

# ♦ OUDRY'S PAINTED MENAGERIE ♦

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CREATED DURING A HIGH POINT OF ENLIGHTENED ROYAL patronage of both the fine arts and scientific exploration, Jean-Baptiste Oudry's painted menagerie served a complex of purposes. The original function of this suite of animal paintings has been the source of some debate.<sup>1</sup> Painted between 1739 and 1745, each picture was exhibited at the annual Salon in Paris, with the entry in the accompanying *livret* (small catalogue) stating that it was ordered by or for King Louis XV.<sup>2</sup> In the end, however, the paintings were sold to a patron even more loyal to Oudry than the French king, the great German francophile Christian Ludwig II, the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

According to Oudry, in his letter of March 1750 advertising the suite to Christian Ludwig, the paintings depict "the principal animals of the king's menagerie, all of which I have painted from life on the order of His Majesty and under the guidance of Monsieur de La Peyronie, the king's first surgeon, who wanted to have them engraved and thus form a suite of natural history for the Botanical Garden of His Majesty." Probably intended as a gift of gratitude by François Gigot de La Peyronie to the king for his generous patronage of the surgeon's career, the suite was left in Oudry's studio when La Peyronie died in 1747. Oudry also states that the paintings were to serve as documents of natural history, both as engraved reproductions, and as installations at the Jardin du roi (also known as the Jardin des plantes), the Parisian center for the study of natural history.<sup>3</sup> This marvelous suite of paintings, then, must be viewed within the context not only of Louis XV's royal menagerie at Versailles but also of the burgeoning field of natural history in mid-eighteenth-century France, and finally of Oudry's role as one of foremost court painters of the day, not only in France but also in Germany.

## ♦ THE KING'S MENAGERIE

Life-size portraits of inhabitants of Louis XV's menagerie, Oudry's suite of paintings celebrated some of the star specimens of the king's collection of exotic animals, thus extending the authority and prestige of the French ruler. The menagerie at Versailles was in fact inherited entirely from his great-grandfather Louis XIV, whose construction of a live display of exotic animals in his gardens was inspired by a princely tradition (see Marina Belozerskaya's essay in this catalogue).

The Versailles menagerie, completely destroyed during the French Revolution, was designed by Louis Le Vau between 1662 and 1669 in the southwest corner of the park (see Belozerskaya, fig. 8). Le Vau's design was quite innovative, bringing together the animal exhibits into a centralized area, as opposed to scattering the animals in mini-exhibits across the park. The animal enclosures fanned out from a central courtyard in which stood a small château with an octagonal observation room. The pens were landscaped with flora, decorative sculptures, basins and fountains, creating the world's first zoological garden. Le Vau's creation, then, was a highly organized spectacle offering a splendid visual array of lovely, live luxury objects.<sup>4</sup>

The menagerie never was intended to be an encyclopedic zoo, but rather a gathering of interesting animals compiled through royal commission and gifts of diplomacy, a kind of living *cabinet de curiosité*. Exotic animals were imported on merchant ships alongside sugar, coffee, indigo, and African slaves and were therefore intimately connected to colonialism and the luxury trade. Given the difficulty of transporting, handling, and maintaining them, live animals carried a high premium. As colonial trade to Africa, the Americas, and the East Indies blossomed, specimens from these regions signified the growing reach of French mercantile power.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to its function as ostentatious decoration within the royal architectural complex of Versailles, the royal menagerie served as a source of research for both natural scientists and artists. Scholarly use of princely

menageries added to the prestige of the princes themselves, as such activities supported their role as leaders of the Enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> Menageries also served as a new source of inspiration for visual imagery and the fine arts. Flemish painters Nicasiaus Bernaerts (1620–1678) and Pieter Boel (1622–1674), both students of Frans Snyders (1579–1657), used animals from the Versailles menagerie as models for paintings and drawings that were in turn developed into decorative tapestries at the Gobelins manufactory. Other artists who visited the royal menagerie included painters Jean-François de Troy (1679–1752), François Boucher (1703–1770), Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743), Carle Van Loo (1705–1765), Claude III Audran (1658–1743), and Hubert Robert (1733–1808), and sculptors Pierre Puget (1620–1694) and Corneille Van Clève (1646–1732).<sup>7</sup>

The fashionable profile of the Versailles menagerie declined when the royal court moved back to Paris during the Regency and the early part of Louis XV's reign.<sup>8</sup> Although it would eventually regain a place in court life, the menagerie was never of as much interest to Louis XV as it had been to his great-grandfather. He did not continue the practice of commissioning colonial governors and merchant marine companies to import exotic animals, instead expanding and resupplying his collection through the more passive acceptance of tributes from naval and colonial officers.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible that Louis XV's disaffection from the menagerie influenced his lack of interest in acquiring Oudry's series of animal portraits after La Peyronie's death.<sup>10</sup> Equally, La Peyronie's original plan of commissioning the works as a gift for Louis XV was perhaps intended as much to pique the king's interest in his menagerie, zoology, and the Jardin des plantes as to honor and please him.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, the king was partial to Oudry as a great painter of hunting, the hunt being one cultural event consistently favored by the king. Oudry had also painted several portraits of His Highness's hunting dogs, painting the name of each beloved canine in clear letters within the compositions.

Oudry was a regular visitor to the royal menagerie, starting in the late 1720s.<sup>12</sup> When he exhibited the animal portraits at the annual Salon, beginning with *Indian Blackbuck* ("Gazelle"), *Mufflon* ("Bouquetin de Barbarie"), and *Hyena* ("Loup cervier de la Louisiane") in 1739, he mentioned in the *livret* that the subjects lived in the Versailles menagerie, and that their portraits were ultimately intended for the king.<sup>13</sup> Particularly during a period in which the number of visitors to the menagerie was in decline, the paintings served to advertise the king's collection of exotic animals.

#### ◆ OUDRY'S HISTOIRE NATURELLE

According to Oudry's letter to the duke of Schwerin quoted above (and reproduced in the appendix to Christoph Frank's essay), the paintings were also conceived as empirical documents recording natural specimens. They thus participated in the burgeoning contemporary field of natural history.

Oudry's empiricism was central to his artistic philosophy: In his lectures at the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1749 and 1752, he repeatedly emphasized direct study from nature. At every step of the construction of a painting, Oudry counseled, check nature again and again. Although only three of the paintings were engraved for use in natural history texts—*Mufflon*, *Rhinoceros*, and *Lynx* (the last painting has been lost or destroyed)—the precision and sensitivity with which Oudry recorded the details of each animal's appearance was of generally recognized scientific value.<sup>14</sup> The importance at the time of firsthand, empirically based pictorial records of these unusual animals cannot be underestimated. There was a long history of zoological fantasy in European visual culture, including the medieval bestiary in which fantastic animals serve as moralizing symbols. Unicorns and jackalopes appeared in zoological treatises into the sixteenth century, for example, and a fantastic conception of the rhinoceros prevailed until Oudry's corrective portrait of Clara (see Charissa Bremer-David's essay in this catalogue).

