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FRONT COVER
Raphael, *An Allegory ('Vision of a Knight')* (NG 213), detail of PLATE 13, page 16.

TITLE PAGE
Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867), detail of PLATE 1, page 49.

A note on the reproductions

The reproductions of complete paintings from the National Gallery's collection in this book have been printed from colour-correct, high-resolution digital scans made with the MARC II Camera. This process was described in 'The MARC II Camera and the Scanning Initiative at the National Gallery', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 23, 2002, pp. 76–82.

Nicolas Lancret's *The Four Times of Day*

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NICOLAS LANCRET (1690–1743) began *The Four Times of Day* (NG 5867, 5868, 5869, 5870; PLATES 1–4) at some time before September 1739, when *Morning* was exhibited at the Paris Salon.[1] He had completed the series – all on copper – by February 1741, when the engraver Nicolas de Larmessin III (1684–1755) presented proofs of his engravings of the set to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.[2] Their patron, or first purchaser, is unknown. Although Lancret's recorded paintings on copper are relatively few,[3] painting series of four was something of a speciality for him. During the course of his career he painted several sets of *The Four Seasons*, the first possibly as early as *c*.1719,[4] a set of *The Four Elements* by August 1732,[5] and the National Gallery's series, *The Four Ages of Man* (NG 101, 102, 103, 104) by July 1735 when engravings after them by Larmessin were advertised for sale.

Many of these sets of paintings were the subject of engravings, and it seems likely that in conceiving them Lancret, who was assiduous in protecting the copyright of his works,[6] hoped to exploit the long-established taste for buying prints in series.[7]

In contrast to most of his contemporaries, Lancret did not base these series on mythological stories, nor did he use allegorical figures.[8] Instead he expressed the abstract concepts of the Seasons or the Times of Day through the media of the *fête galante* and genre scenes, bringing up to date a different tradition, namely that of the popular print.[9] Examples of seventeenth-century genre prints treating such themes include *The Four Ages of Man* by Abraham Bosse published in 1636,[10] and Gabriel Le Brun's *Times of Day*.[11]

Although Lancret may have been among the first French artists, at least of his generation, to paint the Seasons and the Elements as scenes of genre, this was not the case so far as the Times of Day were concerned. Here he was preceded by his younger contemporary François Boucher (1703–1770) who in about 1734 painted a series of *The Four Times of Day* which were engraved by Gilles-Edmé Petit.[12] Boucher's *Night* is known neither in painted nor printed form, but it can be assumed from the three images that are known that each painting in the series showed a single half-length female figure close to the picture plane. In this respect they are entirely different from the treatments of the theme by Lancret. Nevertheless, there are some affinities of detail – in Boucher's *Le Matin* a lady is shown at her toilette and in his *Le Midy* (*sic*) another is shown checking her watch against a sundial (FIG. 1). It seems reasonable to conclude that if either artist looked to the other it was Lancret to Boucher rather than, as is sometimes said, the other way around. [13]

Lancret began and ended his *Times of Day* with figures in a state of partial undress. The prosaic description of *Morning* given in the Académie's official booklet accompanying the 1739 exhibition – 'Another smaller [picture] showing a lady at her toilette having coffee'[14] – was both a mis-statement

PLATE 1 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867), before 1739.
'Silvered' copper, 28.3 × 36.4 cm.

PLATE 2 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Midday* (NG 5868), 1739–41.
'Silvered' copper, 28.6 × 36.9 cm.

Paul Ackroyd, Ashok Roy and Humphrey Wine

PLATE 3 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Afternoon* (NG 5869), 1739–41.
'Silvered' copper, 28.8 × 36.7 cm.

PLATE 4 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Evening* (NG 5870), 1739–41.
'Silvered' copper, 28.8 × 36.8 cm.

FIG. 2 Nicolas de Larmessin III after Nicolas Lancret, *Le Matin*. Engraving in reverse. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

FIG. 4 Nicolas de Larmessin III after Nicolas Lancret, *L'Après-Dinée*. Engraving in reverse. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

FIG. 3 Nicolas de Larmessin III after Nicolas Lancret, *Le Midi*. Engraving in reverse. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

FIG. 5 Nicolas de Larmessin III after Nicolas Lancret, *La Soirée*. Engraving in reverse. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

and an understatement: a mis-statement because the drink being poured is tea not coffee, and an understatement because it contains no hint of the picture's flagrantly risqué nature. This quality was, however, recognised by Chevalier de Neufville de Brunabois Montador who in his account of the painting at the 1739 Salon wrote of the flirtatious woman exposing to view things which evoked guilty thoughts, and of the abbé distracted by her state of (un)dress.[15] No critical account of *Evening* (or of the other two paintings in the series) exists but, so far as one can tell given the poor state of the picture, it too included glimpses of bare breasts, albeit without the pictured presence of a male viewer. The leisured pursuits shown in *Midday* and *Afternoon*, respectively checking the time and playing backgammon, are by contrast more modest. Interestingly in the prints after *The Times of Day*, which show the

