

Bouguereau at Work

by
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Bouguereau at Work by Mark Walker

To fully appreciate the art of Bouguereau one must profess a deep respect for the discipline of drawing and the craft of traditional picture-making; one must likewise submit to the mystery of illusion as one of painting's most characteristic and sublime powers. Bouguereau's vast repertory of playful and poetic images cannot help but appeal to those who are fascinated with nature's appearances and with the celebration of human sentiment frankly and unabashedly expressed.

But it remains to understand, given Bouguereau's in many ways unique style, exactly what the artist was trying to represent. Although Bouguereau has been classified by many writers as a Realist painter, because of the apparent photographic nature of his illusions, the painter otherwise has little in common with other artists belonging to the Realist movement. Bouguereau himself regarded his tastes as eclectic, and his work indeed exhibits characteristics peculiar to Neo-Classicism, Romanticism, and Impressionism, as well as to Realism. Within these categories, the painter is perhaps best understood as a Romantic Realist, but one would also be quite justified in this case in devising an entirely new school of painting and labeling him the first, the quintessential Photo-Idealist. The designation is apt in that, although Bouguereau actively collected photographs and tempered his observations of nature with a keen awareness of the qualities of light inherent in the photographic image, he almost never worked from photographs.¹ The rare exceptions are a few portraits, usually of posthumous subjects, which are readily identifiable as photographic derivatives as they exhibit an uncharacteristic flatness and pose.

Bouguereau and his fellow academicians practiced a method of painting that had been developed and refined over the centuries in order to bring to vivid life imagined scenes from history, literature, and fantasy. The process of acquisition of the skills necessary to produce a first-rate academic painting was a long and laborious one. Forever distrustful of educational reforms, Bouguereau once wrote:

"Theory has no place ..., in an artist's basic education. It is the eye and the hand that should be exercised during the impressionable years of youth It is always possible to later acquire the accessory knowledge involved in the production of a work of art, but never — and I want to stress that point — never can the will, perseverance, and tenacity of a mature man make up for insufficient practice. And can there be such anguish compared to that felt by the artist who sees the realization of his dream compromised by weak execution?"²

The singular goal of traditional art instruction was to endow artists with the skills essential for the convincing pictorial actualization of their imagined visions. The *croquis*, figure drawings, compositional sketches, color studies, and cartoons were all logical steps in a process that at the end magically congealed separately studied details into an impressive, illusionistic, and unified ensemble.

Plein-air studies were also commonly done as part of the training of most academic painters. The Impressionist landscape painters, deeply stirred as they were by the visual world, limited themselves to this genre, and succeeded in refining certain techniques that wonderfully rendered out-of-door effects. These techniques were later adopted, in some measure, by many studio painters as well.³

Although broken color was not an innovation of the Impressionists (Vermeer was well aware of the principle), some of them took the technique to its presumed theoretical limit. But they did so at the expense of form and modeling, which continued to concern academic painters as well as conservative Impressionists such as Degas and Fantin-Latour.



Even the Realist painter Courbet, who professed disdain for the unseen worlds of the academicians, painted imagined scenes which he could not possibly have produced from direct observation; for their realization, he was perforce obliged to draw upon the traditional methods of the Academy.

The idealizations of Bouguereau's imaginary universe, which have delighted some critics, have incurred the wrath of others. Although some of the latter have loudly lamented the over-romanticized image of the French peasant presented by the painter, few of them have bothered to contemplate the heroic attention required to



sustain such a vision of perfection in a less than perfect age. Moreover, as Bouguereau's contemporary Emile Bayard observed:

*"It is good to note, in any case, that dirt and rags are not exclusive to the underprivileged and that indigence is not always clothed the same way."*⁴

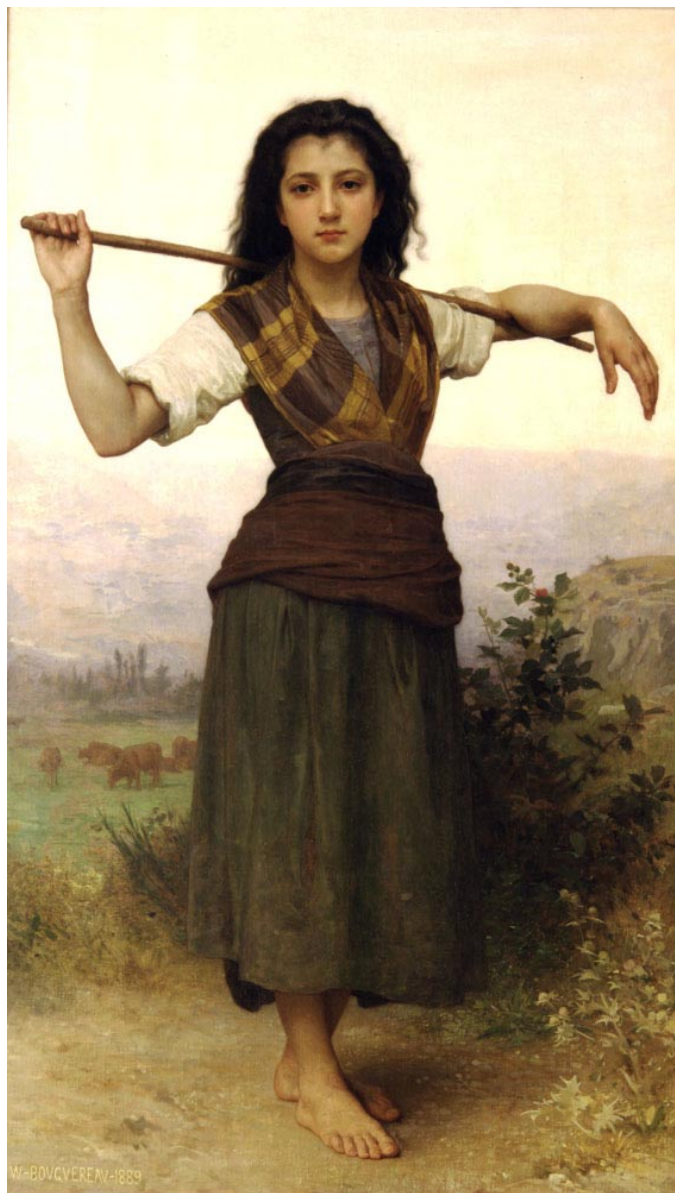
A similar charge often leveled at Bouguereau is that his art bears little or no relationship to the realities of political, industrial, and urban life in nineteenth-century France. But if Bouguereau's art ignores in its content the pressing issues of the day, it may very well be because the artist, though well aware of them, nevertheless prompts us to lift our eyes from the ground and focus upon the lures of distant Arcadia; when misery is afoot, to exalt the more pleasant possibilities of *la vie champêtre* is

not artistic falsehood.

