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LE COLIN-MAILLARD (THE BLINDMAN'S BUFF). OIL ON CANVAS. H. 62.5 CM, W. 75.5 CM.

JEAN BAPTISTE PATER (VALENCIENNES 1695 – 1736 PARIS)

Jean Baptiste Pater (Valenciennes 1695 – 1736 Paris)

Le Colin-Maillard (The blindman's buff)

Oil on canvas

H. 62.5 cm (24½ in.), w. 75.5 cm (29¾ in)

In a wooded landscape, next to a sculpture of cupid sitting on a dolphin and a shell-shaped fountain, eight elegantly dressed young women surround a sculpture of Hermes with a satyr face. The three women seated to the left hold a shepherdess crook and a bagpipe. The other four appear frivolous and surround the smirking Hermes while decorating him with flowers. In the center, facing the viewer, a young woman points towards a playful couple. The woman, also the main protagonist, removes the blindfold obstructing her view while a man pulls her by the arm. A shepherd's crook embellished with flowers sits at his feet. A cupid pushes them towards the group of women while three other putti drop flowers on the lovers. A village sets the stage in the rapidly sketched blue background, while a couple can be seen under the trees. Jean Baptiste Pater has depicted the most ordinary of youthful pleasures associated with the game of Love. The role of entertainment in this game is

portrayed explicitly. A young man gives the blindfold woman a kiss as cupid pushes the couple towards a group of women smitten with Hermes. Love may be blind, but stimulated by the exuberance of a game such as Blind Man's Buff, it ultimately triumphs. Pater used a composition similar to Watteau's in the *Pèlerinage à l'île de Cythère*. On one side he placed a group of characters in the darkness of the forest and extends the scene with undulating movement towards a misty background, tinted with shades of blue and grey. In this painting, the scene's focus is on the left, and lightens up to the right towards the clearing and the couple of shepherds. Pater introduced a simplicity in the composition using a different background and foreground. The light and colors of his painting are influenced by the warmth of Rubens' work. The smooth brushstrokes and fluid, flat paint surface reinforce the gracious character of the movements and the narrative. This painting holds a special place among the artist's works. It shows how Pater distinguishes himself from his master. Most likely painted during his last fifteen years, after Watteau's death, this painting creates a certain proximity between the viewer and the figures in the foreground, similar to actors on a stage. The foreground is empty and the young woman invites us into the painting. Pater gave Cupid a more active role here than in other *fêtes galantes*. The perfect Rococo-style cupid and putti in the sky animate the scene. They intervene like real characters. Pater drew his inspiration from the theater. Furthermore, he accentuated the singular character of his paintings by combining the grace and charm of wrinkled costumes with the extreme elegance of the characters playing a simple outdoor game. Before beginning a painting, Pater produced numerous sketches, noting gestures and poses. His composition method was similar to that of his master, Watteau. "When he decided to do a painting, he turned to his collection. He chose the figures that best suited his needs for that occasion. With them he formed groups, most often over a landscape he had already designed or prepared." This technique was very useful and widely utilized to produce copies. When he had to compose a painting, Pater chose the figures that pleased him most among his elegant and polished drawings. He would cut them out so that he could fit them together as he wished for his composition. When he wanted a figure facing the opposite direction, he simply turned over the cut-out drawing. This reversal of figures was commonly used for counter-proofs, often utilized by Watteau himself. The woman to the left in this work, with her back to the viewer, her face in profile, and leaning slightly backwards, appears in the opposite direction in *Le Colin-Maillard*, in the Wallace collection in London (F. Ingersoll-Smouse, n° 295, reproduced fig. 21) (fig. 1). This same woman reappears in *La Balançoire* (canvas, 45.5 x 66 cm. See the exhibition catalogue, *Watteau et la fête galante*, Valenciennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2004, n° 82) preserved at the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge (fig. 2). Pater enjoyed considerable success during his lifetime. With his technique, he could reproduce the same painting for other patrons. Florence Ingersoll-Smouse has identified two other replicas of comparable size of this same painting. One was painted for Frederick the Great and is in New Palace of Potsdam (F. Ingersoll-Smouse, n° 292, reproduced fig. 65) (fig. 3), while the second is a variation of this last one. It belonged to Frederick II and is now in Potsdam (F. Ingersoll-Smouse, n° 293, reproduced fig. 77) (fig. 4). Pater made more or less significant changes in these different versions. The main group was scarcely modified, but the architectural and decorative elements differ. In the second painting in Potsdam, the putto sculpture on the left has its back to the viewer, and Pater eliminated the group of three seated women. Admitted to the Royal Academy in 1728 as a "painter with the special talent in *fêtes galantes*," Pater treated a popular scene with an elegant style, close to that of theater. The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture used this new theme of "Gallant festivities" to qualify Antoine Watteau's *morceau de réception* (a work demonstrating his proficiency in painting), *Le Pèlerinage à l'île de Cythère*. This description designated an outdoor celebration by aristocratic men and women who may be lovers. This name designates a specific genre of art work, between historical painting and genre paintings. As in historical painting, the genre of *fêtes galantes* represented an event. As opposed to historical painting, however, the event is not recognizable. As in a genre scene, the *fêtes galantes* portray human activities, including everyday entertainment and without any reference to a clearly defined social function. This new genre broke with the academic painting of Louis XIV's *Grande Siècle*. Gallant topics deal with love. Musical instruments and the allegorical sculpted groups create a two-fold expression with an ambiguous meaning. The elegant and gracious youth are painted in light colors. In a country-style *décor*, they dance, play

