterre émaillé qui semble le disputer à la nature.’ Dezallier d’Argenville, *Conchyliologie nouvelle et portative*, pp. 312-313.
674 ‘Ajoutez à cela l’arrangement du Cabinet où l’on reconnaisoit le goût pittoresque & plein de graces de M. Boucher, goût auquel peu de gens peuvent prétendre.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné…le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, Avant-propos (no page numbers).
between art and nature in his studio remained unchallenged by any other artist or collector of his generation.

The subtleties of such nuances are detected in a number of other comments that appear in the wake of the artist’s death in 1770. For example, in his eulogy on Boucher, published in the Mercure de France that same year, Desboulmiers (1731-1771) noted that ‘this celebrated painter’ who ‘had a penchant for gaiety….. and a love of letters’, possessed a ‘cabinet of curiosity in almost all genres, which he had formed at great expense and which is indisputably one of the most interesting in Europe for its variety, and also for capturing his taste (son goût) and knowledge’. In this context, Desboulmiers’s reference to ‘son goût’ confirms that Boucher was remembered by his peers as having demonstrated a broader aesthetic strategy, one that encompassed all aspects of his life. For regardless of whether he was arranging his collection, producing works of art, working on theatre sets, or painting Easter eggs at the king’s behest, Boucher was perceived as having had a sense of taste that was inherent within the artist’s many and varied activities.

It is this same sense of taste that Rémy referred to his discussion of works ‘dans le goût de Boucher’ for the Blondel de Gagny sale catalogue in 1777. Rémy’s comments follow those of Desboulmiers in that he sums up the holistic vision with which his contemporaries viewed this artist-turned-collector of one of the period’s most impressive displays of art and nature. For Rémy, Desboulmiers and others,

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675 The complexities surrounding Boucher scholarship is outlined in the introduction.
676 ‘La mémoire de ce peintre célèbre…du penchant à la gaité…il aimerait les lettres….le cabinet de curiosité de Presque tous les genres qu’il a formé a grand frais, & qui sans contredit est un des plus intéressans de l’Europe par sa variété, atelle également son goût & ses connaissances.’ Desboulmiers, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi et directeur de l’Académie royale de peinture & sculpture, mort le 30 mai 1770’, pp. 188-189.
677 Activities that took place outside of Boucher’s painted oeuvre are discussed in Hyde and Ledbury, Rethinking Boucher, passim. The Easter eggs are mentioned in Hyde, Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics, p. 2.
678 See this chapter (note 539).
Boucher’s arrangements of both real collected objects of art and nature, together with those represented in painted or print form, were part of a unified aesthetic, one that reveals a richer and more cohesive portrait of an artist and collector that modern scholars are only now beginning to fully understand.
Conclusion

Inspired by Venus: Boucher’s Studio at the Louvre

Boucher’s move to the Louvre in 1752 represents a significant moment in the development of his career as an artist and collector. Not only did the apartment offer he and his family a place to live and a spacious studio in which to work, but for the first time, Boucher had the room he required to display his growing collection of art and nature. Over 5,000 objects formed his natural history collection, around half of which were made up by shells, corals, and other marine plant life. Placed on mirrored tables or in wall cabinets behind glass, Boucher’s collection of nature (and similarly those objects that imitated it) articulated his taste for collecting and his passion for artistic display. For those who came into contact with Boucher’s collection at the Louvre, there was little doubt that his reputation as a celebrated artist and collector was firmly intertwined.

For the art historian, this raises questions as to the extent to which these objects influenced Boucher’s artistic production in the last two decades of his life. During these years, Boucher spent most of his time in his studio at the Louvre. He typically worked a twelve-hour day, with Mannlich reporting that he left only to attend to official business and to satisfy his taste for collecting.679 As the abbé de Fontenay (1737-1806) wrote in 1776, Boucher’s ‘imagination was always active and the love

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for his art did not allow him to lose a single day for his glory’.  

While this goes some way in explaining the artist’s prolific output of paintings and drawings, it is clear that Boucher’s efforts in the studio were not limited to the demands of his patrons. Whether he was producing works of art, arranging his collection, mentoring students or entertaining fellow collectors, the time served in the studio was inclusive of a broader range of activities.