If one pronounces Bouguereau to have been out of step with his time, what must one then conclude about the many, many critics and collectors and viewers who supported him and others of a similar artistic persuasion? Could he really have achieved such prominence and financial success by going against the grain of the "realities" of the nineteenth century? Exactly what are those realities and exactly what attitude was a visual artist obligated to take toward them? If the accomplishments of Bouguereau are poorly understood today, that may have something to do with the shifting of aesthetic expectations over time. As for Bouguereau's public, it was a public raised on Raphael, a public that had not yet been conditioned to prefer abstract ideas to the palpable images that give them utterance, a public that insisted upon an obvious narrative content and that saw in Bouguereau someone opposed to the trends it regarded as inimical to art. It may very well be that a determining factor in Bouguereau's success as a painter, apart from his talent, was that he allied himself to that sizeable, conservative, and revisionist element of French Roman Catholicism which, under the aegis of such men as Louis Veillot, popular theologian and publisher of *L'Univers*, refused to yield to the attacks on traditional ideals that were current at the time. Be that as it may, other writers have moved beyond a simplistic view of the question and have forcefully argued that Bouguereau properly belongs, for better or worse, in the Nineteenth Century; Linda Nochlin has noted, for example:

"... The very concept of contemporaneity is a complex one One might, as the great mid-Nineteenth Century historian, Hippolyte Taine, implied, be perfectly justified in saying that the admonition to be of one's times was unnecessary, since artists and writers, whether they would or not, were inevitably condemned to being contemporary, unable to escape those dominating determinants which Taine had divided into milieu, race and moment. Thus the works of such strivers after eternal verity as Ingres, Bouguereau or Baudry seem inevitably Nineteenth Century"5

The quality of reverie that is present in so many of Bouguereau's works shows clearly to what extent the artist's romantic disposition prevailed in concert with his classical forms. Bouguereau's alchemical transformations, in which objects, costumes, and the like are removed from the realm of the familiar and transplanted



in a distant, archetypal and poetic world, continued a practice with a long academic tradition perhaps most famously articulated by Poussin. Robert Isaacson has observed: “It is noteworthy that Bouguereau tried in every way to avoid signs of contemporary life, even in his choice of costume (a timeless ‘peasant’ dress), setting the scene in a never-never land of pure beauty.”⁶

The craft of picture-making as practiced by Bouguereau basically followed the principles of academic theory as codified by the seventeenth-century aesthetician Roger de Piles.

The code embodied the fundamental idea whereby a painting could be judged logically and objectively by its conformity to ideals established for its divisible parts, which were determined to be: composition, drawing, color harmony, and expression. The method Bouguereau used to execute his important paintings provided ample opportunity for the study and resolution of problems that might arise in each of these areas.

The separate steps leading to the genesis of a painting were:

- 1. *croquis* and tracings;**
- 2. oil sketch and/or *grisaille* study;**
- 3. highly finished drawings for all the figures in the composition, as well as drapery studies and foliage studies;**
- 4. detailed studies in oil for heads, hands, animals, etc.;**
- 5. cartoon; and, only then,**
- 6. the finished painting.**

Evidently Bouguereau was constantly making *croquis* or “thumb nail sketches.” Often these preliminary studies were done during meetings at the Institut or in the evenings after supper. For the most part they were scribbled from the artist’s memory or imagination, others were sketched directly from nature. These drawings, hitherto unknown to the public, constitute a very important element of Bouguereau’s work. For one thing, they yield a wealth of information about the artist’s method.

They also show in many cases how a particular composition evolved. Executed either in pencil or ink, they served as a means of determining the *grandes lignes*, the important linear flows and arabesques, within the entire composition and within individual figure groups as well. They were often refined by means of successive tracings.





The oil sketches, *grisailles*, and compositional studies in vine charcoal served as means for determining appropriate color harmonies and for the “spotting” of lights and darks. Like the *croquis*, these were usually executed from imagination and yielded a fairly abstract pattern of colors and greys upon which the artist would later superimpose his observations from nature.

The figure drawings represented the first important contact with nature in the evolution of the work. Among the considerations of the artist at this point were anatomy, pose, foreshortening, perspective, proportion and, to some degree, modeling. Although Bouguereau was reputed to have the best models in Paris, some of them were not always the most cooperative; as one observer noted:

*"Bouguereau's Italian model-women are instructed to bring their infant offspring, their tiny sisters and brothers, and the progeny of their highly prolific quarter. Once in the studio, the little human frogs are undressed and allowed to roll around on the floor, to play, to quarrel, and to wail in lamentation. They dirty up the room a great deal — they bring in a great deal of dirt that they do not make. They are neither savory nor aristocratic nor angelic, these brats from the embryo-land of Virgil. But out of them the artist makes his capital. Sketchbook in hand, he records their movements as they tumble on the floor; he draws the curves and turns of their aldermanic bodies, and he counts the creases of fat on their plump thighs as Audubon counted the scales on the legs of his humming-birds."*⁷



At times Bouguereau was obliged to use sculptural sources. J. Carroll Beckwith wrote:

"Entering Bouguereau's studio one morning, before he had come up from his breakfast, I was studying with interest a large canvas half completed, representing a group of laughing children with a donkey [see cat. no. 72]. A gaudily attired Italian woman was endeavoring to pacify a curly-headed cherub, the model for the morning, who was ruthlessly rubbing his dirty fingers over

*some exquisite pencil drawings which lay on the floor at the foot of the easel. I rescued the drawings, while the mother apologetically explained to me in Neapolitan French that M. Bouguereau spoiled all of her children so that she could do nothing with them at home or elsewhere. The drawings were beautiful reproductions of the Laughing Faun in the sculpture gallery of the Louvre. As Bouguereau entered the room, he began a series of frolics with the youngster which quite verified the words of the mother. [When he stopped] at last to set his palette, I asked him when he had made the drawings. "Oh, you see, that mauvais sujet is so wicked", said he, pointing to the curly-headed urchin turning somersaults on the floor, "that I can use him for nothing but color and was obliged to spend nearly all of yesterday afternoon at the Louvre, making these notes for the form."***8**

If a particular figure was to be clothed, Bouguereau would also make drapery studies by posing a mannequin in place of the model and experimenting with the folds of cloth until a disposition was found that enhanced the underlying forms. Sometimes, especially for small or single-figure paintings, Bouguereau drew the model already draped. Most of the figure drawings were executed in pencil or charcoal (or a combination of the two) and were often heightened with white. The support for them is usually a heavyweight toned paper of medium grain; such a background allowed Bouguereau to dispense with the problem of rendering troublesome halftones which, in any event, were more easily and accurately realized in the painted studies.

Some of Bouguereau's comments help us understand the manner in which he perceived nature and its representation in his art:

*"Paint as you see and be accurate in your drawing: the whole secret of your art is there."***9**

*"If you want to draw and model effectively, you have to see all of the details as well as the whole at the same time."***10**

*"One of the more useful tricks for getting the overall feeling of a painting, is to blink your eyes while looking at the model."***11**

"During that period of my studies — around 1846 — when progress was slow or almost nil, and when no one was willing to provide the explanations my soul craved for, I experienced (it was just after my arrival in Paris) many discouraging weeks.

I was in this state of mind one day when, strolling through the Louvre, I saw the casts of the Parthenon pediment. How can I



*describe the emotion I felt? A veil fell from my eyes. Never had I experienced such a deep and intense joy. What was it I saw in those wonderful plasters? I understood that the subtlety of accents, in contrast with large planes, is what makes a drawing great. This truth, which I have yearned all my life to express and which still drives me on, is the secret of art. It applies to composition as well as to drawing proper. It is the principle that must guide both the young beginner and the fully developed artist."*¹²

Some of Bouguereau's drawings were rendered with the aid of an optical device known as the *chambre claire*. This instrument, by means of prisms, allowed the tracing of a subject's outlines, as observed by the artist, directly onto a drawing board. Used as an artist might use a photograph today, the *chambre claire* permitted the artist to readily and quickly reproduce certain details of nature which could be used later in the studio as details in a painting.

The oil sketches of heads and hands (cat. no. 128), done, like the figure drawings, from nature were worked to such a degree of finish that Bouguereau was frequently able to use them for the finished painting without further recourse to the live model. The execution and the function of these studies have been described by Leandre Vaillat:



*"Bouguereau would draw [these faces] quickly, in a four-hour session; he would then keep them by his side while working on the figures to which they belonged in the painting they were part of, and for which he had composed a well-balanced sketch beforehand."*¹³

The grounds of these small canvases, often tinted a light warm gray, were probably prepared in the same manner as the ground for the final large canvas. But whereas the final canvas was marked with a definitive outline drawing that the artist respected more or less, the painted studies demonstrate Bouguereau's virtuosity in drawing with paint. In other instances Bouguereau chose to execute similar studies in vine charcoal (cat. no. 30).