The naturalist's enterprise was founded on description. As the sixteenth-century Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi stated, "description yielded definition, definition order, and order knowledge."<sup>15</sup> In line with a venerable tradition, most famously exemplified by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), who combined firsthand experience, artistic recording, and scientific knowledge, natural history texts depended on visual information provided by artists.<sup>16</sup>

The great natural historian Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, well understood the power of the illustrative *planche* (plate), for the broad dissemination of scientific information, and for the popular success of his natural history books. Appointed director of the Jardin du roi in 1739, he longed to create a comprehensive illustrated work on natural history.<sup>17</sup> Buffon's thirty-six volume work, *Histoire naturelle* (1749–88) included 1,290 prints, most of which were done after drawings by Jacques de Sève (d. 1795) in order to give the illustrations a uniformity of style (an additional eight volumes were published after Buffon's death, the final and forty-fourth volume appearing in 1804). Some were drawn from living animals at Versailles,

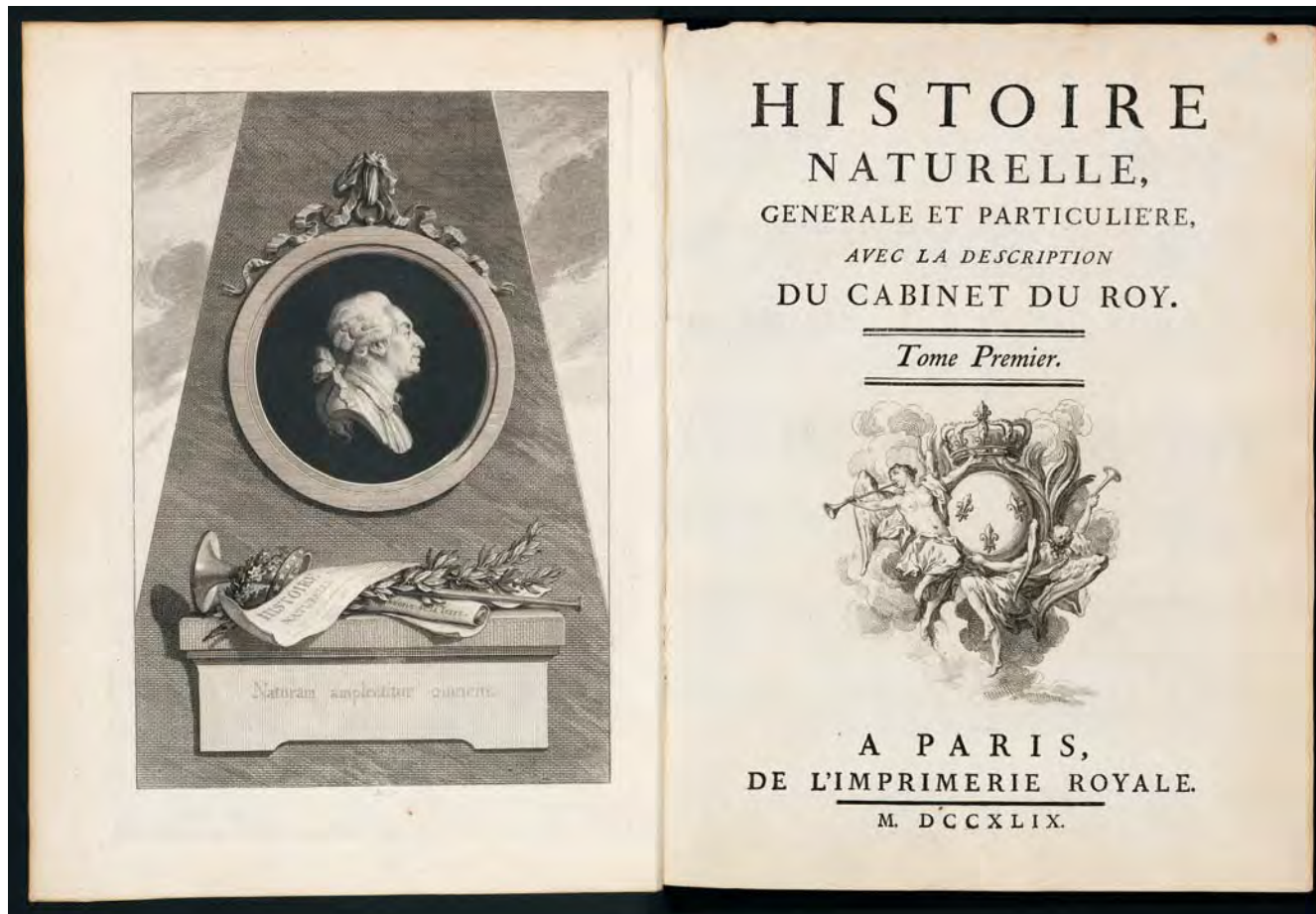


FIGURE 1  
Frontispiece from Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1749), including a dedication to King Louis XV. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 84-B8203.

some from preserved specimens, and some from images by other artists, as in the case of Oudry's *Rhinoceros* (plate 11). Buffon's book was in fact one of the most popular French-language books of the time, rivaled only by Denis Diderot and Jean Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.<sup>18</sup>

Both Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* and Oudry's painted menagerie corresponded to the building wave of interest in natural history among the nobility and cultural elite in the eighteenth century. The vogue for natural history was encouraged by the rise in colonial trade, feeding an avid market for exotic creatures. Between 1710 and 1770, the value of foreign trade quintupled in France, and by the end of the century hundreds of ships traveled each year to the Caribbean, Africa, India, and the Far East.<sup>19</sup> In Paris, exotic animals proliferated on the streets, in homes, and in jokes, poems, stories, posters, and paintings.

Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was initially inspired by the desire to describe and catalog the king's natural history collection, just as Oudry's suite was initially intended to record central animals in the king's menagerie. Both projects were, on the surface, intended to glorify the monarch, becoming part of a long history of zoological works with royal patronage (fig. 1). (Perhaps the earliest instance of such patronage was when Alexander the Great, eager to

know about all living things, commissioned his tutor Aristotle to create fifty books on the subject.<sup>20</sup>) Inspired by the contemporary taxonomic impulse, the animals in Buffon's plates and Oudry's paintings are ordered and organized into separate framed spaces.

Oudry's animal paintings and Buffon's textual "descriptions" also shared a sympathetic view of animals, often projecting onto them human sentiments and evoking their "character." In Enlightenment intellectual circles the debate about the character of animals was quite heated, with one camp denying the presence of intellect and soul in animals, the other arguing that there was a similarity between animals and humans, both materially and emotionally/spiritually. Although of an earlier generation, Jean de La Fontaine was a central figure in these debates, positing in such works as his *Fables* an image of animals as reasonable and sentient. Between 1729 and 1734, Oudry created 276 drawings for illustrations of La Fontaine's *Fables*, in which the animals perform as feeling actors in a visual drama.<sup>21</sup> This training clearly translated to his highly expressive animal paintings. *Histoire naturelle*, in which Buffon treated animals under the same analytical and taxonomic rubrics as he did humans, similarly advanced a conception of animals as capable of behaving beyond instinctual motivations.

Finally, Oudry's paintings and the plates in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* shared a refined, even decorative presentation. The illustrations for *Histoire naturelle* are exquisitely engraved, endowed with elegance and visual charm. Neither Oudry nor Buffon insert the animals into their natural habitats but rather place them on compositional stages, their backdrops intended to enhance their visual appeal. While both visual strategies foreground the empirical, they are equally affected by an impulse to engage and please.

#### ◆ ROYAL DECORATION

Oudry's animal suite had been intended as a decorative scheme for the Jardin du roi, according to the artist's letter to Christian Ludwig. The death of La Peyronie left the original intention unfulfilled, and the paintings, without a home, were available to the German duke for a negotiable price. An avid francophile, as were many members of European nobility at the time, Christian Ludwig was more than happy to acquire a spectacular group of animal paintings by his favorite French painter. The paintings were shipped to Schwerin and installed in the duke's castle as a decorative, virtual menagerie.

