

Seventh Annual Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture

“Beguiling Deception”: Allegorical Portraiture in Early 18th-Century France

Dr. Kathleen Nicholson

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Heather MacDonald: Good evening. I'm Heather MacDonald, The Lillian and James H. Clark Associate Curator of European Art and I'm so pleased to welcome you here this evening for the seventh annual Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture on 18th-century French art. This lecture series began in 2004 when, subsequent to the untimely passing of collector and philanthropist Michael Rosenberg, the foundation he had established made the decision to place the important works of art from his personal collection at the Dallas Museum of Art. And here they have been displayed together with the museum's own collection of 18th-century art.

The galleries that are now named for Michael Rosenberg have been immeasurably enriched by the high quality of these loans and by the lively juxtapositions they have enabled between many works of art. Michael's generosity and the continuing generosity of his foundation have really allowed his passion as an art collector, as a music lover, and as a community leader to continue. Part of this continuation over the past six years has been the support of the Michael L. Rosenberg Lecture series. Since 2004, we've been pleased to welcome a series of important art historians and curators including such distinguished scholars as Edgar Munhall, the late Philip Conisbee, Alistair Lang and Aileen Ribeiro to name just a few.

Tonight we extend that tradition with a brand new lecture by our guest speaker, Dr. Kathleen Nicholson. Dr. Nicholson is a professor of Art History at the University of Oregon where she teaches the art of Europe in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Her research has been particularly focused on British and French art including books and articles on an artist that we know well in Dallas, J.M.W Turner, an early research interest for Dr. Nicholson that she's returned to recently via her contributions to the important exhibition, *Turner and the Masters*, which has been on view in London, Paris, and Madrid in the past year.

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She's also written about fashion and celebrity and innuendo in late 17th-century Europe, fascinating topics. And the topic on which she'll be speaking tonight, portraiture in the late 17th and early 18th century in France. Dr. Nicholson has been for several years investigating a particular kind of portrait, the allegorical portrait, a kind of fancy dress depiction of aristocratic sitters that was enormously fashionable in the early 18th century. Since a beautiful example of this kind of portrait is one of the jewels of the Rosenberg Collection, we couldn't resist taking the opportunity to bring Kate to Dallas to share her unique knowledge with us in a lecture that is intriguingly titled "Beguiling Deception: Allegorical Portraiture in Early 18th-century France."

Please join me in welcoming to the podium Dr. Kathleen Nicholson.

[Applause]

Kathleen Nicholson: [I want you to look at the] initial introductory image while I thank you for the wonderful opportunity of spending this evening with you, and also the opportunity to present the seventh annual Michael L. Rosenberg lecture. I'm really honored to be part of such a stellar list of invitees. I also want to thank you for the opportunity to spend quality time in the Museum's newly installed European galleries. My compliments to the curators and staff for such insightful installation. I have especially appreciated the thoughtfulness and attention of both Heather MacDonald, associate curator, and Lisa Kays whom has made this trip absolutely effortless.

It's a distinct pleasure to speak with you tonight about my favorite topic, allegorical portraiture of women in 18th-century France.

[00:04:00]

But if I may, I would like first to compliment you on something quite different, a compliment I've paid in print to the Turner Society in its annual publication, so I thought I should share those remarks with you. The presentation of the Turner exhibition here in 2008 was truly inspired. The way the paintings were hung, the way the galleries were organized brought the complex career of Turner into crystalline focus. I really thought I was seeing the artist whole for almost the first time. And all of that was lost in the Metropolitan's presentation, so bravo because you did a great job, and what a splendid exhibition it was. That's the only

other time I've been in Dallas and it was in the galleries five hours at a time. And it was wonderful to see the Turner upstairs as well.

And bravo, also, for having in your possession so delightful and important a painting as Largillière's portrait of the Comtesse de Montsoreau and her sister [full title is *Portrait of the Comtesse de Montsoreau and Sister as Diana and an Attendant*]. I've so much enjoyed organizing my larger research around it for this evening's presentation. And what I'm going to do is start with the briefest remarks about where the painting fits in the history of French portraiture, then explore the nature of allegory and allegorical portraiture both in general and in the part it plays in Largillière's career. Finally, we'll take a look into the ways an allegorical portrait like the Rosenberg Largillière came into being.

Most of my images this evening will actually be representations of women, but I would like to set the stage with this comparison for the insights it provides into the critical shift that occurred in portraiture in France from the later 17th century to the mid-18th century. In his classic formal state portrait, the Sun King Louis XIV appears in all his regal magnificence, the very picture of an absolute monarch who ruled over France from the impressive palace he had constructed at Versailles.

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Towards the end of his reign, the highly organized social order Louis had imposed began to loosen and with his death in 1714, the aristocrats who had served him at Versailles removed to Paris where they built luxurious private residences in which they could begin to exercise control over their own lives. By mid-century, the process had extended outward into society, a process articulated by Enlightenment thinkers like Denis Diderot who we see on the right. The distance could not be greater between the hieratic image of the king and the informal approachable portrait of the philosopher and novelist comfortable with his own sparse hair and worn clothes.

Diderot's portrait celebrates the Enlightenment idea of individuality of a self that could be independent in spirit, if not yet in full political terms. Along with Voltaire, the novelist Marivaux, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Diderot demonstrated how one's individual talent, intelligence, and wit could triumph over aristocratic birthright and the grip of state-affiliated religion.