The last of Bouguereau's preparations was the cartoon. It was drawn (usually in vine charcoal on a heavyweight, toned paper) to the size of

the final canvas and was generally not enlarged from a smaller compositional drawing (very few of the cartoons have been squared). For Bouguereau the drawing of the cartoon was an integral step in the evolution of a composition in which he made critical adjustments in gesture and contour. The modeling in the cartoons is usually summary, the interest of the painter being focused primarily on the arrangement of shapes and lines and on the broad massing of lights and darks. It is not known whether Bouguereau used the model at this stage of his production, though it is likely that he did so for the more important and complicated works.

The exact method that Bouguereau used for transferring the cartoons to the canvas is also not known. There are no pounce marks or grids to be found on them, but in view of the fact that their main contours are usually heavily reinforced with graphite, it is likely that a pressure technique was employed. In other instances there is no graphite along the contours but rather a groove indicating the passage of a stylus. Jehan-Georges Vibert described the fabrication of a material which the artist could have used as a kind of “carbon paper” for the transfer process:

"In order to trace onto a canvas, instead of using a piece of paper rubbed with graphite or red chalk or with white or carbon black — such lines having the drawback of disappearing as one paints and of sometimes dirtying the tones — it is preferable to make one's own tracing paper with the desired nuance by rubbing color and oil mixed with siccativ onto a piece of ordinary tracing paper. Then firmly wipe off the excess color with a padded cloth, so that very little color remains.

*The remaining color forms a very thin layer and dries very quickly, so that this type of tracing paper is only good for a few hours. Its use has several advantages: the resulting traces, as soon as they are dry, look as if they were painted with a very fine brush; they do not mix with the new color in the next coat; it is even possible to rub off a blot or to add a glaze; and they introduce no foreign material into the paint."*¹⁴

Vibert claimed that the line obtained by this method was absolutely permanent and did not need to be inked over — a practice he considered detrimental to the preservation of the painting. Nevertheless, Bouguereau always inked his drawing on the canvas and he then covered it with a coat of varnish so as to insure the indelibility of the lines. He prescribed the following formula:

*"Before starting to paint, ink the drawing and varnish it with turpentine copal. [Durosier] makes copal dissolved in turpentine, [but] the one he produces commercially is dissolved in oil of spike lavender."*¹⁵

As for the nature of the ground or preparation upon which Bouguereau worked, Charles Moreau-Vauthier has given the following description:

One [of Bouguereau's pupils] wrote to me:

"He used to paint on a semi-absorbent canvas, primed as usual [with a first coat of insulating glue], that is, with a preliminary layer of white more or less tinted with grey or, at one point, with red-grey (he did not continue the use of the latter, which was a light shade of red-brown [brun de mars] with white and black), then, with the same grey, two or three layers, more often two, of the same shade of absorbent color made with flour paste mixed with the first priming color I mentioned earlier. Only Bouguereau's supplier knew how to prime this type of canvas, which used to be prepared by his pupils themselves, following the master's instructions. The traditional proportions, which in any case vary according to the artist's requirements and whose formula was established, albeit succinctly, in Cennino Cennini's [sic] treatise on painting, were not supplied to me when I was first admitted to the studio.¹⁶ Evidently flour was not the principle ingredient but, to my mind, it is an addition that, although it imparts a slightly absorbent quality, detracts from the general resistance, since it is apt to putrefy easily I should add that this canvas is,

more than any other, subject to cracks. When it is old, if it receives the slightest shock, it will crack on the primed side or the painted side if it is covered, and these fissures are always several centimeters long.

Furthermore, as you say about the other glues, flour paste mixed with color in the last priming coats, although in small quantity, is still enough to make the pumiced surface so soapy and slippery that the colors do not adhere well, allowing one to lift the first coat of paint (and therefore the others with it) as if it were rubber I am not exaggerating. So for good results, the ground should be composed of white lead, and the grain of the canvas should be allowed to remain as coarse as possible, in order for the color, through the oil, to encrust all the pores of the canvas and become, so to speak, rooted there."¹⁷



Having inked and varnished the drawing upon his canvas as previously described, Bouguereau began his *ébauche*; the execution of this lay-in is described by Francois Flameng:

*"Bouguereau attacked his work resolutely, painting directly over a brown scumble, blending in the part left from the day before, making it impossible to tell where the juncture was and thus imparting great solidity to his work. His brush seemed to caress the canvas, its bristles pressing voluptuously on the form"***18**

Camille Bellanger has provided other details concerning Bouguereau's paint application:

*"His lay-ins were broad and thickly-painted He never left them in this state: as soon as the piece — which to anyone else would have seemed completed — started to solidify, he took up his palette knife and, with incredible skill, would go over the whole, in all directions, evening out, stripping, until the surface had acquired the desired finish and transparency."***19**

By all accounts the execution of Bouguereau's paintings proceeded rapidly. According to Jerome Doucet:

*"...For him, the only real labor is the composition. Once his subject is determined and transferred to the canvas, he paints with amazing ease."***20**

Emile Bayard:

He sketches broadly with an extraordinarily unerring eye and hand, completing a "piece" at one sitting, with no retouching, and painting a life-size figure in eight days at the most.**21**

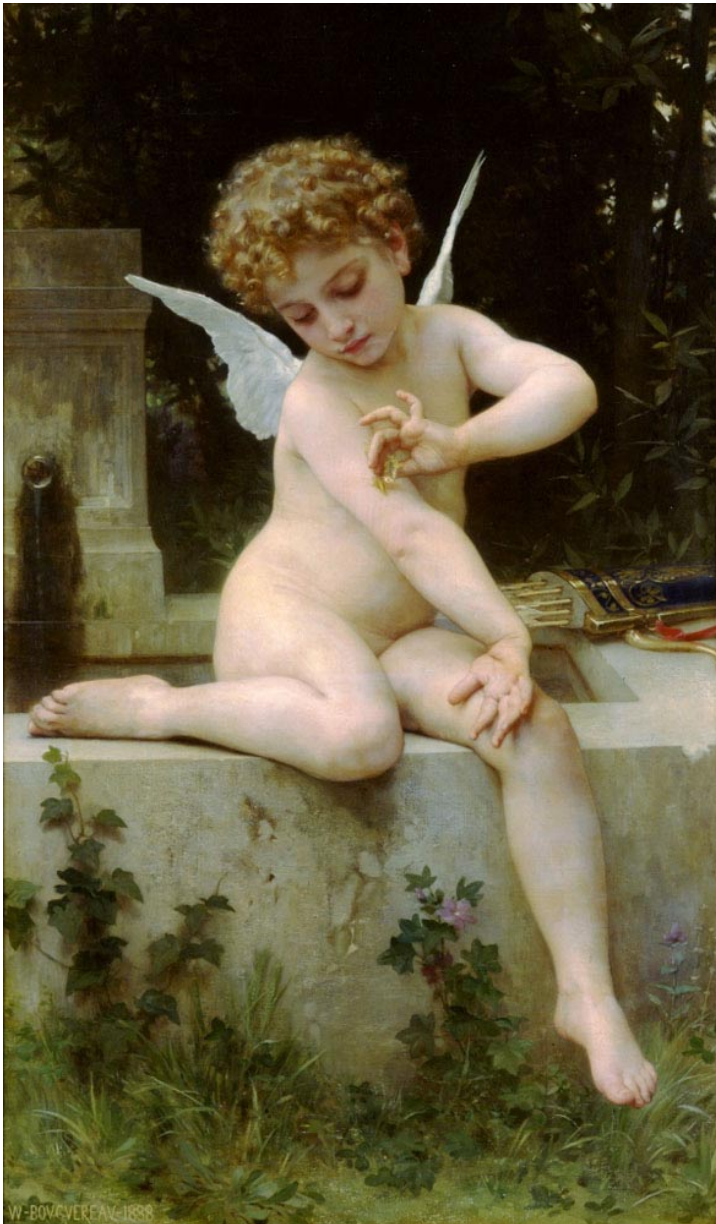
The ease of Bouguereau's execution was, to some degree, made possible by the thorough observations and notes contained in the preliminary studies.