compositions in reverse, the dress of the woman in *Morning* (FIG. 2) has been adjusted to make it less revealing. Whether this was at the behest of the Académie, under whose auspices the prints were to be published, or whether it was so as not to deter print buyers averse to the indecent, is unknown. Other adjustments were made between painting and print. For example, the time shown on the clock in the print of *Morning* is exactly nine o'clock rather than eight minutes after as in the painting, and in the print the floor pattern is more elaborate. The print of *Afternoon* shows the spots on the dice in a different (and impossible) position (FIG. 4).[16] In the print of *Evening* (FIG. 5) there is a diagonal tree trunk at bottom left which does not appear at bottom right in the painting – however, this is more likely evidence of damage to the painting by old restorations (see below) rather than a deliberate change.

Although Lancret sometimes re-used figures in his paintings over a period of several years – the rearmost woman in *Evening* appears in three other paintings, namely *Summer* (St Petersburg, The Hermitage),[17] *Les Plaisirs du Bain* (Paris, Musée du Louvre),[18] and *Girls Bathing* (London, Wallace Collection)[19] – he was a prolific draughtsman and made numerous studies for the individual figures.[20] A red chalk study for the abbé in *Morning* (FIG. 6) once in the Kunsthalle, Bremen, is in the possession of the Pushkin Museum, Moscow.[21] There are a number of differences between it and the abbé in the painting, most noticeably in the position of the proper left hand, and of the proper right leg, the way in which he holds the teacup, and in the width of the chair. A drawing belonging to the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris (FIG. 7) is preparatory for the maid at the left of *Morning*. A study for the right arm of the seated woman is on the verso.[22] Another preparatory drawing for the figure of the maid is in the Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain, Épinal (FIG. 8). In the Épinal drawing the maid holds the bonnet in her proper right hand, the position ultimately adopted by Lancret for the painting, and one may therefore suppose that it is later than the Jacquemart-André drawing.[23]

Preparatory drawings also exist for *Midday*. One in the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin (FIG. 9),[24] has on the same sheet two studies for the woman standing in profile at the centre of the picture – in both she is

FIG. 7 Nicolas Lancret, *Study for the maid in Morning*. Red chalk on paper, 24.9 × 18.8 cm. INV. 1587. Institut de France, Paris. © Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris.

looking away from the viewer, and in the one on the left the position of her proper right hand is different from its position in the painting. The woman standing next to her in the painting was the subject of a red chalk study recorded as once in the Bottellier-Lasquin collection.[25] And there is a third drawing, also in red chalk, which appears to be a study for the woman seated at the left.[26] Again this figure has been modified in the painting – the position of the head is different, she is shown holding a fan and her costume is not striped. No drawings for the other two paintings have yet emerged, nor drawings for any of the compositions as a whole – although in any event Lancret rarely made compositional studies as opposed to studies of individual figures.[27]

Copper panels

Painting on copper panel supports had some popularity in France in the eighteenth century, probably prompted by the fine and detailed effects achieved by Bolognese, Dutch and Flemish seventeenth-century painters working on copper, examples of which were widely admired and collected in France. Lancret employed small-sized copper panels on a

FIG. 6 Nicolas Lancret, *Study for the abbé in Morning*. Red chalk on paper, 15.8 × 14.6 cm. © Kunsthalle Bremen (currently in the Pushkin State Museum, Moscow).

number of occasions, for example in *Birdcatchers* and *Pastoral Revels*, the latter dated 1738 and both now in the Wallace Collection, and *A Tale from La Fontaine* (also in the Wallace Collection), one of a series of twelve paintings. Earlier in the century Jean-Antoine Watteau had also produced a number of small works on copper, a few exist by Chardin, and there are some, often forming series of paintings, or pendant pairs, by C.J. Vernet and others.[28]

The plates used by Lancret were machine-made rather than beaten by hand, and marks made by the rollers used in the flattening process are evident on the backs of each panel. The attractions of copper as a surface for oil painting are the consistent and predictable rigidity of the support, its smooth surface, the lack of movement in response to changing ambient temperature and atmospheric moisture, and, most importantly, the relative ease with which fine and detailed effects can be achieved. Indeed, in comparison with Lancret's *Four Ages of Man*, painted on canvas supports, there is a greater use of detail in *The Four Times of Day*. It may also have been a factor that copper panels are easy to frame, requiring no,

FIG. 9 Nicolas Lancret, *Study for Midday*. Red chalk on paper, 21.1 × 23.9 cm. Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Jörg P. Anders.

or only the most simple, auxiliary support, whether they are framed conventionally as pictures or set into the woodwork of a piece of furniture. It would have been apparent to painters of the eighteenth century that many of the works on copper by their seventeenth-century predecessors – Dutch, Flemish and Italian – were remarkably well preserved.