Your portrait by Vincent of Pierre Choudard is a continuation of this tendency. While it would take another 40 odd years for the political

ramifications of this shift to be actualized in the French Revolution, its impact could be observed as early as the 1720s. What you see now is an illustration from the 18th-century equivalent of the *New Yorker* magazine. It was called *Le Mercure de France*. It's making the point that under Louis XIV one could easily read the stratification of society in dress and comportment.

The aristocrat's or noble's extravagant wig, the abundant lace trimmings he wears, and the authoritative stance distance him from the more self-effacing slouch of his lackey here who wears similar clothing but without the abundance of lace and shinier buttons.

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By 1726, it was presumably becoming all but impossible to read the social distance between lackey and master by external cues because one's inner qualities would then become key to moving up in society. But as we'll shortly see for women, one's ability to manipulate her public persona offered rather different challenges. We can see a variation of the shift I've just described in Largilliere's portraits.

His 1685 allegorical portrait of an unidentified woman in the guise of Diana, goddess of the hunt, exhibits courtly decorum and ceremony. Indeed in this portrayal, we see the entirely serious side of the goddess. In contrast, by 1714 in the Rosenberg painting the reference to Diana is conveyed with refreshing informality, warmth, and even playfulness coincident with the more relaxed, indeed, libertine social life of aristocrats in Paris.

The comtesse sits comfortably on the ground in casual dress. Indeed, the dogs in each painting are perfect keynotes. In 1685, Diana's hunting hound -- I'm sorry it's dark but the hound is here. If that dog were unleashed, it would tear you apart as it did the hapless young man Actaeon who was caught invading her privacy in myth. By 1714 Diana's dog is an affectionate pet to be caressed by its charming owner, although we should expect some play of meaning on the mythological story here as well. I will return to that question later because before we consider such portraits in more detail and before we puzzle out the very curiosity of the allegorical portrait as category, we need to briefly touch on what allegory is and how it works.

[00:10:11]

Since antiquity, allegory in its literary form has been considered an aspect of rhetoric. In the standard definition it's a figurative mode of representation that uses symbols to tell its story rather than conveying the literal meaning in a straightforward way. Simply put, one thing stands for another often spun out into a narrative. In literature, an allegory in its most general sense is an extended metaphor. Art of course visualizes that transformation or correspondence of one thing to another.

The French painter Simon Vouet received a commission to portray four cardinal virtues as part of the edifying decoration of a royal palace. You would look up and be reminded to be a better person when you saw his paintings. He embodied the dual qualities of mental and physical strength, which was one cardinal virtue, in the figure of the strong, handsome, semi-divine female seated in the clouds. In doing so, he drew upon a pre-existing dictionary, if you will, that codified how to match abstract or physical qualities with visual symbols.

By the end of the 16th century, it had become obvious that for visual symbols to be legible and consistent, they needed to conform to a set formula. That formula was initially provided for artists by an Italian, Cesare Ripa, in his book entitled *Iconologia*. You see now a page from the mid-17th century French edition. Some of the figures came straight from antiquity. Some Ripa had to embellish or even invent. Some were quite logical in their symbolism, others more idiosyncratic. The images were treated in groups and in some editions alphabetically. So on this page, we have concepts like imagination, intelligence, invention and incontinence - - not that kind of incontinence.

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In Vouet's painting of strength, he was also aided by verbal texts that accompanied these images again in various editions. And I want to use one which comes from a really charming early 18th-century English edition from 1707. So if we open that, this is what we would read if we wanted to know how to portray strength, "Strength should appear as a woman in armor, big boned and with plump breasts"--I don't know why-- "harsh hair, sparkling eyes, a spear in her hand, a shield on her arm with a lion. The armor shows strength of body and mind; the spear, superiority; the lion, strength of mind."

The English version stipulates the oak branch that you see in the illustration on the right but that was an attribute for strength that was actually added to the formula by the English. Thus, when we encounter a woman with a sword, a shield, a lion, we will not confuse her with any

other personifications of virtues. For the pantheon of gods and goddesses, artists could either turn to the long tradition of visual representation again from antiquity through the Renaissance or they could go to a literary source like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this case, Vouet represents the goddess Diana with the attributes or symbols that identify her and that allude to one of the key stories about her. She's the goddess of the moon and as such is always identifiable by a small crescent that she usually wears in her hair.

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She's the goddess of the hunt and as such is accompanied in this distilled version by very sleek hounds. They call to mind, without enacting it, the tale of Actaeon and Diana's role as the protector of chastity. As Ovid recounted in the story, Actaeon, out hunting, stumbled upon the chaste Diana while she was at her bath.

In the European collection, you have the later Corot painting of Diana and her nymphs at the bath for example [*The Bath of Diana (Le Bain de Diane)*, c. 1855, 2005.15.FA]. But as punishment for spying on her, Diana transformed him into a stag that was then set upon by his own hunting hounds. The moral couldn't be clearer as the steady outward gaze of Vouet's Diana seems to imply. Transgress against a chaste goddess at your own peril.

I think we can appreciate or begin to appreciate why women might want to call up such an association in their portraits with these examples. At the most superficial level, by introducing the goddesses' attributes, her virtues accrue to the subject or sitter. At the same time, this kind of reference, this kind of dressing up differentiated women not so much from each other but from the real world in which men did in fact have prominence. It accorded them significance, however fictional, that they did not yet possess in daily life.