The close proximity shared by these varied interests is captured in the numerous described responses to Boucher’s collection. Together, they emphasise the studio as a shared space, one that facilitated his career as an artist and indulged his passion for collecting. The activities of the studio were further served by the congenial atmosphere that was promoted by the artist. As Antoine Bret noted in his eulogy, Boucher’s studio was seen as a place were young aspiring artists and likeminded collectors could drop by at a moment’s notice. This sentiment was echoed by Rémy, who argued that the only thing more seductive than Boucher’s collection at the Louvre was the ‘honnêteté, innate politeness, affability, fine wit, and cheerfulness of its owner’. In the end, Boucher spent his final moments in his studio, dying

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681 The number of paintings and drawings produced by Boucher during his career as an artist is mentioned in Desboulmières, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi et directeur de l’Académie royale de peinture & sculpture, mort le 30 mai 1770’, p. 184.

682 ‘Ami de la jeunesse, puisqu’il l’était du plaisir, il en était souvent entouré; & comme il n’avait, dans sa maniere de peindre, aucune de ces incertitudes, aucun de ces mysteres qui rendent quelques atelier inaccessibles, ses heures de travail etaient des leçons utiles pour tous ceux qu’il jugeait dignes d’en profiter.’ Bret, ‘Éloge de M. Boucher, premier peintre du roi’, pp. 47-70.

683 ‘Tout ce que nous pourrions dire pour faire l’éloge de ce cabinet seroit au-dessous de l’impression qu’ont dû ressentir tous ceux qui l’ont vu. Qand on en sortoit, les expressions manquoient pour témoigner son admiration: mais ce qui séduisoit toujours le plus, étoient l’honnêteté, la politesse naturelle, l’affabilité, la finesse d’esprit & la gaieté du propriétaire.’ Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, ‘Avant-propos’ (no page numbers).
peacefully in the early hours of May 30 1770, surrounded by the instruments of art making and by the objects that he had spent his life pursuing. While Boucher did not depict his studio at the Louvre, a later drawing entitled *The Artist Inspired by Venus* (plate 54), can be interpreted in light of what is known about the space and how it was used. There are significant parallels between Boucher’s picturing of artistic inspiration and the studio that inspired his productivity as an artist during the last decades of his life. Dated to the 1760s, when Boucher was in his late fifties or sixties, it depicts a young artist sketching in his studio in the company of Venus, who appears in the form of an ethereal vision. Floating above the artist, Venus and several winged cupids occupy the majority of the available space in the studio, which is suggested by the multiple sketchbooks and tools of the artist’s trade scattered across the floor. These objects, however, are not clearly defined as the free nature of sketch gives way to the dream-like atmosphere of the scene.

Even so, the studio setting is punctuated with deliberate framing elements formed by the central figures of the artist and Venus, as well as through the allusions to classical architecture that surround them. A distinctive sense of space, for example, is articulated by the Doric column and wall panelling that leads to a dome-shaped roof on the left. These architectural inclusions are balanced by the figure of Minerva, the goddess connected with artistic invention. In a departure from the other more loosely formed figures represented in the drawing, Minerva appears as a statue attached to a pediment on the far right of the composition. Together, architecture and

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684 The idea that Boucher died alone in his studio seems to have originated from Restout’s eulogy on the artist. See Jean-Bernard Restout and Jean-Thomas Hérissant, eds., *Galerie française ou Portraits des hommes et des femmes célèbres qui ont paru en France*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: Hérissant le fils, 1771), entry no. 24, pp. 1-6 (my page numbers).

685 As the goddess of wisdom, war and the crafts, Minerva is identified by her crested helmet, shield and spear. She is also associated with the progress of the arts, sciences and industry—offering assistance to those who required tools for production.
sculpture act as a partial frame that works to contain the artist’s vision, an effect that compounds the intimacy of the drawing and directs attention towards Venus, who as the subject of the artist’s sketch, serves as the embodiment of artistic inspiration.

The *Artist Inspired by Venus* was interpreted in the eighteenth century as an allegorical reference to Boucher and his artistic processes in his studio at the Louvre. A description of a lost grisaille oil sketch by the same name appeared in the posthumous sale catalogue of Boucher’s friend and patron Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul. According to the sale’s organiser, Nicolas-François-Jacques Boileau (b.1720), *The Artist Inspired by Venus* is: ‘An ingenious sketch in which M. Boucher represented himself drawing in his studio, visited or inspired by Venus and the Loves’. The interpretive reliability of Boileau’s claim is supported by the close relationship Boucher forged with his patron during the last decade of the artist’s life. As Boileau noted: ‘The Studio of the Painter was the Museum of the Amateur, and it was there that M. de Sireul would spend hours on end, watching the canvas spring to life under the happy touch of the Artist’. Indeed, the oil sketch of *The Artist Inspired by Venus* and its companion drawing were among the 200 or so paintings and drawings by Boucher listed in Sireul’s estate, with some like the