music, and converse. They lose themselves to the pleasures of seduction and the sweetness of the moment. Nature is taken as is, and the landscape plays a major role. This new world derives from theater, from Dancourt and Marivaux's role reversals, as well as from Honoré d'Urfé's novel, *L'Astrée*. The dominant theatrical character of this painting resembles the work of Charles Joseph Natoire and his series on Don Quichotte (fig. 5). By representing these elegant games in a rich natural environment, such as Colin-Maillard or La Balançoire, this painting is reminiscent of the Age of Enlightenment, François Boucher's pastoral scenes, or Jean Honoré Fragonard during his series on *Evolution de l'Amour dans le cœur d'une jeune fille*, preserved at the Frick Collection in New York. Our painting shows us the extent to which Pater was a narrator his epoch's customs. He was a perfect stage director to express the rituals and ceremonials of the *fêtes galantes* in an appropriate setting. In 1645, in his *Remarques*, Vaugelas defines this 'gallant' term in the following terms: "This gallant word designates a composition that incorporates a 'je ne sais quoi', the court's atmosphere, spirit, judgment, civility, courtesy, and joyfulness; all without constraint, pretention, and vice." Jean Baptiste Pater (Valenciennes 1695 – Paris 1736) As a faithful and talented successor of Antoine Watteau, ten years his elder, Jean Baptiste Pater enjoyed considerable success during his lifetime. Like Antoine Watteau, he was also from Valenciennes, the second child in a family of five. His father Antoine was an ornamentalist sculptor, while his uncle was a painter. Jean Baptiste began painting in Valenciennes but left for Paris in 1711 after the death of his first teacher, Jean Baptiste Guidé, to join his famous compatriot, Antoine Watteau. Jean Baptiste Pater's father "believed that, for a compatriot, Watteau would be able to help his son improve. He therefore sent him there for the purpose of training him." Jean Baptiste Pater is the only artist to have studied under Watteau. According to Edmé-François Gersaint, however, Pater's Master had a "bad temper and is too impatient to lend himself to a student's weaknesses and progress ... The young Pater had to make it through and ensure that he could teach himself." Edmé-François Gersaint was the merchant who commissioned the painting *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*, painted by Antoine Watteau and kept in Berlin (see E. F. Gersaint, *Catalogue raisonné des diverses curiosités du cabinet de feu M. Quentin de Lorangère*, Paris, 1744, p. 193-97). From around 1715 to 1718, Jean Baptiste Pater lived in Valenciennes again. Various accounts highlight some of the issues that he and his father had with the guild of Saint Luke, which required that painters be members if they wished to practice and sell their work. In 1716, Pater was accused of defrauding "the art of painters." In 1719, a ruling was given in favor of the guild of Saint Luke. Pater was then officially banned from practicing in Valenciennes, after which he returned to Paris. Around 1720, Pater was painting military subjects and village festivities. In 1721, Watteau, dying and filled with remorse, called his young and only student back to him. According to Gersaint: "During his last days, Watteau blamed himself for acknowledging the natural aptitude that he saw in Pater ... He then had misgivings for not having helped to cultivate these talents. He asked me to bring him [Pater] to Nogent to repair the wrong he had caused through his negligence, but also to at least offer the training he could still provide. Watteau made Pater work in front of him and dedicated his last days to him." In 1721, "death took Watteau prematurely. He [Pater] confessed to me that he owed everything he knew to that short amount of time. He totally forgot the unfortunate times he experienced in his youth with this master and always felt enormous gratitude." Pater certainly finished some of Watteau's unfinished pieces. This proximity with the master's work is present throughout his own work. In 1721, Pater therefore inherited his master's commissions. He provided work to all the merchants and connoisseurs paintings of Watteau, including Gersaint, and Jean de Julienne, director of royal dyes and linens manufacturing. Pater registered at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1725. He was then accepted as a member in 1728 as a "painter with a special talent for *fêtes galantes*" with the work *Les Réjouissances des soldats*, very influenced by Watteau's work. It is now in the Louvre. It is difficult to establish a precise chronology of Pater's works during this period. His finest paintings were produced from 1725 on. He appeared to use painting as a pretext to celebrate women's grace, beauty, and youth and to evoke the pleasures of love. Meetings in a park, outdoor concerts, and games among company created an easy and entertaining life. He worked constantly: "Starting at daybreak, he would enter his studio leaving only to obey nature's needs: he never wasted a single moment ... this continuous and relentless work ethic overtaxed his body so much that he suffered an illness,