We can see here the different ways such a reference could be appropriate, different ways that might be nuanced. On the left, Diana's virginal nature fits perfectly with an image of a young innocent girl. And again in this case, note how adoring and gentle the dog is as it rests its head on her knee. In the center, we encounter a young princess before her marriage. Indeed, this might have been the kind of portrait painted expressly to advertise the fact that she was available and to underscore her virtues as a desirable wife and mother.

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Portraits of this type could actually be sent to a prospective king looking for his future bride for prior approval. The attributes of the bow and the hound in this painting are actually relegated to the lower register. And again, because of the darkness of the painting you might not be able to see it, but she just holds the top of a bow so it's just a reference which, if you're inaugurated into the symbolism of Diana, you would recognize. And I think her hound is there. I can't see it from this distance. That's where I remember it having been.

These are just reminders that this Diana, this incarnation of Diana, is less a fearsome hunter and more a hunter of the heart. In the Rosenberg version on the far right, our fetching, charming Diana may either already be a cherished wife or if not yet, she's definitely someone worth flirting with. Such associations or interpretations of course evolved the social mores over time. They were always somewhat fluid and they also change with an artist's development as was the case with Largillière. But more generally these kinds of allegorical references simply permeated France at the time and at the court of Louis XIV.

Louis understood how such illusions could function as part of his overall propaganda or visual program to support his claim to ruling by divine right as an absolute monarch. Having declared himself to be the Sun King, he took every opportunity to associate his person and his rule with Apollo, the god of light and learning. In this extended family portrait, he sits enthroned -- he's actually here -- crowned with Apollo's laurels as god of light and learning.

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And wearing that gold robe, he seems to radiate his own light. Each of his relatives is associated with his or her own mythological persona. Let me just signal the one at the far right here whose hair adornment, the crescent, of course we now recognize as Diana's. The woman in question is Louis' cousin who had the title at court of the Grand Mademoiselle. Appropriate to her assigned allegorical persona, she had indeed remained unmarried, if credited with at least one scandalous affair. But that kind of place, such a reference carried with it a dose of irony to be sure and to be appreciated as well.

I'm using these two images to underscore how entirely saturated an allegorical reference court life at Versailles could be and also in how many different registers it operated. For example, court pastimes like opera and ballet provided an outlet for more capricious willful layered

allegorical illusion. One of Louis XIV's vanities was his talent as a dancer and the fine turn of his leg. We see here a drawing of him in a costume designed for one of the court ballet productions, the Royal Ballet of the Night, in which he triumphs over night at the end by appearing gloriously, certainly, radiating light as the sun.

On the right, and I hope you can see this -- I think you'll be able to -- we're looking at a detail from a print of an infamous masquerade ball of the sort that took place well into the 18th century. At this one in 1745, King Louis XV and his male retinue dressed, improbably as it sounds, as yew trees.

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These strange bulbous things are the yew trees like a mobile planting that came in from the formal gardens of Versailles. So yes, men partook of allegorical association as well. But in general, in the period from 1680 to 1750, they increasingly refrained from having themselves painted as allegorical persona. I think you can appreciate why that would be. As more emphasis was placed on deeds in real life, on valor, on accomplishment, the usefulness of the game of allegorical reference diminished. Since we don't know who the gentleman at the left is, we can't begin to sort out why he might find an association with Bacchus and this particular costume flattering. Most men preferred to show off their accomplishments in station. The gentleman at the right was obviously a military man who in fact rose in rank to become the brigadier general of the king's army.

I also think that the increasing interest in individual faces and in individual character that marks that larger development of French portraiture with which we started made for a very strange and infelicitous hybrid of real man and fictive allusion. I'm using a first brief look at a pair of portraits that we'll come back to to make a simple point that, yes, portraits in this period were gendered, leaving no doubt about the roles of husband and wife within a marriage. Monsieur Gueidan on the left is all business in his robes of office. His wife is decorated with allusions to the goddess of spring, Flora, through all the flowers and the presence of the adoring cupid. And these kinds of pairs were typical. Often, a pairing would be of the husband as a hunter with his hunting gun and the wife as Diana, the huntress with her bow and arrow.

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It is a fact of art historical research into allegorical portraits like this that men of the Ancien Régime and into the 18th century left behind biographical trails, often in detail. Actually from the archives in Aix where the paintings reside, we know exactly what Gaspard de Gueidan did and when and what he thought since he wrote political tracks that survive. Women of the same period including the Montsoreau sisters alas are not retrievable in the same way. They show up in documents only as daughters, wives, occasionally as abbesses when they were able to run convents. Except for the members of the royal family and their immediate circle and except for a rare handful of individual women by virtue of their being authors, most women in such portraits remain either anonymous or just names.

And as I said, that's the case with the woman identified in the Rosenberg portrait. We have the family name Montsoreau but that's all we know. Another sad fact of portrait history is that the identification of subjects or to use the usual term "sitters" as in sitter to the portrait only take one generation before being lost unless there are special circumstances like the Gueidan portraits because they stayed in the family in Aix. This rather amazing early portrait of a princess of royal blood posing in the persona of a Turkish sultana at her bath first appeared with its full title identifying her in 1740. It had been in the family residence, the Chateau at Chantilly, but was loaned back to the artist so he could put it on view in an exhibition.