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687 Boileau’s comments on the drawing, along with the information about the two different versions of *The Artist Inspired by Venus* is discussed in Melissa Hyde, ‘Getting into the Picture: Boucher's Self-Portraits of Others’, p. 21 and p. 36 (note 34). On Boileau as a dealer, see Patrick Michel, *Le commerce du tableau à Paris dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle: acteurs et pratiques* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Univ. Septentrion, 2007), passim.

Portrait of Jean-Claude Gaspard de Sireul from 1761 (private collection), having been acquired in the form of a gift from the artist.\footnote{Alastair Laing, The Drawings of François Boucher, p. 174 (no 65).}

This was not the first time Boucher had chosen to refer to himself and his working practices allegorically through the figure of a young artist. In The Landscape Painter from c.1732 (plate 55), Boucher presented a youthful looking artist working on a picture in a comparatively more modest studio. Facing away from the window on the left, the artist’s focus is directed towards his sketchbook, elements of which he recreates through the medium of paint. The age and possible likeness of the artist to Boucher, together with the identification of the painting on the easel as Boucher’s Le berge napolitain (known only through engraving by Jean Daullé from 1758), has led at least one scholar to argue that The Landscape Painter is a self-portrait.\footnote{Regina Shoolman Slatkin has suggested that The Landscape Painter (like The Luncheon) functions as a self-portrait. Regina Shoolman Slatkin, 'Portraits of François Boucher', pp. 280-291. On Slatkin’s idea of The Luncheon as a possible self-portrait, see chapter one of this thesis.} More recently, however, these claims have been dismissed in favour of an interpretation of the work as a self-conscious presentation of Boucher’s emerging identity as an artist and, perhaps more importantly, as a statement about the nature of artifice and the role of imagination in his creative processes.\footnote{In the Metropolitan Museum’s catalogue from 1986, Alastair Laing warned against identifying The Landscape Painter as a self-portrait, noting that Boucher was at least thirty when he painted it and therefore much older than the artist that is portrayed in the work. See Laing, Marandel and Rosenberg François Boucher, 1703-1770, pp. 149-150 (no. 22). More recently, the issue of Boucher as a self-portraitist has been taken up by Melissa Hyde. As Hyde has argued, if The Landscape Painter refers to Boucher, then it does so in such a way that obfuscates any physical likeness to the artist and instead calls attention to his artistic practices as means of asserting a kind of ‘pictorial signature’. See Hyde, ‘Getting into the Picture: Boucher's Self-Portraits of Others’, p. 17.}

Executed more than thirty years apart, The Landscape Painter and The Artist Inspired by Venus both represent an allegory of Boucher in the studio; yet, they do so at completely different points in his career. The Landscape Painter was painted shortly after Boucher returned from Italy, when the artist still had to rely on
commissions for prints. By comparison, *The Artist Inspired by Venus* was produced at a time when Boucher had established himself as one of the leading painters and amateur collectors of his generation. The last decade of Boucher’s life represents some of his most successful and productive years as a painter within the Academy and at court. This prosperity gave Boucher further opportunity to grow his collection of art and nature, selecting only, according to Rémy, those objects that pleased him visually and stimulated his already fertile imagination.

When viewed in this context, the figure of Venus in *The Artist Inspired* can be understood as a highly conceptualised form of inspiration, one that calls attention to Boucher’s collection as a source of artistic invention. As the goddess of love, Venus is emblematic of Boucher’s passion for collecting. She signifies the pleasure the artist derived from his collection, evidence for which is suggested by the large amount of time and money he dedicated to the process. In *The Artist Inspired*, however, this sense of pleasure is presented as a game of seduction, one in which the young artist freely submits to Venus, the source of his joy. The coquettishness of Venus’s pose is conveyed by the contortion of her body and head, which simultaneously offers and rejects any advances that the young artist might make. At the same time, the direction of her leg and gaze leaves little doubt of the focus of her attention. The force of this pose is matched equally by the willingness of the artist whose submissive stance and thoughtful expression give the impression of an artist engaged in the moment of creation.