"This impeccable painting, in which everything is depicted with the utmost care, where the slightest detail is lovingly rendered, was not easily achieved. The material execution was confident and rapid, but the preparations were lengthy and carefully thought out, each subject being weighed and looked at every which way with the help of studies, full-size cartoons, and numerous painted sketches."



When asked by a journalist if he worked quickly, Bouguereau replied:

“That depends. I produce a lot because I work all day long, without any breaks. It is the only way in fact of achieving good work. Often I find the desired gestures for my figures immediately; in that case, my painting is quickly completed. If, on the other hand, things don’t go the way I want, I put the canvas aside for a day or two and wait till I feel better disposed. I never work on one picture only but have three or four in progress in my studio; that way, if a model doesn’t turn up one day, I don’t have to sit around with my hands in my pockets, I can work on the others.”²²



Later, when asked how many paintings he had done, Bouguereau replied:

I don’t know the exact number, but if I said six hundred, I wouldn’t be far off. And look, these portfolios are full of all kinds of sketches and studies. I’ll never be able to turn them all into paintings; for that, I’d need ..., many more years than I have ahead of me.

As soon as a painting is completed, I know that in this or that portfolio I’ll find such and such a sketch, and straight away I go to a new canvas.

I never ask myself, “Let’s see, what can I do now?” I have my work all cut out for me. Not to mention the many works that will go unfinished for want of the ideal model.²³

When one considers the care Bouguereau lavished on a single painting, his actual total production of over seven hundred finished paintings appears as a remarkable achievement. Unfortunately, the painter's effort is often lost on the modern eye, which is frequently sufficiently satisfied by accidental and spontaneous effects.

Painting mediums have often been of special interest to artists concerned with the subtleties of paint manipulation and with verisimilitude in the representation of nature. Bouguereau's medium is described by Moreau-Vauthier:

Bouguereau used siccatives in his painting: a first siccative, a kind of Courtrai, employed by house-painters and known as *siccatif soleil*; and then a second, mysterious siccative whose recipe he kept secret. However, one of his pupils believes it was composed of a mixture of "*siccatif de Haarlem*" and essence, plus a little *oliesse* added in the summer months to prevent its drying too quickly.²⁴ As with most painters, Bouguereau changed methods several times. One of his students wrote me:

"Bouguereau, at the time I entered his studio, used as his sole medium a liquid composed of Courtrai mixed with nut oil and turpentine oil in varying proportions, depending on the colors used. Thus, for shadows, [he used] spirit and Courtrai, with little or no white; for the other colors, oil, spirit, and a small amount of Courtrai; finally, to rework a dry outline, pure or nearly pure oil or spirit. He oiled out the area to be repainted to *desemboire* [that is, to treat the canvas so as to prevent the color from sinking in] it, with either the first or the second liquid, depending on the effect he wanted. He also painted with picture-varnish blended into these two liquids, but that was before I entered his atelier "

Bouguereau used "*siccatif soleil*" in order to lay in his sketch without thickening it. Sometimes he left it to dry before reworking; other times, he repainted over it immediately, using a second, less powerful siccative [the secret one]. In the case of a dry sketch, he rubbed this same siccative in before reworking. He has also painted with picture-varnish. In short, he painted with a medium that dried right under the brush.²⁵

The "secret recipes" described by Moreau-Vauthier conform closely to several found in Bouguereau's sketchbooks; they are as follows:

1864 [Sketchbook No. 22]

Quantities for the paste:

Siccative of Haarlem 6 drops Diluted with turpentine

Oil 2-3 drops oil, as needed.

Courtrai 1 drop

Add some Haarlem to the white and one drop of Courtrai to the other colors.

Glazing:

Oil and spirit, little Haarlem.

For an extra glaze, little or no turpentine.

1879 [Sketchbook No. 1]

To prime the canvas before painting:

Haarlem, picture-varnish diluted with elemi (little elemi, 1/5), a drop or two brown fixed oil and *terebine*.²⁶

Afterwards paint with the same mixture diluted with a few more drops of fixed oil and *terebine*.

Other dipper:

picture-varnish and elemi in small quantity and light fixed oil diluted with turpentine.

For a fresh glazing, add to the 2nd dipper a few drops petroleum spirit.

1894 [Sketchbook No. 2]

To prime the canvas before painting:

Haarlem, picture-varnish diluted with a little elemi at 1/5, one or two drops fixed oil and *terebine*.

1st dipper: for painting, same mixture plus a few more drops fixed oil and *terebine*.

2nd dipper: picture-varnish and elemi in small quantity and light fixed oil diluted with turpentine.

3rd dipper: for a fresh glazing, add to second dipper a few drops petroleum spirit.

1894 [Sketchbook No. 2]

Underpainting. Copal dissolved in turpentine diluted with elemi (little).

Ist dipper, for painting: White siccative. *Oliesse* and elemi. 2nd dipper, for glazing:

Turpentine oil (*ratafia caron*), *oliesse*, petroleum spirit.

Venetian-type painting

1) grind pigments into turpentine;

2) add part of the *oliesse* and grind again;

3) at the last minute, add the Robertson paste [a commercially prepared medium] and give a final grinding. Very good for all lacquers.