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The portrait was owned by her brother but once he died the portrait passed into the art market and, again, within one essential generation, she became simply a woman in the guise of sultana. Her name became disconnected from the portrait until about 150 years later. Such fates make the task of matching the nuances of a particular allegory selected for or by the sitter to her life very, very tricky. Unraveling why this princess would expose so much flesh in such an intimate moment and for whom that is the meaning of the allegory employed here is very much detective work but with no clues. I follow them when I can but since that happens so rarely, what I concentrate on is the phenomenon of allegorization itself and how it operates over time.

The allegorical portrait as a type is almost an oxymoron. We expect the portrait to be a record of someone in particular and to be seen in all of his or her specificity. Allegory of course makes an allusion to something or someone else. What results is a strange hybrid. It is even unclear how best to call it. In French, there's more wrestling with that dilemma than in

English. I use almost consistently “allegorical portrait” even if it’s not always 100% appropriate. In French, the alternatives are *portraits déguisés*, in fancy dress, in disguise, but those never quite translate the same way; *portrait historie*, which more generally refers to sitters shown with accoutrements that expand our knowledge about the individual. Perhaps the best solution can be found in the titling as in *Mademoiselle de Clermont en Sultane*. The “en” which is not quite “as” is “in the persona of.” *Mademoiselle de Clermont* as a Sultana never seems to be quite as nuanced.

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It signals the fiction maybe too straightforwardly, as if we’re dealing with an actress. And that is why I tend to use “allegorical portrait” as the default term, because it explicitly references this game of decipherment inherent in the allegory. My title *Beguiling Deception* actually comes from an early 18th-century description of a woman’s allegorical portrait which I take to have meant some form of what you see is not quite what you get or what you get is not quite what you’re seeing. And somewhere in that play is the enjoyment of the portrait type.

There’s one other sticky aspect of such portraits that I’d like to explore with you and that’s the issue of idealization and its role in making allegorical portraiture, portraits more suitable for women than for men in the 18th century. The portrait on the screen is not itself allegorical unless the garland of flowers is meant to underscore the spring-like youthful beauty of the young woman. But it’s an excellent example of earlier 18th-century idealization. The very opposite of the particularizing we can observe in male portraits.

Idealization is a form of generalizing to the standard of beauty that is in place at the time. All the features for 1730 are here: an oval face, arched eyebrows, big dewy eyes, a rosebud mouth, a dimple, and a straight nose. By the end of the 18th century, as part of a larger condemnation of women that began to take place, women were castigated for never having any real substance, for only being this kind of surface, only a layer of make-up, and to Diderot’s thinking, always vainly silly, especially if they decided to spend extra money and have themselves painted allegorically.

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A woman overly invested in her appearance, according to Diderot, diverted men away from their more serious philosophizing. I have two

thoughts about this. The first is if the women's faces in portraits of this time period do seem similar and overly perfect, one reason may well be that in real life, most of them did not escape the ravages of small pox. We have many, many accounts of someone being referred to as beautiful before small pox disfigured her face. What is preserved then in the portraits is the memory of that beauty lost. There's also a certain logic at work as well. If you're already wearing a mask or someone thinks you are, then why not don the rest of the clothes and attributes and become a goddess in fact.

Now, while real-life women were being taken to task for wanting to appear attractive in this manner, a market was developing for decorative images of precisely this kind of ideal beauty. One of the most famous artists of the era with the genuinely international reputation was the Italian pastelist Rosalba Carriera. When she visited Paris in 1720, she met Largillière and there was some suggestion that he lightened his own palette and infused his portraits with the softer atmosphere by following her example and her medium because she was an expert at pastel. While she was sought after for her bust-length portraits, in fact, Mademoiselle de Clermont who we saw as a sultana was taken with her sister by their mother to Rosalba so that they would have straightforward portraits of the two girls.

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Rosalba was equally successful with these ideal heads. These are pseudo-portraits. They're not based on a model. They are fictional in all senses of the word. And what they personify of course is youthful beauty, fetching blondes and brunettes who have been embellished by the scantest allegorical motifs. So Diana, all you can see -- but now we're quite versed in this -- is the top of the quiver of arrows. It's all it takes to set her as Diana. Flora, or spring, is always associated with flowers and here we have a bouquet being held next to her bare chest in fact.

Male collectors wrote enthusiastic letters to Rosalba and to each other about these works allowing that they really longed to possess them, these coy, charming pastels at some level, but I think also the fictive beauties that they tended to depict. And they really do write things like, "I can't wait to get my own cute little blonde."

[Laughter]

To the artist, it seems understandable to me that this might be some incentive for real wife women to model themselves perhaps in a similar

way in their allegorical portraits or to aim for something a little bit higher. And I can't resist juxtaposing one of the artist's self-portraits on the right that seems to pointedly measure and remind both her and the viewer of the gap that existed between the fantasy of her images and the reality of actual flesh. In her advancing years, she could wryly[?] take on the persona of winter.

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Now, we've seen how artists learned about allegorical subject matter and how the royal circle used it, but what about the larger public? And, in particular, the wide range of clients who in fact had themselves painted allegorically? Of course, you might have read Ovid, but if you didn't and if you didn't wander around Versailles or the Luxembourg Palace looking at those allegories on the ceiling, there was a popular source for the dissemination of this kind of information, a popular level I was delighted to find in the form of inexpensive prints.

The prints in question were an offshoot of the development of fashion plates in the 1670s. Fashion itself as well as production of fine silks were one of France's most important exports then as it is now. It was a source of national pride. It was a goal set by Louis XIV himself to have the world know how fine the production of silk was, as well as the promotion of fashion.