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692 This culminated with Boucher’s appointment as premier peintre du roi in 1765.
Boucher explored the relationship between the male artist and Venus in a number of other works from this period. For example, the besotted artist in *The Artist Inspired* is interchanged with the figure of Vulcan who is seduced by Venus in order to make arms for Aeneas in *Venus at Vulcan’s Forge* from 1769 (plate 56). Boucher adapted this pictorial convention to demonstrate bonds of love and desire between Aurora, the goddess of dawn, and her sleeping lover in *Aurora and Cephalus* (plate 57), also from 1769. The fluid nature of this transfer reveals the extent to which Boucher was persuaded by the power of Venus as a metaphor for the passion that inspired artistic creativity and production.

For Boucher, the figure of Venus provided a visual and conceptual bridge between his collection and his art making. In particular, his assemblage of shells, corals and other marine plant life, which had a broader association with the realm of Venus. As the 1771 catalogue reveals, Boucher was an enthusiastic collector of the *Concha veneris*, the same shell that delivered the goddess of love to her mythological birthplace on the island of Cythera. Boucher’s collection of more than 150 clam shells, including the prized *Coeur de Vénus*, formed part of the artist’s display at the Louvre. Thus, it is tempting to think that Boucher’s interest in the figure of Venus not only provided the motivation for their acquisition, but also played a role in his own treatment of the subject.

In fact, Boucher’s collection of *Concha veneris* shells may have been the inspiration for the decorative metal dish that appears in his *Toilette of Venus* from

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695 In pre-Linnaean terms, the *Concha veneris* belonged to a group of bivalves known as *Coeurs* and *Cames*. These shells are discussed in the 1742 edition of Dezallier d'Argenville, *La Conchyliologie* (1742), pp. 324-325 and p. 335 (plate 24) and pp. 334-336 (plate 26). For Boucher’s collection of *Coeurs* and *Cames*, see Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lots 1755-1775, pp 242-244. (In particular, lots 1762-1763, p. 243 and lot 1775, p. 244.)
1751 (plate 58). Pictured in the foreground on the left of the composition, the shell-shaped dish bears the similar fluted markings and undulating contours of the *Concha veneris*. It was not unusual for Boucher to embellish objects from his own collection. As his former student Mannlich explained, Boucher regularly,

> positioned himself in front of his easel, where he would paint the smallest accessories found in nature: something which, neither I, nor my friend Ménageot nor any other amateur however enlightened would have been able to know had we not seen it everyday.

While Mannlich confirms that Boucher’s collection of nature was as much apart of his artistic training as it was an outlet for his interest in natural history, his comments also draw attention to the continuing role of imagination in the artist’s creations. In Boucher’s hands, shells like the *Concha veneris* take on more playful and exaggerated shapes, becoming, in effect, a self-conscious re-presentation of their natural counterparts.

This is especially true of Boucher’s treatment of the conch shells used by the various tritons that appear repeatedly in his marine mythologies from the 1740s and 50s. For example, in *Triumph of Venus* from 1740 (plate 4), these shells are twisted, bent and macerated to form new shapes that test the boundaries of their natural sibilant curves. Reordering nature provided Boucher with the opportunity to improve existing natural shapes, or in some cases, to invent entirely new forms of

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696 Boucher painted several different versions of this theme. For a discussion of these works, see Georges Brunel, *Boucher*, pp. 228 & 233.
698 It also adds weight to the suggestion by Beverley Schreiber-Jacoby that a currently unattributed drawing featuring shells and marine plant life (private collection) may have been the work of Boucher. The drawing’s attribution, however, remains a problem. For as Schreiber-Jacoby has rightly pointed out, the level of draftsmanship does not display Boucher’s usual artistic virtuosity. Thus, if the sheet is connected to Boucher’s studio, then was most likely used as a training device for his students. See Beverly Schreiber-Jacoby and Konrad Oberhuber eds., *French Drawings from a Private Collection: Louis XIII to Louis XVI* (Cambridge MA: Fogg Art Museum, 1980), p. 109.
representation such as the metal shell dish in *The Toilette of Venus* and the shell-shaped sled that appears in *Winter* from 1755 (plate 36).