Christian Ludwig may have been attracted to Oudry's offer of the menagerie series for any of a variety of reasons. The prestige of not only the paintings' but also the depicted animals' royal French provenance would certainly have appealed to the duke, who emulated Versailles in the design of his palace and its gardens. He had patronized Oudry for some eighteen years and had a successful working relationship with the French painter, not only as a supplier of his own paintings but also as an agent who led the German duke and his son to other contemporary French artists. Finally, the duke was in the midst of building a new picture gallery for the Schwerin castle, expanding the exhibition capacity for his growing collection.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, whatever the duke's reasons, he acquired in the menagerie series a consummate performance by one of the great court painters of the day. Oudry brought to bear not only his experience working with tapestry designs at Beauvais, where he was a highly productive and influential painter in the tapestry works from 1726, and then director from 1734 to 1755, but also, more importantly, the influence of his first master, Nicolas de Largillière. In his animal portrayals, Oudry adopted the theatrical conventions of stately portraiture: the heightened effects of gesture and pose, dramatized

light effects, imaginary landscape backdrops, and sensual color of the Venetian and Flemish masters.<sup>23</sup>

These Rococo elements stand apart from the more straightforward animal paintings by Alexandre-François Desportes, Oudry's main competitor in the genre. Oudry's slightly idealized animals are elegant, dignified, and noble. Although his backdrops occasionally suggest the animals' natural habitat, they are essentially decorative constructions designed to enhance the impact of the "sitter." The details of the animals' real environments have been eliminated—the menagerie walls, the cages—and they have been placed in vague and neutralized settings. Compare, for example, the portrayal of the rhinoceros Clara by an unknown painter of the Venetian school (see Bremer-David, fig. 6), at the Venice Carnevale in 1751, in her pen with her food and water, surrounded by spectators, her cart visible in the upper left of the composition, to Oudry's iconic, majestic portrait, in splendid full scale (plate 11).

Although they share the taxonomic and empirical impulse of natural history illustrations, Oudry's representations are perhaps best appreciated within the context of court portraiture. While the natural history prints were usually engraved in black and white, Oudry had a full range of color at his disposal, as well as the more descriptive medium of oil paint. Furthermore, in contrast to the subdued presentations of animals in the prints, Oudry's subjects have been endowed with personality. They are clearly the individual animals Oudry visited in Versailles, each displaying distinct personas and particular modes of behavior. In a way, then, Oudry was painting the "truth," not just of anatomy and texture and color but also of the perceived character of the animal. Hal Opperman notes that this was a strikingly new kind of animal imagery: "Contemporaries were much more aware of the sentimental qualities of Oudry's animals than we, who have seen [Victorian painter] Landseer and Bambi."<sup>24</sup>

Oudry's technique was perfectly suited to this "truthful" portrayal. He laid in his compositions with a quick, sure application of thinly applied paint, a process that allowed him to maintain a sense of liveliness about the beast and to give a sense of its personality. He then very carefully applied layers of glazes, building up a highly illusionistic *beau terminé* (polished finish).<sup>25</sup>

There is a sense of immediacy in these portraits, and of course that is the essential trickery of successful portraiture—the illusion of the subject's real presence. Oudry presents them at full scale, placed in the foreground on a shallow stage. Several of the animals in the suite look back, seemingly

aware of our presence: the blackbuck tensely halted, ears erect; the cassowary's beady eye gazing directly out of the picture plane. Oudry provides the kind of visual contact one longs for on a visit to the zoo, the intimate, tangible proximity to exotic, dangerous beasts that is generally impeded by fences, glass enclosures, moats, or crowds, not to mention the reluctant performances of the animals themselves.

THE PLATE SECTION THAT FOLLOWS is introduced by Oudry's portrait of Christian Ludwig's son Friedrich, who in the last third of the duke's life played such an important role in expanding the ducal art collection. The prince's portrait is followed by ten of the thirteen paintings listed in Oudry's March 1750 letter to the duke: nine portraits of animals from the Versailles menagerie, plus the portrait of Clara (see Christoph Frank's essay, pp. 52–53). The final plate illustrates Oudry's painting of one of the Versailles lions, completed and sold in 1752 to the duke. Missing is the first painting on Oudry's list, "un léopard" (now titled *Tiger*), also from the Schwerin collection, which is currently undergoing treatment in the Getty Museum's conservation studio (fig. 2). Also missing from Oudry's original list are "le chat-cervier" and "le guide-lion." Both these paintings of lynxes went to Schwerin with the suite of menagerie paintings, but in the tumultuous history of the Schwerin collection, they are no longer accounted for.<sup>26</sup> ♦



FIGURE 2  
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Tiger*, 1740. Oil on canvas (pre-conservation), 158 × 191 cm (62¼ × 75¼ in.).  
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum.

#### Notes

1. See the essays in this catalogue by Colin Bailey and Christoph Frank, as well as Opperman 1977 and Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4.
2. See Opperman 1977, pp. 112–13.
3. There has been some discussion as to the suite's intended destination as decoration, whether for a building such as the Trianon at Versailles or for the Jardin du roi in Paris. Opperman takes his cue from Oudry's reference in his 1750 letter to the duke regarding the suite that they were intended for "le Jardin de Botanique de Sa Majesté" and assumes this royal botanical garden is at Versailles. Salmon also originally assumed that the "Jardin botanique du Roi" is at Versailles (see Salmon 1995). By the time of the *Animaux d'Oudry* exhibition Salmon recognized that the garden referred to by Oudry must have been the Jardin du roi in Paris (Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 139). See also A. Schnapper, "Exposition J. B. Oudry, 1686–1755, Paris, Grand Palais, 1er octobre 1982–3 janvier 1983," *Kunstchronik* 36, no. 2 (February 1983), p. 103.
4. Robbins 2002, pp. 38–40. See also Iriye 1994, p. 44, "With the Ménagerie, the modern notion of a zoo as a compound of animals brought together for human contemplation was first realized on a grand scale." See also Loisel 1912.
5. Robbins 2002, pp. 7, 12, and 17; Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier 2002, p. 17; and Lacroix 1978. The last article, based on ship diaries in the archives of the French East India Company, makes the point that the import of exotic animals from India dominated over that of Africa during much of the eighteenth century in France.
6. Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier 2002, p. 66.
7. Loisel 1912, p. 122.
8. Robbins 2002, p. 45.
9. Robbins 2002, p. 20.
10. Although no known documents trace a formal offer of the paintings to Louis XV, he must have been aware of the suite's availability for purchase, given the fact that they were advertised as having been done for His Royal Majesty at the Salon exhibitions.
11. La Peyronie was a "demonstrator" at the Jardin du roi in Paris and had dissected several species from the Versailles menagerie. He was himself very interested in exotic animals; see Salmon 2004.
12. See Salmon 2004, p. 75, and Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 116.
13. Salmon 2004, p. 82.
14. Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier 2002, p. 66.
15. Kolb 2005, p. 34.
16. Paris 1996, pp. 26, 34.
17. Clark 1977, pp. 65–67.
18. Paris 1996, p. 46, and Clark 1977, p. 65.
19. Robbins 2002, p. 13.
20. Lloyd 1971, p. 77.
21. Iriye 1994, pp. 56–153. For a discussion of Oudry's animal portrayals within the context of current discussions about animal souls, see Sarah Cohen, "Chardin's Fur: Painting, Materialism, and the Question of Animal Soul," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004), pp. 45 and 50.
22. See Christoph Frank's essay in this catalogue.
23. Cohen (see note 21 above), pp. 52–53.
24. Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 49.
25. For an explanation of Oudry's technique by the artist himself, see his second lecture at the Académie royale in 1752 in Oudry 1844.
26. See Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 487–88 (p. 347 and p. 348).