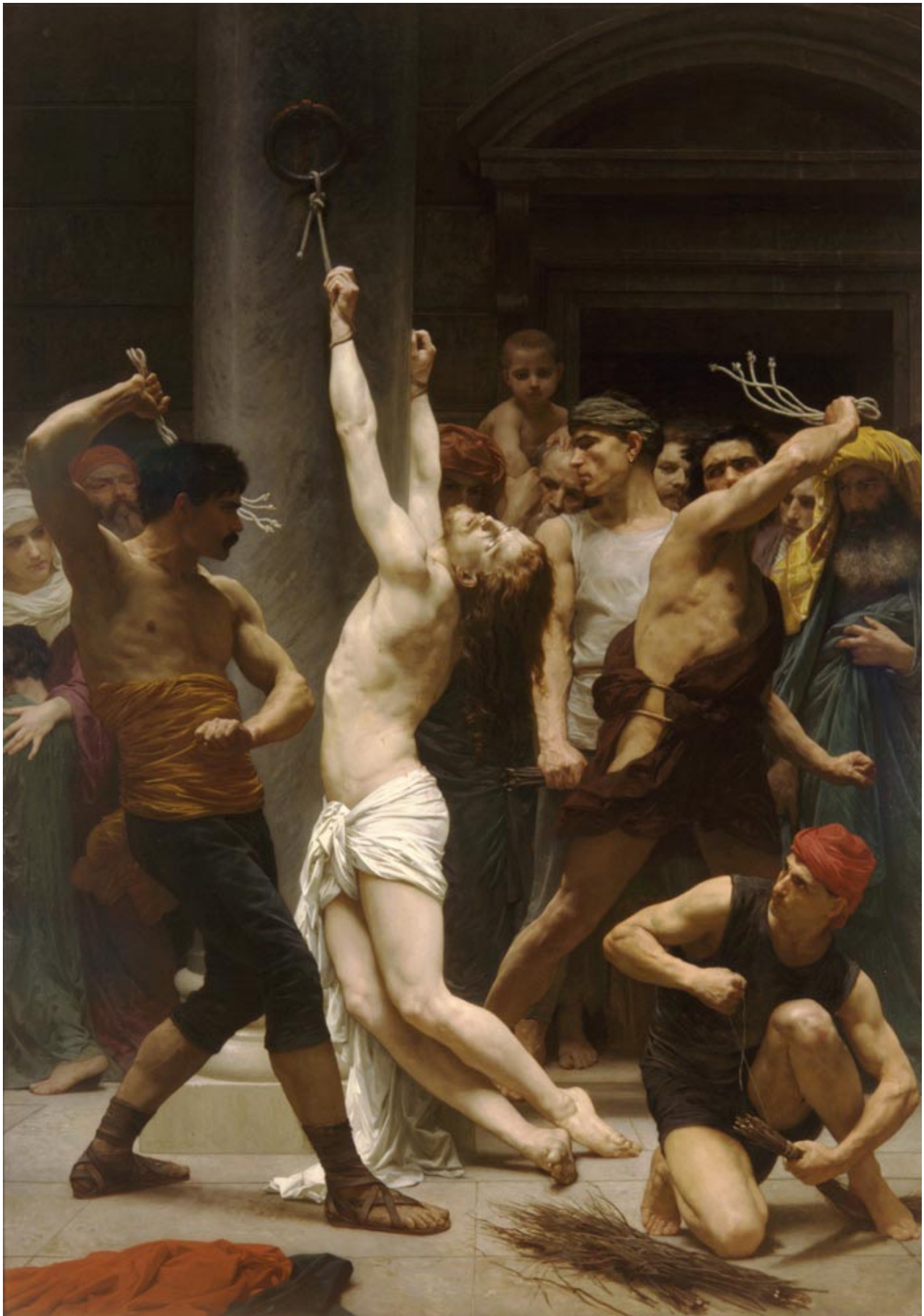
Bouguereau's Palette

Bouguereau never mentions a specific palette, but Moreau-Vauthier is again helpful in this regard; he gives it as:

- Naples Yellow (lead antimoniate)
- Yellow-Ochre
- Chrome Yellow, dark
- Viridian
- Cobalt Blue
- White Lead
- Light Vermilion
- Chinese Vermilion
- Mars Brown (iron oxide); this available from Lefranc & Bourgeois
- Van Dyck Brown
- Burnt Sienna
- Ivory Black
- Bitumen
- Genuine Rose Madder, dark.²⁷

All of Bouguereau's colors are still available today as prepared artist's paints, but not from any single manufacturer. In one of his sketchbooks, Bouguereau lists so many pigments that no palette could possibly contain them, but it is interesting to note all the possibilities he had to choose from.²⁸









1869 [Sketchbook No. 5]

Manganese oil — Leclerc, rue St. Georges...

White lead (Silver White)	Lead carbonate
Ivory Black	Charred Ivory
Minium	Lead
Vermilion	Mercuric sulphide
Brown Madder	Iron (charred)
Cassius Red	Tin bioxide and gold protoxide
Iodine Scarlet (English)	Mercuric iodine
Purple Red	Mercuric chromate
Madder Lake	[preparation from madder root]
Mineral Yellow (Paris)	Oxi-chloride of lead
Charred Massicot	Lead bioxide and protoxide
Minium, orange	Charred ceruse (lead)
Chrome	Lead Chromate
Orpiment (King's Yellow)	Arsenic sulphide or yellow sulphide of arsenic
Naples Yellow	Lead oxide and antimony
Ochre	Hydrated ferric oxide
Indian Yellow	[precipitated urine of caged cows]
Prussian Blue	Iron protoxide sulphate and prussiate solution
Mineral Blue	Iron and [?]
Ultramarine Blue	Lapis Lazuli
Cobalt	Cobalt
Smalt	Powdered cobalt glass
Ash Blue	Copper
Indigo	Vegetable
Violet	Charred iron peroxide Cassius purple and alumina
Verdigris	Copper acetate
Scheele Green	Copper arsenate
Mountain Green	Copper carbonate
Chrome Blue	Chromium protoxide
Cobalt Blue (mineral)	Cobalt and zinc
Vindian	Sulfate of lime and copper aceto-arsenite
Green Earth	silica, iron oxide
Sap Green	Unripe buckthorn berries (lake)
Cassel Earth	[coal byproduct]
Cologne Earth	Natural earth darkened mostly with bitumen
Umber	Natural earth colored with ferric oxide, manganese dioxide plus a little bitumen
Sienna	Ochreous natural earth and manganese (bioxide?) hydrate
Prussian Brown	Charred Prussian Blue
Asphaltum	
Bitumen	
Mummy	Asphaltum and bone ash
Yellow Lake	Albumen colored with Avignon yellow grains
Cadmium	Cadmium sulfide
Azure or smalt	Powdered cobalt glass

It seems that Bouguereau purchased prepared colors in tubes, but on occasion he also ground certain colors himself. It is not known precisely which brand(s) of prepared colors Bouguereau used, but he did write an endorsement for the colors of Lefranc:



“I am pleased to have only good to say about the colors made by Messieurs Lefranc et Cie.”²⁹

It is surprising to see bitumen included among the colors on Bouguereau’s palette, in that hardly any of his canvases exhibit the ravages that have afflicted the works of that substance’s less prudent users. Bouguereau made the observation:

“Spirit of bitumen can be purchased on the rue de Buci, across from No. 14; it can be applied as is on the canvas and, for painting, mixed with Lefranc bitumen.”³⁰

Moreau-Vauthier has written:

“I heard Bouguereau say that bitumen is safe if used only for superficial retouching and not in depth, for underpainting.”³¹

“Bouguereau resorted to bitumen for retouching, binding, and blending; he glazed with spirit of bitumen in scumbles and reworked the area in the glaze before the bitumen was dry To convince people of the sturdiness of bitumen, Bouguereau used to repeat: “They make sidewalks with it.”³²

Bouguereau purchased his materials from many different sources but the most important were:

- Deforge et Carpentier — 8 blvd. Montmartre
- Hardy-Alan — 1 rue Childebert, until 1868; later, 56 rue du Cherche-Midi
Jordaney- 7 rue Brea L’Aube (successors to Jordaney) — 7 rue Brea

When painting, Bouguereau almost always made last minute changes, despite the extensive preliminaries and the fact that his original drawing was unalterably inked upon the ground. If one looks closely at *The Education of Bacchus* (cat. no. 100), numerous adjustments made in the final stages of execution become apparent; hardly a single figure has been left unmodified from the original plan. The obsession with perfection left the painter little peace:

"Starting a new picture is very pleasant, for you always believe that this time you're going to create a masterpiece; you take pains, and little by little the painting takes shape, the effect comes through. You feel marvelous sensations. When it's done, however, things are different. You want to touch up the arm, the movement of the body doesn't seem graceful., and you end up doing nothing, for fear of having to redo the whole thing completely."³³

The finely modeled flesh tones in his paintings led many critics to accuse Bouguereau of relying too heavily on the badger blender. But according to Emile Bayard:

"There has been talk of badger-blending, which still amuses the artist, since he has never resorted to this technique"³⁴

Judging from photographs of the painter in his studio, Bouguereau appears to have used the standard round and flat white bristle brushes commonly used for oil painting (fig. 14). Lovis Corinth observed that the artist generally preferred wide brushes. He also used a palette knife for scumbling color into landscape passages and, for painting fine details, a mahl stick.

The glazed passages in the paintings are primarily limited to the darker portions, particularly backgrounds and drapery; conversely, the flesh tones



are solid and achieve their translucence by means of careful modeling and precise observations of values and color notes. Richard Lack, a painter of “the other Twentieth Century” — that is, a painter who continues to paint in the classical tradition — has written:

“Alongside his mastery of line, Bouguereau utilizes tone relationships with commanding authority. Harmony of dark and light tones is of first importance in a painting. It is even more crucial than color since tone arrangement must underlie every color scheme.