A continuing concern for painters working on copper had been to what extent the paint would adhere to the copper surface, and it was considered important to clean, de-grease and perhaps roughen the surface to improve the ability of drying oil paint to cling to the metal, and to maintain its adhesion over time. It was usual, in any case, to apply some sort of ground (generally of oil paint containing lead white, often tinted with other pigments), but it was vital that this priming should not flake when it had dried, taking the paint on top with it. Oil paint can react chemically with a copper surface, and it is common to find green copper reaction products at the interface between the priming or ground and the metal.[29] Other types of paint media undergo analogous chemical reactions. The tendency for copper to react in this way, and its general propensity to corrosion, were probably seen as the main disadvantages to its use as a painting support. This perhaps explains the silvery metal coating that was applied to the copper panels used by Lancret for *The Four Times of Day*. The technology of 'passivating' copper to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of corrosion is recorded at least as early as Vannoccio Biringuccio's treatise *Pirotechnia*, published in

FIG. 8 Nicolas Lancret, *Study for the maid in Morning*. Red chalk on paper, 26 × 17.5 cm. INV. D1920-72 © Musée départemental d'art ancien et contemporain, Épinal. Photo: Pierre Mignot.
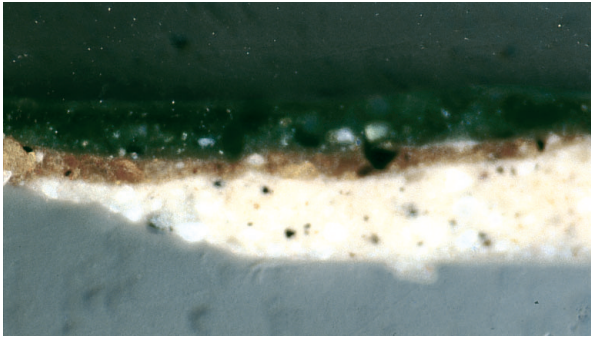
Paul Ackroyd, Ashok Roy and Humphrey Wine

PLATE 5 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Cross-section from mottled dark green and brown background, upper left edge. The fawn-coloured ground is present beneath thin layers of green and brown surface paint. Photographed at 360×; actual magnification 315×.
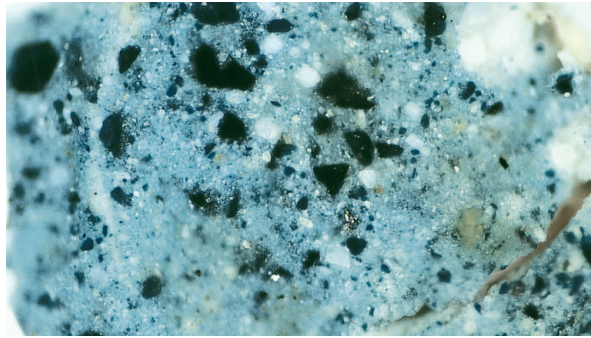

PLATE 7 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Afternoon* (NG 5869). Top surface of an unmounted paint sample from strongest blue of sky, upper edge, with large deep blue-black flakes of Prussian blue mixed with white pigment and some black. The particle form of the Prussian blue is typical of eighteenth-century specimens (see also pp. 80–1 in this *Bulletin*). Photographed at 190×; actual magnification 165×.
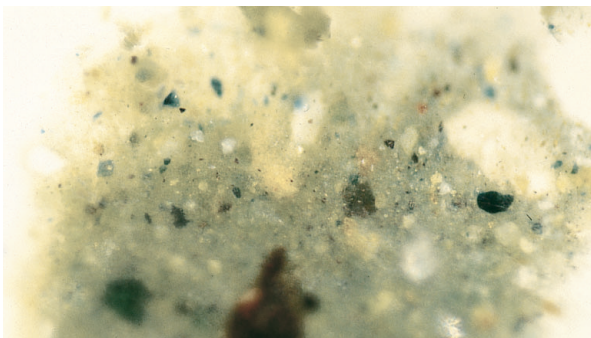

PLATE 6 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Top surface of an unmounted paint sample from dull green of curtain, upper right, showing heterogeneous pigment mixture of green earth, Naples yellow, yellow earth, Cologne earth, Prussian blue and other pigments. Photographed at 240×; actual magnification 210×.
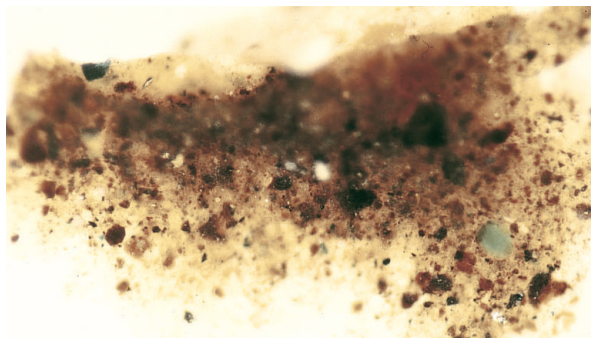

PLATE 8 Nicolas Lancret, *The Four Times of Day: Afternoon* (NG 5869). Top surface of an unmounted paint sample from deep translucent brown of landscape, right-hand edge, largely Cologne earth with a little black and traces of verdigris. Photographed at 240×; actual magnification 210×.