# ✦ Crown Prince Friedrich of Mecklenburg-Schwerin ✦

1739

Oil on canvas, 80.5 × 66 cm

(31<sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 26 in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

oudry painted this dashing portrait of Friedrich, son of Christian Ludwig II, the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, during the prince's prolonged visits to Paris in 1737–39. The stay in Paris was part of a larger grand tour, an educational polishing trip to the Low Countries, France, England, and Germany.<sup>1</sup> Friedrich arrived in Paris in October 1737, spent ten days visiting various cultural sites, including Oudry's studio, and then went on to Angers for several months to develop his equestrian skills at an academy there. Missing the rich social and cultural life of Paris, he returned to the capital in May 1738 and stayed for more than a year.

Painted in the first months of 1739, the portrait shows Friedrich in armor, hardly the daily dress of the young prince, but firmly in the Roman tradition of the portraits of his uncle, Christian I, and his father.<sup>2</sup> Friedrich wears a rice-powdered wig, pulled behind the head and tied in a ribbon in the French style.<sup>3</sup> Christian Ludwig had originally intended his son's portrait to be done by the most fashionable and noted royal portraitist in France, Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), who had a strong reputation in the German courts. The duke may have accepted Oudry's offer to paint the prince with some relief, however: Oudry's rates were cheaper, and he was a familiar business partner. On the picture's completion, the prince wrote to his father, "It is, according to everyone, very successful."<sup>4</sup>

Oudry had begun his career as a portraitist, training under one of the century's great practitioners of the genre, Nicolas de Largillière. The highly refined technique, the elegance, and skilled illusionism in his works were all elements Oudry learned from his early master. However, Oudry seems to have been more responsive to animal than to human expressions, an observation made more acute through the comparison of the prince's portrait to the animal portraits in the Schwerin suite. After the early years of his career, Oudry essentially gave up portraiture, and his painting of Friedrich is, in fact, one of the very few human portraits by Oudry that survive.<sup>5</sup>

Friedrich worked on his father's behalf to develop the duchy's art collection in the area of both Dutch and French art (see Christoph Frank's essay in this catalogue). The duke had a significant collection of Dutch paintings, and in his patronage of Oudry he was surely influenced by this taste. Not for him the sensual Rococo pleasures of the *fête galante*, or of the confectations of François Boucher and Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806). More austere and morally restricted, and an avid hunter, the stolid German duke preferred scenes of the hunt and of animal combat.<sup>6</sup> Prince Friedrich shared the duke's taste for the acute observation typical of Dutch painting, as well as for the work of Oudry. During his extended stay in Paris in 1739, he wrote to his father requesting funds to purchase Oudry's *Wolf Caught in a Trap* (see Frank, fig. 4). When his father declined, he bought it himself and remained an ardent devotee of Oudry.<sup>7</sup> According to Everhard Korthals Altes, Friedrich was "remarkably keen on contemporary art [both Dutch and French]."<sup>8</sup>

Friedrich served as the primary agent between Oudry and the duke in the purchase of the menagerie series in 1750, confirming the acquisition in person on a visit to Oudry. During the same visit, Oudry took the prince to the studio of François-Thomas Germain, one of the foremost silversmiths of the day, which was also in the Louvre. There, Friedrich negotiated the purchase of the spectacular silver centerpiece known as "*La machine d'argent*" (see Frank, fig. 9).<sup>9</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. I, pp. 109, 364 (p. 8); Schwerin 1986, pp. 10, 14, 55; Von Berswordt-Wallrabe 1995, pp. 196–204; New York 2004, p. 6; Rosenberg 2005, no. 755; Graulich 2006, pp. 297–314.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1982, no. 92; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, no. 48; Schwerin 2000, no. 1; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 23.

## Notes

1. See Altes 2004–5.

2. Graulich 2006, pp. 298–99, figs. 1 and 2.

3. See Droguet, entry on *Portrait du prince héritier Friedrich de Mecklembourg-*

*Schwerin* in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 92, and Locquin 1906, p. 305.

4. Locquin 1906, p. 305.

5. Droguet (see note 3 above).

6. Locquin 1906, p. 302.

7. Graulich 2006, pp. 309–10.

8. Altes 2004–5, p. 239.

9. See Solodkoff 2000 and Droguet, "Oudry et la Cour de Schwerin," in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 90.



# ✦ Bustard and Guinea Hen ✦

1739

Oil on canvas, 130 × 160 cm  
(51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63 in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

THE BUSTARD, the larger bird at the left in this composition, used to roam the steppes of Russia and Siberia, with huge flocks found across Europe. So savory a bird is the bustard, however, that it now survives only in Germany, parts of Spain, and eastern Europe, having essentially been superseded by the turkey. Although very large—it is Europe's heaviest bird—it retains an element of glamour. The male is twice as big as the female, and he is generally shy and dignified, until mating season, when, on spotting a female, he puffs up the plumes of his behind and wings and struts around his potential lover, swelling himself up to look even larger.<sup>1</sup> Oudry paints the bustard in this mating dance.

The object of the big bird's attentions is not, however, a female of its own species but rather a guinea fowl. In his representation of two exotic birds in one canvas, Oudry has created a fantasy flirtation—a kind of ornithological *fête galante*. The guinea fowl was imported to Europe from Africa by the ancient Greeks and Romans, who used them in their gardens and aviaries and cooked them as a delicacy. Romans spread them across Europe, but with the fall of the Roman Empire they largely disappeared. Portuguese traders reintroduced them in the fifteenth century from Guinea (a Portuguese colony), and they have been popular domestic birds ever since.

Called a *pintade* in French, the guinea fowl would have been found in the Versailles menagerie in a section with other species of birds, thus Oudry's representation of the two species together is to some degree "natural." The birds' decorative appeal comes from their plumage, white spots on black in overlapping patterns. These spots led to their designation in Latin as *Numida meleagris*, from the Ovidian story of Meleager, the killer of the Caledonian boar. According to the story, the sisters of Meleager were so distraught by the disappearance of their brother that they cried themselves to death. Diana, goddess of the hunt, was so moved by this that she transformed them into birds called *meleagrides*, with plumage representing spilling tears.<sup>2</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 497 (p. 374); Schwerin 1986, pp. 25, 55 (with detailed bibliography); Rosenberg 2005, no. 769.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1740; Schwerin 2000, no. 62; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 69.

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## Notes

1. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 174.

2. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 174.





# ♦ Hyena Attacked by Two Dogs ♦

1739

Oil on canvas, 130 × 190 cm  
(51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)  
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO RECORD of a hyena at Louis XV's menagerie, the precision with which the animal was painted indicates that the painting must have been inspired by a live specimen.<sup>1</sup> Called "Loup cervier de la Louisiane," or Louisiana lynx, in the Salon *livret* of 1739, the creature pictured here is actually a striped hyena, which is more rare than the brown or spotted hyena and more exotic within the menagerie than the rather ubiquitous leopards and lions. This species is found in northern and eastern Africa, Arabia, Asia Minor, and India. They are very shy; however, when threatened they erect a dark crest along their back that can make them appear up to a third larger. Oudry may have placed this menagerie animal in a combat scene (the only one in the series) in order to portray this extraordinary phenomenon.

Oudry specialized in animal combat scenes, and this painting is a perfect example of his mastery in this popular genre. In the tradition of Frans Snyders and Paul de Vos (1591–1678), Oudry often composed paintings around the climactic moments of the hunt, involving the violent confrontation between the dogs and a lone animal.<sup>2</sup> Here, two dogs, barking and

biting, attack the hyena, who, glaring and snarling, ears and fur erect, responds with an electrically charged defiance. The dogs are seen from behind, their coats are neutral in color, and one is cast in shadow while the other coils in counterpoint beneath the hyena, all of which highlights the dramatic centrality of the threatened animal.