Initial illustration -- so we're talking about a phenomenon that essentially we have a starting point for because while there were pictures of costuming, the notion of contemporary fashion being looked at consistently for itself really doesn't start much before the early 1670s, and initial illustrations were published in the magazine that I mentioned earlier, the *Mercure*. And as you can see on the left, one of those illustrations, it came complete with labels of the component parts of a fashionable outfit for winter.

So here, we have an indication of -- I don't remember what [inaudible] is, but it's supposed to be orange, fire-colored, three rows of large lace, lace that either had silver or gold threads in it and so on.

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In a sense, you're looking at the great, great, great, great grandmother of *Vogue* magazine in these plates, but leaving nothing to chance. Now, that interest in fashion being promoted with this kind of an image

spawned almost immediately a flourishing trade in single sheet fashion plates like the one you see on the right.

Most of them were produced simply in the black and white ink from the press and they were inexpensive enough to have been purchased by the chambermaid should she want to look like her mistress, or you could purchase them beautifully hand-colored and bought in volume if you were well-to-do. But there was a further move on the part of the printmakers that was just brilliant. They expanded their subject matter to include not simply what current fashion was supposed to look like and, in fact, after a number of years, they kept recycling the same fashion so that particular use dropped out but people kept collecting these prints. But what this brilliant move is that they expanded the subject matter to include contemporary mores, behaviors, and current trends.

Essentially, these prints were informing a large public about modern life and how to fashion oneself in that modern society as it was increasingly modernizing. This larger educational program is quite fascinating. If you aren't already subscribing to the *Mercure*, the image on the left informs you that it would be very fashionable to do so.

We see an aristocratic woman--*dame de qualité* is the term for a noble engaged in the private pleasure of reading, one of those ways that individuality and an interior life was being released essentially from the formerly hieratic society.

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So she is reading news in the *Mercure* and one of the things that she would've been reading was a game that's still being played called "enigmas" in which a verbal puzzle is posed sometimes with a picture and readers would then send in their answers. And many of those readers who have the answers (because they would be published the next month) were indeed from women readers trying to guess what the clue was that the enigma was describing.

But even more than this, we see her seated on a newly fashionable piece of furniture, the canapé, which allows for this intimate sprawling pose which you otherwise would never hold in polite society.

The image on the right illustrates an art history lesson in progress. As the gentleman points to and presumably explains what that bas-relief on the garden pedestal recounts, and that episode is the one in which Paris receives the golden apple that he would give to the fairest, a choice that

lies behind the start of the Trojan War. And there is beneath a verse, actually, which in some cases is straightforward and helps you understand what you're looking at, but in other cases will have a snide twist to it or carries with it a kind of innuendo about "yes, he is showing her about art but what he really wants is what comes after this lesson" and things like that. So they're humorous and they're puzzling at the same time.

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Other prints were literally primers on how to read allegory. This one in particular explains how spring is personified by the figure of Flora. The accompanying text down below tells you why there are cupids there, what the flowers are meant to signify, and how to understand why these attributes are selected for Flora to represent the notion of spring. So this is a way that without having a classical education the chambermaid on up through the probably less than perfectly educated aristocratic woman would be conversant with who Flora is. But still more importantly, these clever printmakers carry the lesson of allegory forward, juxtaposing modern-day versions of the subject and thereby prompting you to buy not one but two prints if you're interested in the subject matter.

I think in these prints and in the way that they begin to, if not conflate, at least parallel the classical Flora, the traditional Flora and a modern Flora, a modern version of spring with a bird on her finger, again in a rather daring pose for a woman in this period that this kind of imagery would encourage you to have yourself painted as an allegory. And if it's not exactly the logic behind it, prints like these surely must have been at least some instigation to try. And I decided not to show them but there are actually allegorical portraits in this print series as well, probably based on paintings though.

So here is the continuing tradition from antiquity forward that can explain the persistence of allegorical portraits combined with this move into the present and into modernizing.

[00:40:01]

So we have a mid-17th-century example by one of the Mignard in the center above and his great granddaughter down below in Largillière's portrait of Madame de Gueidan -- two different kinds of Floras, same attributes. I would suggest that the kind of modernizing you see in the prints helped not only to keep the tradition going but suggested its ongoing applicability to the newer generation.

You're probably thinking it's high time we paid some attention to Largillière as an artist and as the artist of the portrait upstairs to better understand his part in the story. He was an astonishingly prolific painter who produced somewhere over 1,500 portraits over the course of a very long career. He died at the ripe old age of 90 in 1746.

One of the artistic chestnuts is that most painters found portraiture a chore that they despaired of because it forced them to only record people's physiognomies and that they would have preferred instead to have invented historical or biblical scenes and otherwise engage their time.

Mignard, whose Flora we've just seen, is on record as particularly disliking having to satisfy his female clientele since they demanded, he said, to be shown at their best advantage. Ingres is on record -- the French painter Ingres -- in the 19th century saying simply, "Those damn portraits," dismissing his absolutely inspired work in that simple phrase. I'm not sure he meant it and I'm quite certain that this profile of a disgruntled artist did not fit Largillière.

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He never complained on record as so many other artists did. He enjoyed an exceptionally lucrative career through portraiture. It bought him a fine Parisian house and elegant belongings which we know about because there was a record taken of what he had in his possession.