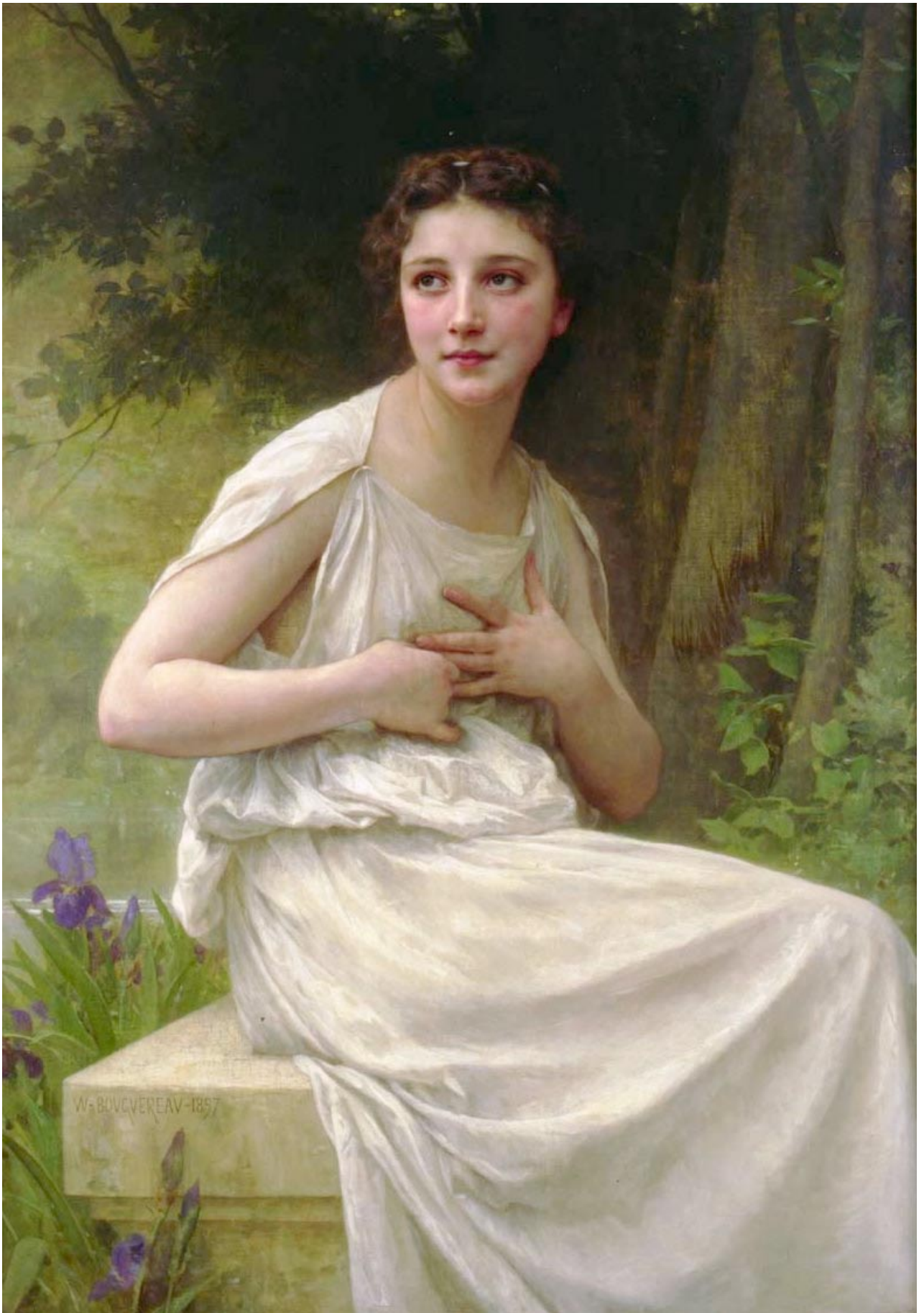
Color or hue cannot exist without value. Painters often say that any color scheme will suffice if the values are harmoniously conceived. Bouguereau’s handsome value harmonies are like music of great beauty and subtlety

An ... ingenious use of light and shadow is seen in the celebrated *Nymphes et Satyre* [cat. no. 51]. The figure grasping the left arm of the satyr is backlit with strong reflected light pouring into the shadow side of the head and shoulders, posing one of the most difficult problems for the draftsman. A head of this sort must be modeled with a minimum of tone contrast in order to oppose those passages in the light that are fully modeled. Once again, Bouguereau succeeds with consummate authority.”³⁵

One of the most impressive features of Bouguereau’s renderings is the manner whereby the artist expresses a maximum of form with a minimum of means. Passages that appear to be modeled with nearly flat tones acquire volume through manipulation of contours and surrounding values.

The location of Bouguereau’s first Paris studio is not known. But in 1866, the painter engaged the architect Jean-Louis Pascal to design his home and atelier at 75 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, finally occupied in September 1868. Undoubtedly Bouguereau himself had an important hand in the planning of the workspace.

The new atelier occupied the northern half of the upper floor of the house and measured 11.5 x 9.5 meters (37 ft. 9 in. x 31 ft. 2 in.) with a ceiling height of 6.9 meters (22 ft., 7 1/2 in.) (fig. 15). The long northern wall of the studio was windowed from floor to ceiling and hung with heavy drapery in order to control the light. In addition, there was a skylight measuring 4 x 2.5 meters (13 ft 11/2 in. x 8 ft. 2 1/2 in.) in the exact center of the ceiling. The lower surface of the skylight rested flush with the ceiling and was composed of a wire-reinforced light-diffusing glass. Just under the skylight a roll of opaque fabric was suspended that, by means of wires and pulleys, could be extended along two





guide wires in order to regulate the amount of light entering from above. Originally, a sizeable balcony projected from the central window; it was enclosed on all sides by glass so as to form a small greenhouse, which in no way obstructed the light from entering the studio (fig. 16). The balcony, along with the glass enclosure, was dismantled many years after Bouguereau's death, and there presently remains only a narrow balcony and railing.

The interior of Bouguereau's atelier was painted a light, warm, twenty-percent grey which visitors described as "luminous". The journalist Paul Eudel has described a visit to the studio in 1888:

"At first glance, a real disappointment. No knick-knacks, absolutely no attempt at elegance. No suits of armor and no Gothic furniture either. It is in no way a curio shop, like some sumptuously appointed studios that are fitted for everything except painting. Here, on the contrary, there is constant hard work

Seated in a corner, a cherubic pupil clutches a piece of cardboard on his lap and tries, with a still shaky hand, to reproduce the academic outlines of the bent head of Niobe, whose plaster mask hangs before him

The whole length of the studio is divided by a partition about two meters high, covered with old, mediocre tapestries. Against the partition rests a fine ebony Louis XIV clock Perched on the mirrored cornice, two stuffed birds³⁶ gaze dejectedly at Duret's Chactas, which is made of plaster with a chocolate-hued patina and which, from afar, could be mistaken for Florentine bronze

At the foot of the walls, painted in a terra-cotta shade, lean portfolios crammed with drawings and sketches. On the floor, on shelves or hanging from nails, Greek and Roman casts I catch sight of a real Chardin, not a painting but a natural Chardin: on a stepladder box lie three small pipes, a ruler, a yardstick, and a sample of varnish, 'guaranteed resin-free,' the bottle of which holds down its prospectus. It is a cosy room, unpretentious and very typical."³⁷

Bouguereau said of his atelier:

"It is a workroom, that's all."³⁸

W. BOVCHEKOV - 1888





Elsewhere he described his work habits:

"Every morning I get up at seven without fail and have breakfast, then I go up to my studio which I don't leave all day. Around three o'clock, a light meal is brought in; I don't have to leave my work. I rarely have visitors, since I hate to be disturbed. My friends, though, are always welcome. They don't bother me, I can work even when it's noisy or while they're chatting. When I'm painting, I don't pay attention to anything else."³⁹

The artist usually spent August and September at his home in La Rochelle (15 rue Verdiere), where his schedule was somewhat more relaxed. Marius Vachon has written:

"In a corner of the garden measuring some two hundred square feet, he arranged his outdoor studio; and in the orangery he set up his interior studio. At six in the morning, rain or shine, drizzle or wind, escorted by his three dogs and a servant, he sets out for a two-hour walk through the fields or along the seashore. Once home, he has a cup of tea and settles down to work. At eleven, the family gathers for lunch; at one, he resumes work with his model and continues until six in the evening, with a few short breaks.