*Hyena* was exhibited at the Salons of 1739 and 1746 and seems to have been quite successful. The composition inspired a terra-cotta by an anonymous sculptor; the sculpture includes only one of the two dogs in the painting but is otherwise very similar (fig. A).<sup>3</sup> Oudry also completed three related drawings (fig. B), probably all of them after the painting, which remained in Oudry's studio until the 1750 Schwerin acquisition.<sup>4</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1966, pp. 394–95, fig. 8; Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 425–26 (p. 191); vol. 2, fig. 253; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, pp. 65–67, fig. 37; Schwerin 1986, pp. 394–95; Rosenberg 2005, no. 763.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1739 and 1746; Schwerin 2000, no. 53; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 67; Amsterdam–Pittsburgh 2006, p. 35.



FIGURE A  
Anonymous (after Oudry), *Hyena Attacked by Dogs*, 1739. Terra-cotta, 18 × 23 cm (7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 9 in.). Sèvres, Musée Nationale de céramique, inv. MNC 23462. Photo: © Martine Beck-Coppola/Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, New York.



FIGURE B  
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Hyena Attacked by Two Dogs*, 1743. Black chalk on blue paper, 32 × 45.8 cm (12<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 18 in.). Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des arts graphiques, inv. 31.495. Photo: © Thierry Le Mage/Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

## Notes

1. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 170. At the Salon of 1746, the painting was again exhibited with the following designation in the *livret*, "Autre [tableaux] . . . représentant un Loup-Cervier de la Ménagerie, assailli par deux bouledogues; peint pour le Roy." Loisel (1912, p. x) notes that there were no inventories taken of the inhabitants of the

Versailles menagerie, nor records of new arrivals. Locquin (1906, p. 308) claims that this work was not part of the La Peyronie commission.

2. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 170.

3. Paris 1996, p. 33.

4. These are Opperman 1977, vol. 2, D 596, 602, and 603, and fig. 254. One of the paintings is signed and dated 1743 (Musée

du Louvre), another is signed and dated (private collection, New York City), and a third is neither signed nor dated (London, Courtauld Institute of Art). Another version of the drawing at the Courtauld is not signed or dated. For other instances of Oudry drawing copies of his paintings, see Opperman 1996, pp. 394–96.



## ◆ Indian Blackbuck ◆

1739

Oil on canvas, 130 × 162 cm

(51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum



FIGURE A

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Indian Blackbuck/Antelope*, ca. 1739.  
Gouache and oils on blue-green paper, 32.2 × 37.8 cm  
(12<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.). Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, inv. 6/1866.  
Photo: © National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm.

AMONG THE MOST FAMILIAR PAINTINGS in Oudry's menagerie series, *Indian Blackbuck* is a highly sensitive portrayal of this most elegant of mammals. The Indian blackbuck is a kind of antelope (*Antilope cervicapra*). The distinctive white markings on its face, underbelly, and rump, its twisting, undulating horns, and its physique, designed for speed (it can run as fast as 60 mph in the open plains), offered a perfect subject for Oudry's decorative instincts. As in his painting of the cassowary (plate 8), Oudry created a sweeping backdrop to accentuate the lovely long neck, alert facial expression, and rising V-shaped horns. The animal seems to look directly at the viewer, tensely alert to our attention.

The same animal appears in two drawings by Oudry (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), both of which were engraved, and in a painting of 1745 that includes dogs, a duck, and a pheasant.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the drawing pictured here (fig. A), probably done from life at the Versailles menagerie, the Schwerin painting is more formal, even monumental. While the drawing is a fairly clear profile, with the blackbuck's head turned somewhat toward the viewer, the Schwerin painting shows the animal slightly from behind, as if he is moving both across and away from the plane of sight, making more visible the antelope's rump. Oudry altered the pencil study in the finished oil painting, resulting in a more elegant, even seductive, representation.<sup>2</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 112 (p. 343); Schwerin 1986, pp. 8, 24, and 56; Rosenberg 2005, no. 767; Bonn 2005–6, p. 180.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1739; Leipzig 1978, no. 38; Paris 1982, no. 96; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, no. 49; Schwerin 2000, no. 60; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 66; Amsterdam–Pittsburgh 2006, p. 34.

### Notes

1. See Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 485 (p. 342).

2. See Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 168.



# ◆ Mufflon ◆

1739

Oil on canvas, 162 × 129 cm  
(63¾ × 50¾ in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum



**FIGURE A**  
Pierre-François Basan (French, 1723–1797), *Barbary Sheep*,  
ca. 1745–50. Engraving, 30.7 × 38.1 cm (12½ × 15 in.)  
(plate: 32.5 × 39 cm [12¾ × 15⅜ in.]). Paris, Bibliothèque  
nationale, cabinet des estampes, inv. DB-23 FOLT2.  
Photo: © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

THIS PAINTING WAS EXHIBITED at the Salon of 1739 as a “bouquetin de Barbarie” (Barbary ibex), a term which refers to a sheep native to what were then known as the Barbary States: present-day Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, and Libya. In fact, the animal is not a Barbary sheep but a wild ancestor of domestic sheep known as a mufflon, which inhabited the cold, dry desert areas and mountain peaks of Asia Minor, Europe, Corsica, Sardinia, and Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> Gracefully arranged on the ground against a rocky outcropping, which stretches up behind him in dark and light jags, the ram is pictured with an almost human dignity, attentively responsive to an unseen presence. The multiple rings on his monumental horns signify a very mature male.<sup>2</sup>

Oudry’s menagerie paintings may have been intended, in the original commission from La Peyronie, to be engraved for works on natural history. In the end, only two of the paintings are known to have been engraved for this purpose: this one (fig. A) and one of the lynx paintings formerly in the Schwerin collection, now lost.<sup>3</sup> (*Rhinoceros*, not part of the original La Peyronie suite, was used for Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* [plate II, fig. B]).

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 485 (p. 343); Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, p. 161, fig. 86; Schwerin 1986, p. 55; Rosenberg 2005, no. 766.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1739; Schwerin 2000, no. 59; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 65.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Michael Dee, general curator at the Los Angeles Zoo, for his help in determining the species of the animals in Oudry’s menagerie.

2. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 166.

3. Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 485 (p. 343).



## ♦ Leopard ♦

1741

Oil on canvas, 131 × 160 cm  
(51½ × 63 in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

THESE TWO PAINTINGS were clearly based on life drawings done by Oudry of specimens in the Versailles menagerie (figs. A and B). Opperman suggests that Oudry waited for the animals to strike characteristic or interesting poses, then recorded them quickly, in just a couple of seconds, in black chalk. The formal essence of each animal, so well captured in the drawings, is faithfully transferred to the paintings.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their empirical origins, Oudry has projected onto his representations of these animals fairly overt gender characterizations. In his letter of 1750 to the duke, Oudry referred to them as “an angry male tiger” (*un tigre male en colère*) and “a tranquil female tiger” (*un tigre femelle dans une attitude tranquille*). (In eighteenth-century French, the term *tigre* was frequently used to designate both tigers and leopards.) Indeed, the male leopard stands in a highly tense, aggressive mode of response, twisting his body around to face an unseen threat, his teeth bared, his tail arching in the light like a menacing snake. The female, in counterpoint, is more passive. She is wary, but the tension is more subdued, and her backdrop is flatter and less visually dramatic than that of the male. (This gendering is only mildly echoed in Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle*, where the only difference between the male and female is that the female has her front paws together, while the male has them apart and appears slightly more active.)<sup>2</sup>

These paintings were exhibited at the Salons of 1741 and 1743, along with two other paintings of large cats by Oudry, *Tiger* (Schwerin, Staatliches Museum) and *Lynx* (formerly Schwerin, now lost).