Venice in 1540, where it is recommended that copper vessels designed to contain food should be given a coating of tin, or of 'solder' (that is, tin mixed with lead), to prevent spoilage or tainting of the contents by reaction with the copper container.[30] There are examples both of later sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century paintings on copper panel where this technique has been used, the earliest in the National Gallery is Scipione Pulzone's *Portrait of a Cardinal* (NG 1048; *c*.1575–98), while seventeenth-century examples are provided by Guido Reni's fairly large *Coronation of the Virgin* (NG 214, *c*.1607; 66.6 × 48.8 cm) and, in a smaller format, Guercino's *Dead Christ mourned by Two Angels* (NG 22, *c*.1617–18; 36.8 × 44.4 cm).[31]

The silver-coloured metallic coating on Lancret's panels is only present on one face of each panel: the surface on which the ground and then the paint was

applied. It is just visible at the edges and sides of the plates, and also in a few places as runs of the metal over the backs resulting from its application in a molten state. The plates were prepared with the coatings individually, which suggests that they could have been made specifically for the artist rather than manufactured for some other industrial use. Analysis by EDX of the silver-coloured coating gave a consistent result for each panel: the material is an alloy of tin and lead, in which the average composition was found to be three parts tin by weight, to one part of lead.

Ground layer

Each of the panels has a fawn-coloured ground of oil paint, which seems to have been applied in two relatively thin layers. These layers consist largely of

lead white combined with varying proportions of earth pigments (translucent brown, a little red and a little yellow) with, in addition, some fine black (PLATE 5). The ground layers on *Afternoon* and *Evening* are a shade darker – the proportion of earth pigment is rather higher – perhaps to help express a rather more sombre light in the two scenes representing times later in the day. In the case of *Morning*, the binder for the ground was identified as linseed oil (see the section on the painting medium below).

Palette

The range of pigments used by Lancret for *The Four Times of Day* is typical of the Rococo palette. A small number of colourful pigments are employed, supplemented by a fairly broad range of natural earths and by white and black. Small amounts of red lake pigment are also used. The key strongly coloured pigments are: Prussian blue, Naples yellow (lead antimonate yellow), green earth (*terre verte*) and vermilion. The natural earths range in colour from a strong golden-yellow to red, orange, brown and brownish black, and they also vary in their degree of translucency. It is characteristic of pictures of this period to be painted using rather elaborate mixtures of pigment, particularly in the greens and greenish blues as well as in the more sombre darks (PLATE 6). In using such pigment mixtures (identified in samples from the paintings), Lancret was able to achieve the soft transitions of colour and the blurred and feathery transitions of form that are characteristic of his style. It is notable also that when very finely ground pigments are used, as in the present pictures, these result in oil paints that flow well and are capable of being used to render fine detail and softly blended colour.

While the backgrounds and the settings for the figures are worked in the most heterogeneous paint mixtures, the draperies show a more straightforward use of colour, with only one or two pigments, often combined with white. For example, the lemon-yellow dress of the central figure in *Midday* is largely Naples yellow, and the pinkish-red dress in the same scene is based on vermilion combined with lead white. The darker yellow dress of the woman at the left in *Afternoon* is a combination of Naples yellow and yellow ochre, and the pink skirt worn by the woman pouring tea in *Morning* is based on vermilion, red earth and white. The bluish-grey textile partly hiding the table at the left in *Morning* consists of a paint containing principally Prussian

blue with smaller amounts of white and black pigment. Prussian blue and white are also used for the skies (PLATE 7).

The greens and brownish greens of the backgrounds in *Midday*, *Afternoon* and *Evening*, by contrast, are composed of very mixed paints in which Prussian blue, green earth and yellow ochre predominate in the strongest greens, but each area tends also to contain white, black and a range of the darker earth colours, particularly a translucent deep brown of the Cologne earth type (PLATE 8). Where the paints are more muted in colour, they contain a concentration of earth pigments and black. The greenish browns, browns and near blacks are similarly complex, with some of the deepest brown colours containing red lake and verdigris.

Medium

Analysis, by instrumental methods, of a number of samples for the paint binder indicated the general use of heat-bodied walnut oil as the principal medium, with the addition, for certain parts of the composition, of small amounts of pine resin.[32] Walnut oil has poor drying characteristics and consequently the pictures exhibit extensive drying cracks and fine wrinkling in the paint surface.