He painted largely for the well-to-do upper classes, a clientele he shared with Rigaud, his contemporary. But where Rigaud received numerous royal commissions, not least of which was that portrait of Louis XIV we saw at the outset, Largillière, according to a contemporary acquaintance, didn't run after the favor of the crown. Instead, "He preferred as he told me numerous times to work for the public because such clients were less demanding artistically and they paid more promptly."

We want to think about someone at work for six active decades intermixed with teaching and administrative duties within the prestigious French Royal Academy. His status within the academy means he enjoyed the full respect of his colleagues and he was not considered a second class citizen as portraitists would be later in the century. From the scant materials that survive about him, it would seem he loved his family, he had a sense of humor, and he was a sociable man. Artistically, Largillière had an important formative experience in London at the apogee of

brilliant portraiture there. He would have learned firsthand from the example of the stunning portraits by Van Dyck available in British royal collections.

An investigation of his work suggests he also had an abiding admiration for Rembrandt's very different portraits of character, as well as for Rembrandt's feeling for paint as substance. We know that he sided with the great colorists in the French academic debate about the relative merits of line and drawing over color. He was a fan of Rubens and had studied Rubens when he was a student in Antwerp.

[00:44:11]

We see here two particularly engaging works. The one on the left definitely a portrait; the one on the right, probably a portrait but of whom on display at her morning toilette is unknown. I would point out their easy elegance, a kind of cheerful palette, and a sense of approachability of the sitter for the viewer.

I think we can perceive Largillière's artistic personality, artistic and otherwise, in this comparison with a very fine but much more sober portrait by Rigaud. Rigaud painted many more men than women. This isn't surprising since men have the money, and he painted still more rarely any allegorical portraits.

Just how many allegorical portraits of Largillière exist or were completed is impossible to determine, first because that body of work is so large and because it's riddled by missing paintings, by paintings changing hands, and by paintings changing titles. Often in lists that survived from the 18th or even 19th century the sitter's name is not specified and we understand why because that simply dropped away. But often not even the specific allegorical theme that he might have employed is mentioned. It will simply say "Portrait Allégoriques". I think they used that term.

His repertory would seem to have been limited to allegories of women as Venus, as Flora, and especially later in his career of Diana.

[00:46:00]

She was clearly the subject of choice for his clients. If you were the least bit tempted to think that having yourself painted allegorically might have been like putting your head into a photographic prop at a fair that turns you into a cowgirl or into Marilyn Monroe, I'd like to challenge that

thought by exploring briefly just how inventive Largillière could be, which will return us to the Rosenberg *Diana*. And while I have these on, it's a very rare sketch of Largillière's on the left of a portrait which I think should be dated later than it appears in print because of the costuming and because that move toward a more playful image is already in place. And we have two different Dianas, slightly similar costumes that were done and again, the identifications of the sitters is probable but not 100% certain. But you can see what the type is and why some critics including Diderot would have the sense that it was just a silly idea to have yourself painted in this way that it just made you into no one instead of bringing out someone that you might in fact want to prove yourself to be.

Now, to do your painting justice, I need to first compare it to an equally delightful multi-figure portrait of an unidentified woman in the guise as Pomona, the goddess of gardens and orchards. And I think by way of this comparison, I can interpret Largillière's motives a bit better.

Largillière's novelty in adapting the Ovidian theme of Pomona and Vertumnus for an allegorical portrait, again, I think can best be appreciated by seeing the normal components of the story. And in this case, I would turn to a beautiful 17th-century painting by Cornelius Bloemaert.

[00:48:01]

In the Dutch painting we encounter a handsome and decorous representation of Pomona with her attributes of fruits and vegetables. She has on her lap -- there's usually a wonderful squash somewhere nearby. And in this image she's not yet undisturbed by her would-be lover Vertumnus, god of seasons and change, who is perhaps the man -- these are so dark, I'm so sorry, but there's a male figure that's approaching in the left background, and that perhaps is a reference to Vertumnus. Any number of these paintings -- I'm just going to show you two different examples. And the second one actually is a print by Watteau, the Rococo painter who took on this subject matter as part of a second generation of this kind of less expensive print produced for broader public.

In the Ovidian story, having spied her in the garden, Vertumnus tries on various disguises to woo her, including appearing to her as an old woman as a way of winning her confidence. And this is the moment, probably the more classic moment, that Watteau has chose to depict. Pomona is being importuned, she thinks, by a harmless old woman.

This particular juxtaposition of Watteau and Largillière I think also allows us to appreciate the sheer presence and reality of his would-be Pomona in her contemporary clothes and her desirable plump body type. We also enjoy the competing activity of the whimsical male figure at the far right who seems to be getting a lesson in disguises and playacting, which is the theme of the Ovidian tale after all. Because in the story, Vertumnus tries out three different other characters to win Pomona's favor before he has success appearing to her as the old woman.

[00:50:14]

The cupid who is holding up the craggy mask above him and gesturing for attention reinforces for us and I think for him the very nature of allegorical portraiture as an ongoing play of identities.

I would dearly love to have found the archival material to unpack the meaning of your lovely portrait of the Comtesse de Montsoreau and her sister, but I'm afraid to say I've had no luck. And I must also say that these particular details still have me somewhat baffled, and I couldn't see them until I was in the gallery yesterday, so this is fresh off the press in a sense.