Then the painter picks up his rustic cane and his soft-felt hat and leaves, a cigarette between his lips, like any ordinary bourgeois, for a walk around the harbor, to watch the sun set on the sea. When the town clocks chime seven, he goes back home for dinner;





and at ten, it is curfew time. At dawn on Sundays, the master and his wife climb into a carriage to meet a childhood friend, an architect in a neighboring village, for an outing in the countryside or, during hunting season, to take a few pot shots, in his own words, 'at hypothetical quails or the occasional rabbit.'"40

Many of the paintings which Bouguereau began in La Rochelle were finished in Paris; usually all that remained to be done was the completion of the background. He wrote one October:

"I still have landscape elements to paint into my backgrounds and I am hurrying, fearing an early frost will leave only dry, leafless trees."41

Bouguereau also produced certain paintings that do not belong to any of the categories described above. These works were clearly not made as preparatory studies and yet they often relate to important compositions. From time to time, in addition, he made drawings or tracings of drawings to send to prospective clients interested in a commissioned work or a work in progress. The artist also made pen drawings for reproduction purposes, since halftone reproduction processes were both time consuming and expensive.



Bouguereau frequently painted "reductions" (sometimes Bouguereau refers to these as "reproductions") as well, which were simply smaller versions of important canvases. These works were finished to the same degree as the large versions; they were signed but never dated. Sometimes Bouguereau's students had a hand in the execution of the reductions. In 1877, he wrote his daughter: "Doyen... worked today on the completion of the reduction of *Youth and Eros*"42 The reductions originally served as models for the engravers, who relied

on them to make quality plates for reproduction purposes. In this way the sales of important paintings were not delayed by the engraving process, and the engraver was not encumbered by the bulk of Bouguereau's large formats. Bouguereau painted most of his reductions early in his career; the first one recorded is done for *Charity*, in 1859. After that, reductions appear regularly and in great quantity; of sixteen paintings produced in 1867, eight were reductions. There are about a half dozen instances where two reductions of the same painting were made.⁴³

Such proliferation, of course, could only have been intended for commercial reasons. Neither Baschet nor Vachon recorded these early reductions with any consistency, but they are listed in the artist's account books.⁴⁴

But with time the painter seems to have grown weary of the practice, and after 1870 reductions appear on the average of about two per year and are usually limited to works from the annual Salon, destined for the engraver. The reductions either progressed at the same time as the large canvases or they were painted shortly after their completion; in any event, Bouguereau required the large canvas for the execution of the reduction. He explained to a correspondent:

"... You have not understood me. After telling you that I did not have the time, I told you that I was unable to do the reproduction of a painting I no longer had; this should have explained why I found it impossible to fulfill the commission I should also add that today I no longer do any reproductions other than for engraving purposes; that is because most of my paintings are too cumbersome for the engraver to work directly from them, so I am resigned to it. But it is always against my wishes."⁴⁵

Most of Bouguereau's reductions appear to be faithful copies of the large canvases, but there may be a few exceptions. There is an engraving of *L'Orage* (*The Storm*), 1874, executed by Annedouche and published by Goupil, which was presumably done from a reduction (of which no photographic record has been found) and which has a completely different background from that of the large version. The small version of *The Storm* is specifically mentioned by Baschet as a "reduction pour la gravure" as opposed to simply "reduction."⁴⁶

A detailed description of Bouguereau's materials and procedures must not obscure the fact that it was above all the master's hand, eye, and temperament, rather than pure technique, that account for the ineffable quality of his work. For those who would invoke the painter's muse, Bouguereau left a final *caveat*:

"One is born an artist. The artist is a man endowed with a special nature, with a particular feeling for seeing form and color spontaneously, as a whole, in perfect harmony. If one lacks that feeling, one is not an artist and will never become an artist; and it is a waste of time to entertain the possibility. This craft is acquired through study, observation, and practice; it can improve by ceaseless work. But the instinct for art is innate. First, one has to love nature with all one's heart and soul, and be able to study and admire it for hours on end. Everything is in nature. A plant, a leaf, a blade of grass should be the subjects of infinite and fruitful meditations; for the artist, a cloud floating in the sky has form, and the form affords him joy, helps him think."**47**





APPENDIX

- 1) *Bouguereau's collection of photographs was extensive and included prints by many of the bestknown photographers of his time as well as by lesser-knowns.*
- 2) *William Bouguereau, 'Discours de M. Bouguereau' in Seance publique annuelle des cinq Academies du 24 octobre 1885, Institut de France, pp. 10-11.*
- 3) *R.H. Ives Gammell, Twilight of Painting (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1946), pp. 66-67.*
- 4) *Emile Bayard, 'William Bouguereau' in Le Monde Moderne (Paris: A. Quantin), December 1897, pp. 851-852.*
- 5) *Linda Nochlin, Realism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978) p. 104.*
- 6) *Robert Isaacson, 'The Evolution of Bouguereau's Grand Manner' in The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin, Vol. LXII, 1975, pp. 7576.*
- 7) *Anonymous, 'First Caresses' in [?], from the files of the Joslyn Art Museum Library, Omaha, Nebraska.*
- 8) *[James] Carroll Beckwith, 'Bouguereau' in The Cosmopolitan, January 1890, Vol. 8. No. 3, p. 264.*
- 9) *William Bouguereau, quoted by Emile Bayard, p. 854.*
- 10) *William Bouguereau, Paris Journal, p. 19. Bouguereau Family Estate.*
- 11) *Ibid. p. 20.*
- 12) *William Bouguereau, 'Allocution de M. Bouguereau' in Distribution des Prix de l'Ecole de Dessin au Grand Theatre, 1899, (Bordeaux, 1899), pp. 17-18.*
- 13) *Ldandre Vaillat, 'Une resurrection de Bouguereau' in L'Illustration, 22 janvier 1921, p.64.*
- 14) *Jehan-Georges Vibert, La science de la peinture (Paris: Paul Ollendorff), 1891, pp. 324-325.*
- 15) *William Bouguereau, carnet No. 2, 1894. Bouguereau Family Estate.*
- 16) *In fact, Cennino Cennini mentions nothing about the incorporation of flour into the ground. Moreau-Vauthier's reference is surely the same as the one in Bouguereau's handwriting, found on a card inserted in Stetchbook No. 5, 1869 (Bouguereau Family Estate), to Giovanni Battista Armenini, Dei veri precetti della pittura. The relevant passage reads: Ci song molti che prima turano i buchi alle tele con misture di farina, olio ed un terzo di bidccd ben trita, e ve la mettonG su con un coltello... Bouguereau's notes from Armenin-i read as follows:
farine-huile-blanc-ben trita
iraprima, avec un 6e de vernis
du vernis dans tous les glacis
verniss huile d'abezzo claire - a petit feu huile de sasso etendu ti chaud
mastic huile de noix (au leu) passe dans un linge pendam qu'il [?] un peu d'alun calcine et pulverise le rend plus brillant (le meler aux bleux, aux lapis qu'il fait secher)*
- 17) *Charles Moreau-Vauthier, Comment on peint aujourd'hui (Paris: Henri Floury, 1923), pp. 46-47.*
- 18) *Francois Flameng, 'Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Bouguereau,' Seance du 24 fevrier 1906, Academie des Beaux-Arts, p. 16.*
- 19) *Camille Bellanger, cited in A. Lemassier, 'Comment peignaient les grands peintres: William Bouguereau' in*

Peintures-Pigments-Vernis, December 1962, Vol. 38. No. 12, p. 734.