Painting technique

The painting technique used in *The Four Times of Day* is fairly conventional and generally follows a three-stage process described by Massing in her transcription of the *Discours sur la pratique de la peinture, et ses procédés principaux: ébaucher, peindre à fond et retoucher*, a publication based on an influential lecture given by Jean-Baptiste Oudry at the Académie in 1752.[33] Like Oudry, Lancret preferred the use of a soft or pale brown ground over which a loosely painted sketch of the composition, or *ébauche*, was applied. The underdrawing in *The Four Times of Day*, visible in infrared reflectography, is not elaborate and is restricted to brief outlines denoting the positions for the main features of each composition.[34] Drawing is only visible in certain areas of the paintings and is largely obscured by the overlying paint layers that absorb much of the infrared radiation. Due to the presence of copper, it was not possible to achieve legible images of the paintings using X-radiography.

After having sketched in the main compositional elements, the paint layers were then built up, working from dark to light, by a process Oudry termed

Paul Ackroyd, Ashok Roy and Humphrey Wine

PLATE 9 *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Detail.
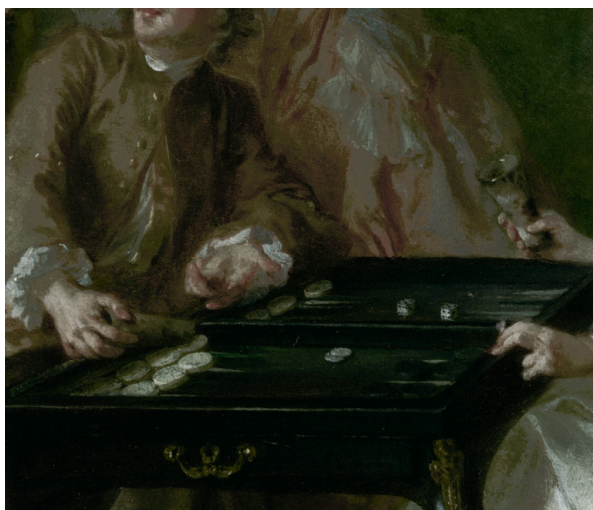

PLATE 10 *The Four Times of Day: Afternoon* (NG 5869). Detail.

empâter. The presence of several thinly applied paint layers in a number of the cross-sections taken from the four pictures (see PLATES 5–8) demonstrates that Lancret followed this process. This stage of painting is apparent also from a visual examination of areas such as the background wall of *Morning*, where the underlayers have been freely applied, followed by a final dark grey-blue glaze. The foregrounds in *Midday* and *Afternoon* show similar multilayered applications of thin colour, as do the freely worked landscapes in *Midday*, *Afternoon* and *Evening*.

Lastly, the finishing touches, or *retouches*, were applied to accentuate detail and emphasise the main compositional elements. In the hands and faces of the principal figures, Lancret paid great attention to

detail, using deftly applied touches of opaque colour, and made numerous small adjustments to produce particular expressions or gestures. The facial features were further emphasised by brief outlines in a red-brown colour. This fine use of detail is not restricted to the figures but also extends to some of the still-life elements, such as the crockery on the table in *Morning* (see PLATE 9) and the backgammon table with the dice and horn diceshaker held by the seated woman at the right in *Afternoon* (see PLATE 10). Interestingly, the moon in *Evening* was enhanced in the final stages of painting by an additional layer of bright white. The pictures and clock on the wall in *Morning* were also added during the final stages and the striped pattern of the wall covering is visible as a pentimento in these passages. Unlike, for example, some of the pictures in the interiors of Hogarth's *Marriage A-la-Mode*, completed in 1743, shortly after *The Four Times of Day*, the pictures on the wall in *Morning* were not intended to serve as a commentary on the scene but are generalised views of figures in landscape settings.

Although Lancret employed the general procedure outlined by Oudry, he did not always strictly adhere to it: the folds and floral pattern in the lady's red dress in *Morning*, for example, were fluently painted directly over the ground without any preliminary build-up in the paint layers (see PLATES 5–8).

Oudry also recommended the use of intermediary varnish layers between the various stages of painting in order to prevent the colours from 'sinking', but there was no evidence of this in the cross-sections taken from Lancret's paintings, and indeed Oudry himself acknowledged that this was not common practice among his contemporaries.[35] The presence of pine resin in some of the paint samples taken from *The Four Times of Day*, however, does show that Lancret mixed varnish with his oil medium – a practice that Oudry emphatically advised against.

In all four pictures in this series, the backgrounds were established first in the *empâter* process. At this stage, areas of reserve were left for each of the three figures in *Morning*, and the principal figures in *Midday* and *Afternoon*. As previously stated, preliminary drawings exist for the maid and abbé in *Morning*, and for the seated woman in a red dress and the central female figure holding a basket in *Midday*, but preparatory studies have not been found for the figures in *Afternoon* and *Evening*. Alterations in the poses of the figures in the drawings to those seen in the final painting were made

early on in the *ébauche* stage of painting. These and further changes are referred to below.