which took him swiftly in the prime of life." Pater died young, at 41, in his home on Rue Quincampoix. He was buried the following day, on 26 July 1736, in the Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs Church in Paris. Jean Baptiste Pater and Germany Jean Baptiste Pater experienced tremendous success and received prestigious orders from the Prince Frederick II of Prussia. This European monarch was the principal collector of the "Fêtes galantes" paintings by Antoine Watteau, Nicolas Lancret, Jean Baptiste Pater and artists of their entourage. In 1744, he acquired nearly 200 eighteenth-century French paintings for his Charlottenburg castle. Frederick II was an avid art connoisseur and collector. A keen Francophile, he was a correspondent and host of Voltaire in Potsdam. In 1750, Prussia became a major European power. The construction of the New Palace of Sanssouci in Potsdam, which began in 1763, marked the artistic expression of this new ambition. Its purpose was to host the heir to the throne, members of his family, and their guests, as well as ceremonies. It is during this time and through the intermediary of Parisian merchants that Frederick II purchased many French paintings. Most notable was *Le Pèlerinage à l'île de Cythère*, the second version of Watteau's painting produced for the Jullienne collection, as well as large paintings by Jean Baptiste Pater. These were bought to decorate the newly built rooms of the New Palace. Certain rooms were especially designed and constructed to receive specific works. The "Fêtes galantes" constituted an ideal form of civility and sociability that fascinated the domineering and enlightened despot of Prussia, a skilled flute player himself. They contrasted with the austerity of his father's court, Frederick William I, and represented an antithesis to the worlds of responsibilities and duties of the government, instead promoting a world of peace, pleasure, and individual freedom. This was a world that reminded him of his peaceful days spent at his Rheinsberg castle, northwest of Berlin, from 1736 to 1740.

Provenance:

A. Febvre sale, Paris, 17-20 April 1882 (Maître Chevallier), n° 28 (sold 21.000frcs); Collection E. Keyser, Paris, 1892; Collection Michel Ephrussi, Paris; Sedelmeyer, Paris, 1911; Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 18 April 1980, n° 104, reproduced; Harari and Johns, London.

Exhibitions

- Cent Chefs-d'Oeuvres des Collections françaises et étrangères, Paris, 1892.

- "Scherz - Die heitere Seite der Aufklärung". Exhibition at Gleimhaus Halberstadt to celebrate the 300th birthday of Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, 15th of June - 15th of September 2019.

Literature:

Catalogue de la collection Sedelmeyer, 1911, n° 85, reproduced; F. Ingersoll-Smouse, Pater, Paris, 1921, n° 294 (replica or copy of the Potsdam work n° 292, reproduced); Exhibition catalogue An Exhibition of French Painting 1600-1800, Tokyo, Galerie Lida, 1988, mentioned under n° 10 (autograph copy).