*Leopard*

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 486 (p 345); vol. 2, fig. 265; Schwerin 1986, pp. 9, 56.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1741, no. 24; Paris 1982, no. 98; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, no. 52; Schwerin 2000, no. 57; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 70; Paris–Munich–Bonn 2005, no. 103.

*Leopardess*

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 486–87 (p 346); vol. 2, fig. 267; Paris 1982, p. 187, fig. 98a; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, p. 166, fig. 89; Schwerin 1986, pp. 34, 56; Rosenberg 2005, no. 765.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1741 and 1743; Schwerin 2000, no. 58; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 71.

## ♦ Leopardess ♦

1741

Oil on canvas, 131 × 160 cm  
(51½ × 63 in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

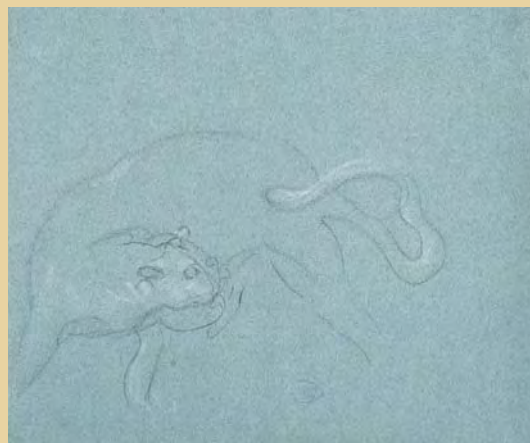


FIGURE A  
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Study for a Leopard*, 1740. Black chalk on blue paper, 29.5 × 33.5 cm (11½ × 13½ in.). Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, inv. 1172 Hz.



FIGURE B  
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Study for Female Leopard*, 1740. Black chalk on blue paper, 28.5 × 33.5 cm (11¼ × 13½ in.). Schwerin, Staatliches Museum, inv. 1174 Hz.

## Notes

1. Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 164, 486–87 (p 345 and 346). The two drawings in Opperman are *Study for a Leopard* (D 725) and *Study for a Leopardess* (D 726).

2. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, vol. 9 (1762).









## ♦ Cassowary ♦

1745

Oil on canvas, 162 × 127.5 cm  
(63¾ × 50⅛ in.)  
Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

oudry exhibited this painting in the Salon of 1745, describing its subject in the *livret* as follows: “This bird is extremely rare; it comes from the Isle of Benda, and has neither tongue, nor tail, nor wings; it will eat anything it is offered, even the hottest coals; it can break a man’s leg with its feet.”<sup>1</sup> The bird’s exotic, dangerous reputation dates back at least to the sixteenth century, and the lust of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II to have this bird in his royal menagerie (see Marina Belozerskaya’s essay in this catalogue). A cassowary was gifted to a Dutch captain in 1596 in the Banda Islands. While in transit, the bird killed the captain but eventually made it to Amsterdam and was presented to Rudolf II. Rudolf was reported to have been delighted with the bird, despite the fact that it did not, as reputed, breathe fire. Jan Brueghel the Elder’s depiction of the bird in *Flora and Zephyr* (Dessau, Schloss Mosigkau) may have been based on Rudolf’s bird or on a specimen in the Brussels menagerie of Archdukes Albert and Isabella, rulers of the Southern Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

The cassowary is first documented in France in 1671 when one arrived as a gift to Louis XIV from the governor of Madagascar, who had acquired the bird from Indian dealers. The bird inspired intense interest, and its image was subsequently introduced into tapestry designs.<sup>3</sup>

The cassowary is a strange bird, whose reputation for violence is well founded. It is among the world’s most dangerous fowl and, based on the frequency and severity of injuries to zookeepers, among the most difficult birds to keep in zoos. Originating in Australia and New Guinea, the double-wattled species pictured here stands over five feet tall and does not fly but can swim. It is glossy black in color, with sharp, bristly feathers. Its feet are three-toed, with a claw on each toe and the innermost claw very sharp and long like a dagger. Though generally shy and evasive, when enraged, cassowaries can be deadly, kicking with both feet at once. A kick can be so strong,

and the spiked toe so sharp, that it can eviscerate an enemy with one thrust. A vertical bony helmet called a casque protects the bird’s head as it makes its way through the thick undergrowth of the rain forest feeding on fallen fruit, insects, and small dead animals on the ground. Its name, meaning horned head, is Papuan in origin.

In his portrait, Oudry isolates the cassowary in its surroundings, appropriate to the way in which these menacing birds are housed in animal collections. This is also the only painting in the menagerie series with water pictured in the background, perhaps a reference to the island origins of this species. The rest of the background, the rocky cliff which arches up to the right, the billowing clouds curling in a halo along the bird’s silhouette, the dusky light at the left, all serve to dramatize this extraordinary bird’s form and presence. Together with the *Indian Blackbuck*, it is among the more striking representations in Oudry’s animal suite.

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 498 (p. 376); Schwerin 1986, p. 57 (with detailed bibliography); Rosenberg 2005, no. 768.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1745; Schwerin 2000, no. 61; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 76.

### Notes

1. Quoted in Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 498 (p. 376). In his letter to the duke in 1750, Oudry’s description is equally marked by a sense of unfamiliarity: “a large bird, four feet high, whose head is colored like that of a turkey, who has

the feet of an ostrich but no wings or tail.”: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 498.

2. This observation was made by Anne Woollett, associate curator of paintings at the Getty Museum, and Marina Belozerskaya on examining the Dessau painting in July 2006.

3. Salmon 2004, p. 72. Earlier, Salmon (1995, p. 122) noted the cassowary painted by Desportes as an overdoor decoration for the château de Choisy in 1743, in which the bird is pictured with other birds from India.



# ◆ Dead Crane ◆

1745

Oil on canvas, 162 × 127.5 cm  
(63¾ × 50⅛ in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

THIS IS THE ONLY PAINTING in the menagerie series that could be classified as a *nature morte* (still life). Oudry probably painted the crane dead to add variety to the series and to show off his considerable skill as a still-life painter. In fact, this painting strikes a different tone from the others, one that is quietly melancholic, even tragic. Out of the elegant bird's body, the artist has constructed a decorative arabesque that moves through the crane's neck, breast, body, and legs up into the tree trunk. The head and neck, laid off to the right, together with the partially opened wing at the left connote a sort of dying gesture of surrender, as if this were a scene of human martyrdom.<sup>1</sup>

Although delicately beautiful, the crane was one of the least exotic animals in the royal menagerie, having been imported to Europe from India in large numbers. It constitutes, then, the perfect subject for the virtuosic display of Oudry's still-life technique, and indeed it is among Oudry's greatest accomplishments in this genre.<sup>2</sup> Oudry scholar Jean Locquin eloquently described the work over a century ago: "a veritable masterpiece of color, dazzling with freshness, volume and light, where the whole known scale of grays, from black to white, unfolds. The silkiness of plumage, its reflected light and its luster of blue-tinted steel, slightly cold, are warmed by the russet tones of the background and the earth. The scarlet of the head throws a lively and gay note over the whole. This is truly the work of a virtuoso, and one understands how his contemporaries, who were enraptured by the paintings of Oudry, called him 'a magician in paint.'"<sup>3</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 112, 191, 554–55 (p. 514); vol. 2, pp. 946, 1126, fig. 307; M. Faré and F. Faré, *La vie silencieuse en France: la nature morte au XVIIIe siècle* (Fribourg, 1976), p. 126, fig. 174; Schwerin 1986, pp. 9, 18, 57.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1745, no. 36; Paris 1982, no. 104; Fort Worth–Kansas City 1983, no. 74; *Das Stilleben und sein Gegenstand: eine Gemeinschaftsausstellung von Museen aus der UdSSR, der CSSR und der DDR* (Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, 1983), no. 121, pl. 15; Schwerin 2000, no. 64; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 45; Paris–Munich–Bonn 2005–6, no. 104.