Lancret's use of preparatory drawings in at least two of the paintings in this series, and the evidence of reserves left for the principal figures, demonstrate that he had a preconceived idea of the main characters and had planned their positions within the composition. By contrast, no drawings are known for the figures in *Afternoon*. All the mid-ground figures, however, were painted over the background trees and foliage. It is possible, therefore, that some of these characters were invented during the course of painting.

Evening differs from the other paintings in the series in that all the figures were painted directly over the background and foreground without reserves having been left. Although studies have not been found for any of the females in *Evening*, Lancret had painted a number of similar bathing scenes, such as *Girls Bathing* in the Wallace Collection, dated 'somewhat later than 1725',[36] and *Summer* in the Hermitage, dated 'before 1730',[37] and was possibly sufficiently well-practised in constructing this type of scene without the aid of preliminary drawings. Indeed, as mentioned above, the central female behind the prow of the boat in *Evening* recurs in three other paintings by Lancret, including the Wallace Collection and Hermitage pictures.[38]

Changes in the compositions

Although the drawings evidence a degree of pre-planning in the compositional arrangements, a number of alterations were carried out during the course of each painting. Changes were visible in infrared reflectography, but were sometimes difficult to interpret due to interference from the thick and unevenly applied ground and the density of the paint layers that absorbed much of the infrared radiation. Alterations were apparent also as pentimenti. Significant changes were made to both *Morning* and *Evening*, whereas those in *Midday* and *Afternoon* were relatively minor and less numerous.

Morning
In the background of *Morning*, an object, possibly a chair with a high back, was initially included in the gap between the abbé and the young woman, but was deleted early on in the painting process (see FIG. 10). Further to the right, the curtains and open doorway underwent a number of revisions. Both curtains were painted over the doorframe and adjustments were made to the outlines of the folds.

The panes in the glazed door were once a little higher and, in the infrared examination, there were indications that a view through the window was intended, possibly into a distant landscape. This was discarded by the artist probably on the grounds that it deflected attention from the central figures, and the passage was left obscured in shadow.

Brief outlines for the maid, further to the right of her present location and carried out during the sketch stage, were visible in infrared (see FIG. 11). There are few alterations to the seated lady, apart from minor shifts in the positions of her feet and hands, and slight changes to the shape of her head. The relationship between the placing of the table and the abbé, on the other hand, underwent a large number of changes in order to establish a credible
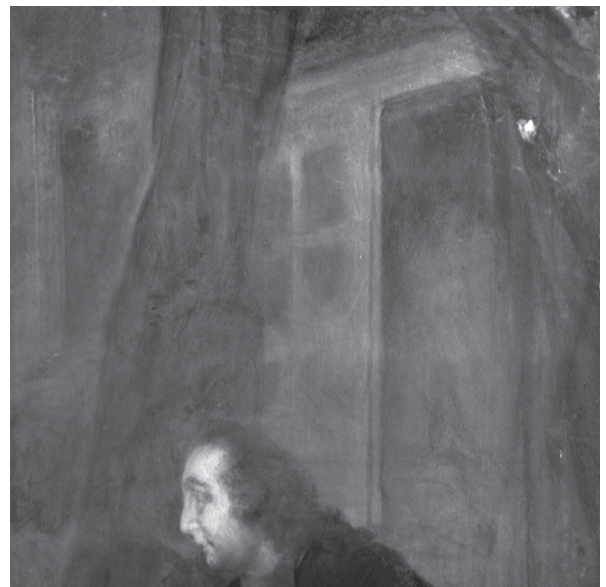

FIG. 10 *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Infrared reflectogram mosaic detail.

FIG. 11 *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Infrared reflectogram mosaic detail.

Paul Ackroyd, Ashok Roy and Humphrey Wine

FIG. 12 *The Four Times of Day: Morning* (NG 5867). Before the recent cleaning.

seating arrangement for this figure behind the table. The right side of the table was originally extended to the right, towards the abbé, and several pentimenti are visible for the tabletop and for the right table leg running through the abbé's right knee and shin. The perspective of the tabletop was adjusted several times and the items of crockery were moved accordingly, further to the left. The area below the tabletop was extensively damaged in a cleaning treatment carried out prior to the Gallery's acquisition of the paintings. Lancret's use of a mixed varnish and oil medium may account for the susceptibility of this passage, and other passages in this series of paintings, to cleaning solvents. Surprisingly, the recent before cleaning photograph shows that five table legs were left visible in the previous restoration (see FIG. 12). However, a microscopic examination revealed that Lancret had painted the floor and yellow drapery at the end of the sofa over the central leg, thus deleting it, and the floor colour in this area was removed during the previous cleaning leaving the lower half of this leg exposed. The table leg immediately to the left of the central one was added during the artist's alterations to the table's position and is painted on top of the floor, but this too was badly abraded during the earlier cleaning. The correct placing of the table legs was confirmed by a comparison with Larmessin's engraving of the picture and was re-established during the recent restoration: the middle leg was retouched, leaving it partially visible as a pentimento, while the other to the left was reinforced. The abbé's proper right leg was initially further to the left, and the positions of both of his feet had been adjusted. His proper right shoulder was once a little higher and further to the left, and his head was

not in its present position in the painting, nor in that shown in the preparatory study, but was lowered, possibly looking down towards the tabletop rather than establishing eye contact with the lady.