20) Jerome Doucet, *Les peintres francais (Paris: Librairie Felix Juven, 1906), p. 169.*

21) Emile Bayard, cited in A. Lemassier, p. 733. 22. Francois Flameng, 'Notice...', p. 16.

22) Emile Bayard, cited in A. Lemassier, p. 733. 22. Francois Flameng, 'Notice...', p. 16.

23) *Ibid.*

24) 'Siccatif de Courtrai' was a term applied to dryers of diverse quality made by many different manufacturers, each of whom seems to have use a different recipe. This lack of uniformity may well have been the real cause of the siccative's bad reputation. Siccatif de Courtrai was made by heating linseed oil in the presence of litharge and a salt of manganese. According to Ludovic Pierre, the siccative, when used correctly, did not impair the longevity of a painting: 'It is a very powerful siccative when it is well made; it is also sufficient to add it in small proportions to the color one desires to dry rapidly. We believe that when used with the greatest moderation, it is not as deleterious as has been suggested by some, but obviously one has to be cautious.

Its dark brown color., looks like black coffee and tends to muddy lighter tones... (Ludovic Pierre. Renseignements sur les couleurs, vernis, huiles, essences, siccatifs et fixatifs employes dans la peinture artistique (Paris: Imp. F. Schmidt, n.d.), pp. 100-101) Bouguereau also mentions 'huile grasse' in some of his formulas. The substance seems to have been either Courtrai or something very similar. Again according to Pierre: 'Huile grasse a tableau' is linseed oil heated with a small quantity of lead and manganese products which render it very siccative (Pierre, p. 89). The fact that Bouguereau refers to it once as 'huile grasse brune' would also lead one to believe that it was basically the same product as 'siccatif de Courtrai.' Bouguereau also mentions the use of 'huile grasse blanche;' Pierre gives the following information: 'Huile grasse blanche' is pure clarified poppy oil treated in a special way with certain siccative agents using a base of lead and manganese; it acquires siccative properties without becoming discolored. Thus it is sold under the name 'huile grasse blanche.' We can be no more precise as to its employ than we can for 'huile grasse a tableau.' It is never transparent, but always displays a somewhat milky appearance.

Pierre also gives a description of 'Siccatif de Haarlem': 'Siccatif de Haarlem' was invented by M. Durozier the pharmacist, now deceased. We can do no better than repeat what he said himself about his product. This siccative replaces 'huile grasse' and all the other siccatives using lead bases; it is characterized by its ability to preserve tones, inhibit 'sinking in,' and prevent cracking. It can be diluted with both oil and turpentine; it renders glazes solid and can serve as the final varnish when extended with rectified turpentine.

(Pierre, p. 101)

Products bearing the names 'siccatif de Haarlem Duroziez [sic]' and 'siccatif flamand' are still manufactured by Lefranc & Bourgeois; one of their brochures gives the following description:

'Siccatif de Haarlem Duruziez': This painting medium is, like 'siccatif flamand' made from a base of Madagascar copal resin. While it is less concentrated, it possesses the same characteristics. Besides the difference in color, it dries less rapidly than 'siccatif flamand.' (Les mediums pour les couleurs a l'huile [Paris: Lefranc & Bourgeois, 1982], h.p.).

Ludovic Pierre comments on 'siccatif flamand,' which was also an invention of Duroziez: ...'Siccatif flamand' could be called the twin brother of 'siccatif de Haarlem. '...in a technical sense, this product is not a true siccative, although it does facilitate drying of the colors to which it is added; it is composed of oil, turpentine, and hard copal resin. 'Siccatif flamand' contains no lead and may be mixed with turpentine in all proportions without coagulating. It can be added to oil colors without fear of the colors altering as they age. It is only slightly colored and has no effect on light tones (Pierre, p. 102).

Hilaire Hiller gives the following information concerning oliesse:

A painting medium used by Gérôme:

Oil copal varnish mixed with Duroziez oil - 4 parts

Rectified oil of spike or turpentine - 3 parts

Mix well by agitation, pouring the spike or turps on the copal-oil mixture. Girardot said that this medium gave paintings 'the solidity of flint.' The Duroziez oil is prepared by the firm of Duroziez of Paris, and it is known by the trade name of Oliesse. (Hilaire Hiller, *Notes on the Technique of Painting* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1969), p. 167, reprinted from the edition of 1934.)

- 25) Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Comment on peint aujourd'hui*, pp. 37, 38, 63, 64.
- 26) 'Terebine' is not to be confused with 'terebenthine' (turpentine). Bouguereau notes: 'Terebine sold at the color merchant, 3 or 5 Quai Voltaire, can replace, siccatif soleil, which in turn can replace siccatif of Courtrai (Sketch book No. 2, 1894.)
- According to M. Henri Sennelier of Sennelier, 3 quai Voltaire, 'terebine' was a 'dryer made with American turpentine' (more siccatif by itself than its European counterpart). Apparently, terebine was a variation of 'terebine francais' which contained one of several possible dryers, among them; resinat de plomb (lead resinat) linoleate de plomb (lead linoleate) linoleate de manganese (manganese linoleate) It is probable that terebine was the same product known today as 'Siccatif de Courtrai, blanc.' Ludovic Pierre describes the latter: ...A siccatif with a turpentine base which is extremely clear, almost without color, but which certainly has none of the siccatif energy of true 'Siccatif de Courtrai,' for it dries the colors much less rapidly and does not harden them as well (Pierre, p. 101).
- 27) Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Comment on peint aujourd'hui*, p. 24.
- 28) William Bouguereau, sketchbook No. 5, 1869. Bouguereau Family Estate.
- 29) William Bouguereau, excerpt from a letter published in *Les peintres et la couleur* (Paris: Lefranc, 1925), n.p.
- 30) William Bouguereau, sketchbook No. 2, 1894. Bouguereau Family Estate.
- 31) Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *La Peinture* (Paris: Hachette, 1913), p. 210.
- 32) Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Comment on peint aujourd'hui*, p. 21.
- 33) William Bouguereau, quoted in 'M. Bouguereau chez lui', n.p.
- 34) Emile Bayard, 'William Bouguereau' in *Le Monde Moderne*, p. 854.
- 35) Richard Lack, *Bouguereau's Legacy to the Student of Painting* (Minneapolis: Atelier Lack, Inc., 1982), p. 4.
- 36) The birds served the artist as models for the plumage of his angels and cupids.
- 37) Paul Eudel, 'Les ateliers des peintres: William Bouguereau', in *L'Illustration*, 30 June 1888.
- 38) William Bouguereau, quoted in 'M. Bouguereau chez lui.'
- 39) *ibid.*
- 40) Vachon, p. 99.
- 41) William Bouguereau, letter to Eugene Bouguereau, Paris 16 October 1886. Bouguereau Family Estate.
- 42) William Bouguereau, letter to Henriette Bouguereau, 22 July 1877. Bouguereau Family Estate.
- 43) 1866; *First Caresses*, 1866; *Covetousness*, 1866; and *Sleeping Children*, 1868.
- 44) Sketchbook No. 32 (1861-1875), sketchbook No. 33 (1866-1886), and sketchbook No. 34 (1882-1894). Bouguereau Family Estate.
- 45) William Adolphe Bouguereau, letter to [?], 23 August 1871, La Rochelle. Collection of Mark Steven Walker.
- 46) Ludovic Baschet, *Catalogue illustre des oeuvres de W. Bouguereau* (Paris: Librairie d'Art, 1885), p. 51.
- 47) Vachon, p. 114.

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