## Notes

1. For more on this reading, see Sarah Cohen, "Chardin's Fur: Painting, Materialism, and the Question of Animal Soul," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 1 (2004), p. 43.
2. Veron-Denise in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 126.

3. "... un véritable chef-d'oeuvre de coloris, éblouissant de fraîcheur, de relief et de lumière, où s'épanouit toute la savante gamme des gris, depuis le noir jusqu'au blanc. Le soyeux du plumage, ses reflets et son brillant d'acier bleuté, un peu froids, sont réchauffés par les tons roux du fond et du

terrain. L'écarlate de la tête jette une note vive et gaie sur l'ensemble. C'est là vraiment l'oeuvre d'un virtuose, et l'on comprend que les contemporains, qui s'éxtasiaient devant les toiles d'Oudry, l'appelassent 'un magicien en peinture.'": Locquin 1906, p. 307.



# ✦ Demoiselle Crane, Toucan, and Tufted Crane ✦

1745

Oil on canvas, 130 × 160 cm  
(51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63 in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

THE ROYAL MENAGERIE at Versailles was originally designed to house birds, and it was only sometime later, with the addition of exotic animals and, finally, with the transfer of the more ferocious animals from Vincennes to Versailles in the late seventeenth century, that the collection became more varied. These placid, elegant creatures encouraged the sophisticated visitor to enjoy them as aesthetic, decorative objects.<sup>1</sup>

Of these three exotic birds, the demoiselle crane (at left) and the tufted crane (at right) tended to be grouped together, both in the menagerie and in representations (fig. A). Flocks of the two birds shared a yard in the menagerie structure, and they also were allowed to wander freely through the park of Versailles.<sup>2</sup> Pieter Boel, who painted many of the animals in Louis XIV's menagerie, often pictured the two cranes as a male and female couple, and their elegance and ornamental head gear likened them in the popular imagination to the king and queen, thus they were known as *les oiseaux royaux* (the royal birds). Cranes perform spectacular, elaborate courtship dances, involving head pumping, bowing, jumping, running, stick or grass tossing, and wing flapping, all designed to strengthen mated pairs. And cranes mate for life, further enriching the fantastic analogy to the royal couple.

The demoiselle crane, so delicate and lovely, was the signature bird of the royal menagerie. It was also known as *grue* (crane) *de Numidie*, after what was then considered its place of origin, the ancient North African country of Numidia, roughly modern-day Algeria. The demoiselle is the smallest and

second most abundant crane species today. Its distinctive feature is the long, pure white feather plume that stretches from behind the eye to well beyond the head. Both males and females sport the ornamental tufts and are virtually indistinguishable, with males slightly larger.

The particular subspecies of the tufted, or crowned, crane depicted here comes from the savannah region of the Sudan. Oudry plays the distinctive white markings on the crane's upper and under wing off against the tree trunk crossing behind it, and he backlights the regal head of this majestic red-cheeked creature, its crown topped with stiff golden feathers, with blue sky light. Oudry drew a copy in ink and watercolor of one of Boel's oil studies of a tufted crane, which may have inspired the pose of the bird in this painting.<sup>3</sup>

In this trio of exotic fowl, the toucan trumps the cranes in rarity. Toucans come from Mexico, Central and South America, and the West Indies and do not appear in European texts until the sixteenth century. Drawings of the toucan, along with two drawings of the tufted crane and one of the demoiselle, appear in an album of watercolors by Oudry, probably based on oil sketches by Boel.<sup>4</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1966, p. 390, fig 3; Opperman 1977, vol. 1, pp. 497–98 (p. 375); Schwerin 1986, pp. 25, 56 (with detailed bibliography); Rosenberg 2005, no. 771; Bonn 2005–6, pp. 156–57.

EXHIBITIONS: Paris 1745, no. 38; Schwerin 2000, no. 63; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, no. 75.

## FIGURE A

Pieter Boel (Flemish, 1622–1674), *Pavillon central de la Ménagerie de Versailles, depuis la cour des demoiselles* (Birds from the Royal Menagerie [Young Ladies from Numidie]). Engraving from Scotin. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, inv. JB-37 FT 4. Photo: © Bibliothèque nationale de France.



## Notes

1. Iriye 1994, pp. 39–41.
2. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 182.
3. The drawing is in the collection of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University; see Opperman 1977, vol. 2, p. 811 (D 900), and Paris, 2001, p. 88.

Salvi (2002, pp. 173–74) suggests that Oudry's animal compositions were directly influenced by Boel's life studies of the Ménagerie animals, which were kept at the Gobelins manufactory.

4. See A. Mongan, "An Album of Watercolors by Oudry," *Annual Report, Fogg Art*

*Museum, Harvard University* (1953–54), pp. 10–11. Opperman (1966, p. 390) at first thought these watercolors to be of menagerie animals, and thus done from life, but later indicated (Opperman 1977, vol. 1, p. 498) they were done from Boel's oil sketches.





# ✦ Rhinoceros ✦

1749

Oil on canvas, 306 × 453 cm  
(120½ × 178⅛ in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

THIS EXTRAORDINARY PAINTING, a life-size portrait of a mid-eighteenth-century celebrity rhinoceros named Clara, had, until 2001, not been seen publicly for at least 150 years (see Mark Leonard's essay in this catalogue) and is little known in the literature.<sup>1</sup> Although Clara was not herself a member of Louis XV's Versailles menagerie, this painting was part of the suite of animals acquired by the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1750. The painting hung in the Schwerin castle until the building was renovated in the mid-eighteenth century, when it was displaced to dwellings in town. Of course, a painting this size could hardly be accommodated in storage, so the work was removed from its stretcher, carefully rolled, and placed in a crate, where it safely remained for the next century and a half.<sup>2</sup>

The great rhinoceros was brought by her Dutch keeper to Versailles early in 1749, reputedly offered to the king for an exorbitant price, and dispatched to Paris, where she stood as a well-attended exhibit at the Saint-Germain fair.<sup>3</sup> Clara had been on the Continent since 1741 and was wildly popular, initiating a wave of rhino-mania, manifested in commissions of her image in print, paint, porcelain, bronze, and textiles (see Charissa Bremer-David's essay in this catalogue). Her debut in Paris, the fashion capital of the Western world, was sensational. A Countess Dash refers to a hair-ribbon design inspired by Clara, "ribbons à la rhinoceros." She goes on, "This villainous animal has become involved in everything . . . the little masters have even invented armor of the rhino. Will not someone, some clerk, write an epic poem on the rhinoceros."<sup>4</sup>

Oudry sketched Clara at the fair sometime between early February and late April 1749, working up his submission to the upcoming Salon. The entry in the Salon *livret* of 1750 reads as follows: "No. 38, the Rhinoceros, life size, on a canvas 15 feet long and 10 feet high. This animal was painted in its pen at the Fair of St. Germain: it belongs to the Artist."<sup>5</sup> Oudry completed several drawn studies (fig. A), carefully analyzing the extraordinary beast.<sup>6</sup> Born in Assam, Clara was an Indian rhinoceros, the largest of the three rhino

species.<sup>7</sup> She had a single black horn and a gray-brown hide with skin folds that give her an armor-plated appearance. Her strangely shaped upper lip is semiprehensile, useful in munching on leaves and branches. Given her regular, generous feedings, Clara probably attained the upper reach of the scale of average weight for her species, 1,800–2,700 kilograms.

Rhinoceroses can be dangerous, but Clara was famous for her tame nature, having been raised in captivity from a very early age. Oudry gives an accurate sense of her great girth, silhouetting her profile against the blue-lit background. Her presence is less menacing than melancholic, this great animal having been carted across Europe, permanently on show. Her ears twitch in different directions, she looks directly out of the composition, and the viewer is struck by the profound pathos of this awesome, clearly sensitive and sentient animal.