The yellow drapery at the right end of the sofa was added late in the painting process. It was carefully painted to follow the contours of the lady's arm, table and crockery, and covered the upper part of the central table leg. Additionally, small changes were made to the table at the far left of the picture: the folds at the bottom of the white transparent cloth covering this table were adjusted and the tabletop stopped abruptly in a vertical line before meeting the blue cloth. This discrepancy was covered by the cylindrical red box.

Evening

In contrast with the left-hand figure, which is in good condition and was not altered by the artist, the remaining females in *Evening* underwent significant changes during the course of painting and suffered considerable abrasion during an early treatment. A striking feature of this painting are the pronounced drying cracks and wrinkles in the surface, which are indicative of an accumulation of layers of paint caused by numerous alterations. The right leg of the reclining female in the foreground was originally painted outstretched, with the foot hidden by the edge of the bank, but was changed to its present position where it is bent at the knee (see FIG. 13). Her other leg was originally a little lower than the one seen now. The drapery in the lower half of this figure underwent a certain amount of revision in order to accommodate the final arrangement of the legs. Pentimenti around the fingers of her right hand, exposed during the previous cleaning, show that the length of this arm was reduced, and small alterations were made to her profile and the drapery covering her chest.

FIG. 13 *The Four Times of Day: Evening* (NG 5870). Infrared reflectogram mosaic detail.

FIG. 14 *The Four Times of Day: Evening* (NG 5870). Detail before the recent cleaning.

Numerous minor changes were made to the draperies and faces of all three females in the middle distance, and an area of paint beneath the head of the female behind the prow of the boat appears to have been scraped away before the artist decided to repaint this passage. Judging from the various alterations to the outline of the boat, the artist experienced some difficulty in achieving its position in perspective. Additionally, a pentimento of a folded white cloth shows that a canopy was once draped over the front hoop attached to the boat.

The right side of *Evening* suffered extensive damage during the previous cleaning; all four figures at the right, the boat and the background landscape have been severely abraded, exposing many of the artist's alterations. A comparison between Larmessin's engraving and the before cleaning photograph (see FIGS 5 and 14) indicates that a diagonal tree trunk in the bottom right corner, part of the female's dress at the far left, the back of the dress of the woman standing in the boat, and two of the hoops attached to the boat were probably removed by a previous restorer. In the case of the tree trunk and hoops, no evidence of their existence remained in the painting and it was decided not to reconstruct these passages in the recent restoration. It was felt that the engraving did not provide a sufficiently accurate basis for re-creating these losses, and achieving a convincing reconstruction of the missing tree trunk would have been problematic.

Midday

The most significant alterations in *Midday* occurred in the sundial and stone water-basin. A different architectural arrangement for the upper part of the sundial was initially sketched in and may not have included the cherub (see FIG. 15). The arm at the top of the sundial was once in a higher position than its present one, and the shadow cast on the stone below was lower. The cherub's shoulders and the architecture at the right were adjusted and several attempts were made at the elliptical shape formed by the rim of the stone basin. Two trees between the sundial and the central female were deleted during the course of painting, probably because they had obscured the view into the distant landscape. The folds in the woman's red dress at the left and the positions of her feet were changed, and the yellow dress of the woman standing at the right was enlarged at the back and the hem raised from its original reserve position.

Afternoon

The woman standing directly behind the male figure in *Afternoon* was once further to the left, and her initial location is marked by a flesh-coloured pentimento in the background landscape. In comparison with their present positions, the man's proper left arm was further to the right and the contour of his proper right leg was further to the left. As in *Midday*, the view into the background landscape was expanded. This was achieved by painting out a diagonal tree in an area to the right of the sky,

FIG. 15 *The Four Times of Day: Midday* (NG 5868). Infrared reflectogram mosaic detail.

Paul Ackroyd, Ashok Roy and Humphrey Wine

adjusting the tree trunk at the far right from an upright to a bent position, and moving the entire tree slightly over to the left.

The differences between Lancret's figures as drawn and the figures as painted, and the pentimenti in the paintings themselves, show that, as he worked towards completion of these pictures, Lancret undertook a continual process of adjustment.

Acknowledgements

Notes and references

1 *Explication des peintures, sculptures, et autres ouvrages de Messieurs de l'Académie Royale*, Paris 1739, p. 19 ('Autre [Tableau] plus petit, représentant une Dame à sa Toilette, prenant du Caffé').

2 *Procès-Verbaux de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture 1648–1793*, ed. A. Montaiglon, Paris 1883, Vol. 5, p. 293.

3 Of Lancret's paintings on copper many were of subjects from *Les Contes* of La Fontaine, and were painted in the late 1730s.