Again, I suspect that what we're looking at is a young bride no longer in the hunt, though I admit I'm choosing to read that second figure presumed to be her sister as hanging up the quiver of arrows rather than taking it down. But as I looked at it, I realized it obviously can go either way and if it goes in the direction of taking it down, then I'm at a loss as what to say. So my interpretation is it's being hung up because she no longer needs to be a huntress.

Since the Diana figure gestures to her pet spaniel, I want to give it special significance, more particularly since in the caressing it, as she does, she reveals its belly and the fact that this is a female, not a male, and perhaps even a nursing female. I'm not actually that up on canine pregnancy but I was struck by the fact that this very, very particular bit of anatomy is in fact so prominent in the painting and wonder if it could be an allusion to upcoming pregnancy of the woman.

[00:52:09]

She's also resting her hand in such a way that suggests she's – while she's pointing to the dog, she might also be indicating her own swelling stomach, all conjecture here, which I admit. And I hope in my closing

remarks that we can maybe talk about what you see in the painting and how this reading might or might not play with my audience.

I'd also want to point out the trio of dogs who are particularly hard to see in any illustrations, and I think you can even sense that that's the case here. But as a student in front of the painting, I found myself drawn to something peculiar about them and the peculiarity is we have three different kinds of dogs. The one that's furthest back and almost painted into the background like an afterthought comes from that long tradition that we've been looking at of this sleek breed with its short coat, very short ears, and long snout. I don't know what breed it is. Maybe there's someone in the audience who does, or it might be a fictional breed as well.

In the middle, here, is what I believe to be a genuine hunting dog of the sort kept in the early 18th century. And that dog -- so if the dog in the background references the past of the story, the dog in the middle ground adds a note of contemporary life, and the spaniel in the foreground then connects the larger theme very much to the present. And in doing so, this woman's pose, gestures, and that slight smile that she has breathes new life into allegorical traditions and brings the scene I think very much to life.

[00:54:07]

That's quite an accomplishment I think and Largillière should be celebrated for that.

So, thank you very much.

[Applause]

I really would welcome any questions you have because this is very much a work in progress. While I had studied the portrait before. I couldn't see what I saw until yesterday. Yes?

Audience Member 1: Can you comment at all on the rather interesting landscape? Do you have any idea what that might mean?

KN: Well, frequently in portraits, there will be bits and pieces of landscape type, trees, a storm. Very rarely do you see actual estates of people. That's something that occurs in England regularly. In fact, there are portraits that are actually portraits of someone's estate. It happens much less often in France.

So they are almost bits of theatrical staging. The plant in the foreground - - this orange thing, I'm really puzzled. It looked like coral almost. I didn't understand what that was or what it was trying to do.

In general, I don't ever tend to go in this direction but I must admit that from a distance, when I was looking in the gallery -- now the light is on, it's going to be a little bit harder. Can you see those two trees there? They kind of connect with the dog and I thought, "Was he making a very broad allusion to the antlers of Actaeon?" Maybe not, but there's just something that's a little strange there. The colors are autumnal. I don't know if that has a particular significance.

[00:56:04]

So you paid extra for this sort of thing. You paid much less -- you paid less for a straightforward portrait than you did for an allegorical portrait. And if I had another hour, I wanted to tell you a story from the letters that went between a client and Largillière about -- it was actually between the husband of Madame Gueidan. I'll just put this on for a moment because he decides he wants a portrait of her because they have been married, she's had two children. She goes off to Paris with her brother and while the husband is thinking about reducing the commission from a three-quarter length portrait to a simple bust because it was cheaper (and this is all on the letters), she has already negotiated with Largillière to have herself painted as Flora. And then there's this wonderful backpedalling between the artist who has to flatter the man who is going to pay the bills, the wife who is clearly willful she's going to be Flora, and that's all there is to it. I would love to know what happened between husband and wife. But you paid extra for the allegorical adornment and I would assume you also paid extra to have landscape put in. But that also would have been done by shop assistants and Largillière might not have spent his time. So in trying to quite understand what the landscape is doing, it's not by his hand, that's risky.

Yes?

Audience Member 2: I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the inclusion of the sister because that seems to be an unusual move in the Diana form of portraiture to have another woman there and I know we don't know anything about the sitters -- do you think it's the younger sister or was it Diana the huntress herself?

KN: Did you notice I passed over that?

[Laughter]

I passed over it. Heather, what do I do?

[Laughter]

Heather MacDonald: We're easily satisfied. You can say almost everything. We don't know.

[00:58:06]

KN: We don't know. Unfortunately, I decided I would wander into the genealogy of the family and I can't find two sisters. I can't find a pair of sisters at the right date. The only Montsoreau sisters that existed had already been married in 1685. And since this is 1710 to 1714, it can't refer to them unless -- it doesn't make sense for it to refer to them.

So no, I can't, although Largillière is pretty much unique in doing these multiple figure allegories. The allegory of Vertumnus and Pomona had traditionally been identified as the regent and his mistress because you want to name them. But whether or not it's someone, I don't know. So that's the unfortunate end of that story. I can't tell you about it. She has a very vivid face, which would suggest she's more than just an attendant. But if she's a Montsoreau, she's not a sister.

Yes, please.

Audience Member 3: My daughter and I believe the dog to be a King Charles Spaniel because we have one. That will be the tricolor variety -- the interesting heritage of that dog was it was bred by King Charles I of England but he gifted one of the pups of the first successful grouping to the king of France, so the dog is often in royal portraiture. So I just thought that was interesting.