The *Concha veneris* and *Coeur de Vénus* were not the only items in Boucher’s natural history collection capable of conjuring up a vision of Venus. The 1771 catalogue discloses that the artist owned approximately forty pearls of both the round freshwater type, as well as the irregularly formed baroque variety.\(^{699}\) As symbols of love and fertility, pearls have long been associated with the kingdom of Venus. Accordingly, they appear in a number of the artist’s mythological works, including *The Toilette of Venus* (1751) where, like the shell-shaped metal dish, they engage with the agency of Venus as an emblem of feminine beauty.\(^{700}\)

As a metaphor for Boucher’s collection, both as an assembly of physical objects and as a source of artistic invention, the figure of Venus in *The Artist Inspired* offers a new way of looking at the activities that took place within Boucher’s studio and of what Boucher, as artist and collector, imagined his inspiration to be. Indeed, the drawing goes some way in explaining the relationship between his collection of natural history and his art making during the years he occupied his studio at the Louvre. It also emphasises the need to look more closely and consider the parallels between the two. The purpose of such an exercise is not to see where these objects

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\(^{699}\) Rémy, *Catalogue raisonné.....le cabinet de feu M. Boucher*, lot 1791, pp. 246-247.

materialise in Boucher’s oeuvre, but rather how they are incorporated into his artistic practices.

This is no more evident than with his collection of shells, corals and other marine plant life, which as symbols associated with the realm of Venus are embedded in the stylistic vocabulary of Boucher’s mythologies. To what extent they represent the wider transfer between Boucher’s collection and his artistic production during his years at the Louvre lies beyond the scope of this study. Bringing attention to his collection, however, opens the way for further investigation into the role these objects played in the creation of Boucher’s artistic identity and his contribution to the visual and material culture of eighteenth-century France.
List of Contributors to the 1742 edition of La Conchyliologie

Appendix 1.\textsuperscript{701}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SHELLS</th>
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<td>Lepas ou Patelle</td>
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<td>Univalve</td>
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\textsuperscript{701} Names and titles are recorded as they appear in the 1742 edition of \textit{La Conchyliologie}.
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Plate 3
Plate 4
La jonction de l'Océan et de la Méditerranée.

Plate 6
Plate 11
Plate 13
CATALOGUE

D'UNE COLLECTION
considérable de Curiosités de différents genres, dont la Vente doit commencer le Lundi 2 Décembre 1737,
daux heures après midi, chez
GERSAIN Marchand Pont Notre-Dame.

Les Curiosités consistent en un très-grand nombre d'Estatpes d'après les plus grands Maitres, des mieux conditionnées; des Dessins; une grande quantité de Coquillages rares; des M baudores & autres Plantes marines; des Animaux dans des phials; des Minéraux: des Papillons étrangers; des trés-belles Pierres arborisées; des Pagnes de diverses formes, & autres Ouvrages vasés de Porcelaine; des Tasses & Boïtes d'anciennes Verris, quelques Pierres antiques, montées & non montées; des Figures en cire très-finies, & autres Curiosités & productions de la Nature & de l'Art.

Ce Catalogue se vend

A PARIS,
Chez Prault fils, Quay de Conty, vis-à-vis la décente du Pont-neuf, à la Charité.

MDCCXXXVII.

On y trouve aussi le Catalogue de la Pente de 1736.
CATALOGUE
RAISONNE

D'UNE COLLECTION
considerable de diverses Curiosités
en tous genres, contenues dans
les Cabinets de feu Monsieur
BONNIER DE LA MOSSON,
Bailly & Capitaine des Chasses de
la Varenne des Thuilleries &
ançien Colonel du Régiment
Dauphin.

Par E. F. GERSAINT.

A PARIS,

Chez

JAQUES BAROIS, Quay des Augustins, à la
Ville de Nevers.

ET

PIERRE-GUILLAUME SIMON, Imprimeur du
Parlement, au bas de la rue de la Harpe,
à l'Hercule.

M. DCC. XLIV.

Avec Approbation & Privilege.

Plate 21
Plate 23
Plate 25
Plate 27
Plate 28
Nautilus

aux dépens de M. Bonnier de Lamosson.

Plate 29
Plate 30
CATALOGUE
RAISONNE'
DES CURIOSITÉS
Qui composoient le Cabinet de
feu MME DUBOIS-JOURDAIN.
PAR PIERRE REMY.

A PARIS.
Chez Dijon, l'Imprimeur Libraire & Imprimeur,
rue Pavée, la première Porte cocherie en en-
trant par le Quai des Augiflans.
M. DCC. LXVI.

Plate 31
Plate 39
Plate 43
Plate 49
Plate 52
Plate 55