The rarity of the rhinoceros, and its enormous size and unusual shape, inspired a great deal of mythologizing. The rhino horn was and still is considered to have valuable medicinal powers. In traditional Asian medicine, it serves as an aphrodisiac and is used in the treatment of such ailments as epilepsy, fevers, and strokes.

In the seventeenth century, rhinos were known in the Western world mainly through artists' depictions, drawn from either hearsay or memory and generally embellished by fantastic, exotic, or mythical notions.



FIGURE A  
Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Study of the "Dutch" Rhinoceros*, ca. 1749. Black chalk on blue paper, 27.6 × 44.4 cm (10⅞ × 17½ in.). London, The British Museum, inv. 1918.6–15.7.





In this context, Oudry's firsthand observation of the rhino, and his carefully skilled recording of every aspect of her physical appearance, can be seen as an act of the Enlightenment, a gathering of scientific knowledge that usefully dispelled misleading or ignorant conceptions of the Asian beast. It was in 1749, the year of Clara's arrival in Paris, that Buffon convinced the Imprimerie royale to begin printing the first volumes of his *Histoire naturelle*. Buffon carefully studied Clara over several visits to the Saint-Germain fair, writing a long and very detailed description of her in volume II (not published until 1764), in which he details her precise measurements, the color and texture of her skin, the shape and constitution of her horn, her diet, and her general mood.<sup>8</sup> His entry included an engraving of Clara, done by Jean-Charles Baquoy, after a drawing by Jacques de Sève of Oudry's portrait (fig. B).<sup>9</sup> Thus Oudry's artistic creed and the naturalists' empirical imperative collaborated in disseminating a more accurate understanding of the rhino in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. I (p. 349); Clarke 1986, pp. 64–68; Schwerin 2000, no. 75; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 141; Rosenberg 2005, no. 776.

#### Notes

1. In Opperman's seminal and still commanding dissertation (1972; published 1977), he states that although he knows the painting to be in Schwerin, he "has not looked for it." He goes on, "Although supposedly painted from nature, the animal is very close to Dürer's famous woodcut of 1515. But then all rhinoceroses look alike.": Opperman 1977, vol. I, p. 488 (p. 349).

2. In the 1863 Schwerin castle inventory of paintings on view in "Bürgerhäuser" in the Alexandrinenstrasse, the painting is listed as being rolled up in a crate. Mark Leonard

suggests that the painting, large as it is, has in fact been cut down at the top, probably to fit a wall decoration in Schwerin. Leonard made this discovery when studying the much smaller but very accurate copy of Oudry's painting made by the Schwerin court artist Johann Dietrich Findorff in 1752.

3. See Robbins 2002, p. 94 and Ridley 2004, ch. 6.

4. Loisel 1912, vol. 2, p. 279.

5. "No. 38, le Rhinoceros, grand comme nature, sure une toile de 15 pieds de large sure 10 de hauteur. Cet animal a été peint dans sa loge à la Foire de St. Germain: il appartient

à l'auteur.": Collection des Anciennes Expositions, Salon de 1750, vol. 15 (Paris, 1889), quoted in Clarke 1986.

6. There is also a red chalk drawing in a private collection in Paris; see Clarke 1986, p. 66, fig. 42.

7. Initially widespread, found in northern Pakistan, much of northern India (including Assam), Nepal, and northern Bangladesh.

8. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle* (1749–88), vol. II, pp. 174–98.

9. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle* (1749–88), vol. II, p. 202, pl. VII.

10. Clark 1977, p. 65.



FIGURE B  
Jean-Charles Baquoy (French, 1721–1777), *Rhinoceros*, 1764. Engraving after Jacques Eustache de Sève (French, d. 1795), 22 × 17.5 cm (8 7/8 × 6 7/8 in.). Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 84–B8203.

## ♦ Lion ♦

1752

Oil on canvas, 307 × 258 cm

(120<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 101<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.)

Schwerin, Staatliches Museum

USED BY THE ROMANS in staged fights, lions were a staple of aristocratic animal collections and were collected by Renaissance princes as symbols of strength and pride. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Florentine aristocrats kept a lion house near the Palazzo Vecchio, giving the nearby Via dei Leoni its name.<sup>1</sup> Lions have been represented across the history of art and illustration, though over the ages they have often been copied by artists from other representations, to the consistent detriment of anatomical accuracy.

In the tradition of Pieter Boel, who completed several very fine life studies of lions in Louis XIV's menagerie, Oudry's paintings of lions are based on empirical study. The Versailles menagerie expanded at the end of the seventeenth century to accommodate lions in a pen next to ostriches.<sup>2</sup> Artists came to study these great animals. Unlike Alexandre-François Desportes, Oudry went to study the beast as much to capture in powerful, sensitive pastel and pencil the stormy temperament of the king of animals as to transcribe its anatomy.<sup>3</sup>

Oudry had early success with a painting of a lion, *Le Lion et le moucheron* (The Lion and the Fly) completed in 1732. The painter used a fable from La Fontaine as the basis for this impressive, large-scale lion portrait. He immediately offered the painting to the duke of Mecklenburg, and in 1735 to the court of Sweden. Stating explicitly that work was done "at the menagerie in Versailles, after nature," Oudry was asking the significant sum of 1,200 livres. The painting was exhibited at the Salon of 1737 and finally acquired, in 1747, for the royal château in Stockholm (now in the Nationalmuseum).<sup>4</sup>

Extinct in the wild since 1922, the particular species pictured here is known as an Atlas lion, with a distinctive blonde mane around the face, which turns black and black-brown as it extends down the chest through the

front legs and along the length of the belly to the groin.<sup>5</sup> This beast comes from the woodlands of the Atlas Mountains in north and northwestern Africa. Roman rulers had hundreds of these cats, frequently using them in Christian martyr mauling for sport.

Here Oudry pictures the massive form of this great beast in a life-size portrait. To accommodate the extraordinary scale, the artist used two pieces of linen sewn together, laying down the lion first and then painting in the landscape around him.<sup>6</sup> Oudry captured a sense of ferocity in the physical presence of this male, built for fighting more than hunting (most hunting is done by teams of lionesses.) This painting was not part of the original suite of menagerie paintings acquired by the duke of Mecklenburg but rather was added to the group in 1752 after its exhibition that year in the Paris Salon.<sup>7</sup> Along with *Rhinoceros*, the painting was removed from view in the middle of the nineteenth century and stored away until this exhibition began several years ago.

LITERATURE: Opperman 1977, vol. 1 (p. 350); Schwerin 1986, p. 57; Schwerin 2000, no. 76; Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 141, fig. 3; Rosenberg 2005, no. 777.

## Notes

1. Lloyd 1971, p. 47.

2. Loisel 1912, vol. 2, p. 129.

3. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 158.

4. Salmon in Fontainebleau–Versailles 2003–4, p. 158.

5. Michael Dee, general curator of the Los Angeles Zoo, classified this lion.

6. Conservation report, Tiarna Doherty, associate conservator, Paintings Conservation, Getty Museum. Like the image of Clara, the *Lion* had also been folded, then rolled for storage. Unlike Clara, he was then crushed along one side of the folded roll, suffering more extensive paint flakes and losses.

7. See Locquin 1906, p. 308. Opperman (1977, p. 489, p. 350) does not list this picture as having been shown at the Salon, though he states it is possible that a little picture from the Salon of 1753 (p. 492, p. 358) was the sketch for this work.

## OPPOSITE

Digitally enhanced image taken during conservation.



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