KN: And probably not in quite this pose.

[Laughter]

The dogs in royal portraiture are going to be behaving themselves as is required of a dog if it belongs to the royal family.

[01:00:00]

There is a rather intriguing book that was written by Robert Rosenblum called *The Dog in Art*. We tend not to see them. You run past them and, in fact, they often will offer interesting insights into what else is going on in the work. But thank you for that. Does anyone know what the breed is with the long nose or is that --

Audience Member 3: Some of the King Charles can have a longer nose.

KN: Oh no, but these dogs are tall. These are more like greyhounds somehow.

Audience Member 4: It's vaguely like a greyhound.

KN: Yeah, it does look vaguely like a greyhound but a little bit pointier in the snout.

Audience Member 5: I'm embarrassed to say that I've done a little work on dogs in male hunting portraits. I think that I'm not really the expert but one in the background is a sight hound, a greyhound-like dog that would be used for specific kind of hunting; and the other dog would be more like a scent hound, more like a dog that would be used for tracking and a different kind of hunting.

KN: So that could also add into the story. If the portrait belongs to a family that enjoys the hunt, then there are stages of the hunt that are indicated by the dogs in it.

Anything else?

Female: [Inaudible]

Kathleen Nicholson: Okay.

Audience Member 6: In the vein of the direction of the dogs representing the history of maybe the transition through time, I see the young lady maybe taking the quiver from the now married maiden, so it is sort of a passage as well. That's what I saw when I first saw it. She's beautiful and that's a little bit of a smirk on her face as if she is now getting in-charge of the quiver so that she can be in search of her...

KN: I really like that. That's very satisfying. I got derailed by realizing that they weren't the sisters they're supposed to be.

[Laughter]

[01:02:06]

They could still be sisters but at least not the ones I thought they were. But I think that helps explain that gesture, which is hovering rather than absolutely --

Audience Member 7: I think that the dogs are representing the transition [inaudible]. But I see that the portrait as a whole, the picture as a whole represents the changing time and station in life.

KN: Nice reading, thank you. Yes?

Audience Member 8: I always look at it as if the main subject is presenting herself as Diana. That's a pretty big comparison to make of yourself personally, to be disguised. And then her sister is included in -- her sister is really beautiful but her sister is clearly not Diana. So assuming that she has something to say about how the portrait is painted, she is really saying something about herself and her position, her self-confidence and what she thinks of herself.

KN: Oh, absolutely. That's, I think, why women persisted in being shown allegorically. The literature from the mid-18th century on right through to quite recently so valorizes the realistic portrait that these kinds of works are often just seen as a mistake somehow or an aberration that served no purpose. But yes indeed, to equate one's self with --

Audience Member 8: To be Diana.

KN: To be Diana, yeah. In fact, I was joking with the photographer before that if I'd known I was going to be photographed, I would have brought a little crescent to wear on my hair.

[Laughter]

[01:04:09]

Audience Member 9: I would point out that there are many other versions of Diana in the galleries upstairs. I mean, that carries forward usually. It's no longer [inaudible] in saying that she appears often portraits, maybe not now so much, but...

KN: Right. There is an allure to Diana because on the one hand, she's the goddess of the moon, so there's something dark and mysterious about

her. On the other hand, the protector of virginity and chastity, so there's something fearsome about her. And the stories that come from mythology are also conflicting. So she destroys anyone who trespasses against virgins but then winds up having -- and she's smitten by the young Endymion. And so, all this notion of holding herself apart is traded off in the story of the young man Endymion who she sees and falls desperately in love with.

So she's a very complex character, as are all of, I think, the allegorical persona once you start looking into them. And again, I can imagine feeling a little bit frustrated about only being someone's wife or daughter and deciding that the way to counter that is to take a step up and assume a role in the pantheon of the gods and goddesses. Yes?

Audience Member 10: Who was the husband of the Countess de Montsereau?

KN: Who was the husband?

[01:06:00]

If we go just by the dates, the husband was the son of the king's policeman and his son actually inherited that role, and so she would've come from the Montsoreau family and married into the de Sourches family. There is a reference to this pairing. So we know what her husband did. And the Montsoreau who married the de Sourches, and they had one son, so single children all around. In back, please.

Audience Member 11: I know I've seen pointing fingers occasionally in art, but I feel like it's not commonplace or all the time, so if I'm not mistaken in that, this is more than a gesture where her finger is actually pointing at the dog, so to me that has -- that's when I first things I noticed when I looked at the paintings was that she's actually pointing, so I feel like it probably has some strong significance and now that you mention her possible pregnancy, the way her breast is put over her [inaudible] It's pretty, is hiding her form quite a bit. And this may be conjecture but to me that's a significant notion that she has with her hand.

KN: When you go back into the gallery sometime, take another look at that gesture because it's pointing but the finger is also just slightly bending back to her self, so again, it kind of reads in both directions. The pointing finger is very much a male gesture of authority and does appear in a lot of portraits. And so, it is interesting to see it here in its softness.

[01:08:05]

I know you're probably hungry and need to leave.

Heather MacDonald: [Inaudible] If you do want to run up to the galleries and take a good look at this portrait now that we're I think all intrigued by these multiple layers of meaning -- you have one more chance to go upstairs and just take a quick peek before the museum closes. And I just want to thank everyone for coming this evening and thank our speaker, Dr. Nicholson.

[Applause]

KN: Thank you. Thank you very much. I really enjoyed it.