4 Georges Wildenstein, *Lancret*, Paris 1924, pp. 70–3. For the dating of Lancret's first known series of *The Four Seasons* made for Leriget de La Faye, see A. Wintermute, 'One of the great sponges. The art of Nicolas Lancret', *Apollo*, March 1992, 135, pp. 190–1.

5 Wildenstein 1924 (cited in note 4), pp. 53, 69–70. Prints of these were on sale in August 1732. For a history of the paintings following the death in 1770 of their patron, the Marquis de Béringhen, see Rachel Akpabio, 'Five drawings by Nicolas Lancret at Waddesdon Manor', *Apollo*, April 2002, p. 43. In addition Lancret was planning in 1730 to paint *The Twelve Months of the Year*: Wildenstein 1924 (cited in note 4), p. 49, but there is no evidence that the series was ever started. According to A.J. Dezallier d'Argenville, Louis XV ordered from Lancret paintings of *The Four Parts of the World* which he gave to the then Comte de Toulouse: *Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*, Paris 1762, Vol. IV, p. 234.

6 Wildenstein 1924 (cited in note 4), pp. 49 ff.

7 See for example Marianne Grivel, *Le Commerce de l'Estampe à Paris au XVIIe Siècle*, Paris 1986, pp. 146, 165, 230. For Lancret's own successful exploitation of the print medium, see Mary Taverner Holmes, *Nicolas Lancret 1690–1743*, New York 1991, p. 47 and p. 152, n. 86, and for an example of the marketing of prints, in this case as a set of three (after paintings which were not so conceived), see ibid., p. 94.

8 For example, Watteau used mythological figures for his series of *The Seasons* painted around 1715: M.M. Grasselli and P. Rosenberg, *Watteau 1684–1721*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington 1984, pp. 325–8, as did Nicolas Vleughels for a series of *The Seasons* and two series of *The Elements*: Bernard Hercenberg, *Nicolas Vleughels Peintre et Directeur de l'Académie de France à Rome 1668–1737*, Paris 1975, nos 34–7, 38–41 and 81–4. For a series of *The Seasons* painted by Natoire before 1742 and using figures from mythology, see *Charles-Joseph Natoire (Nîmes, 1700 – Castelgandolfo, 1777)*, exh. cat., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Troyes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nîmes, Villa Medicis, Rome 1977, nos 7, 21 and 22. Even Jean-François de Troy, who might have been expected to relish the opportunity to paint a *tableau de mode*, portrayed a bacchante in his representation of *Autumn*: Christophe Leribault, *Jean-François de Troy (1679–1752)*, Paris 2002, no. P152. J.-F. de Troy's *Four Elements* and *Four Parts of the World* painted for Samuel Bernard remain unidentified: Leribault, ibid., nos P170–3, and P174–7.

9 Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), p. 90.

10 André Blum, *L'Oeuvre gravé d'Abraham Bosse*, Paris 1924, nos 152–5.

11 Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), p. 90.

12 A. Ananoff, *François Boucher*, 2 vols, Lausanne and Paris 1976, Vol. 1. nos 111–14. Claude Simpol (*c.*1666–1716) had also painted a series of *The Times of Day* as genre scenes. These were engraved by Pierre Filloeul: see Helga Puhlmann, '"Kleine bunte, zum Theil sehr unschlickliche Zeichnungen..." zur Geschichte einer Serie von Miniaturen aus der Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister', *Dresdener-Künstblätter*, 1994, Vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 178–84.

13 Both *Le Matin* and *Le Midy* are known only in the form of prints. The verses to the prints after Boucher's *Le Matin* and *Le Soir* are signed by Roy, presumably the poet Pierre-Charles Roy (1684–1764) and the same person who signed the verses after the prints to Lancret's *Times of Day*. For more information on the prints, see Emmanuel Bocher, *Les gravures françaises du XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1875–7, 4eme fascicule (1877), nos 10, 49, 50 and 74. Contrary to Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), there is no reason to believe that Boucher's *The Milliner (Morning)* painted in 1746 for Crown Princess Lovisa Ulrica was inspired by Lancret's *Morning*. It seems more probable that Boucher's projected series was to have been developed from his own earlier series. On *The Milliner* and the planned manner of portraying each of Boucher's paintings of the *Times of Day*, see *François Boucher 1703–1770*, exh. cat., Detroit Institute of Arts, Grand Palais, Paris, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1986, no. 51 (entries by Alastair Laing).

14 Translation by HW.

15 *Description raisonnée des tableaux exposés au Salon du Louvre, 1739,*

Lettre à Madame la marquise de S.P.R., Deloynes Collection, Vol. 1, no. 11.

16 The spots on the opposite sides of a die always add up to seven, but in the print the spots on the adjacent sides add up to that number.

17 See Inna S. Nemilova, *The Hermitage Catalogue of Western European Painting. French Painting Eighteenth Century*, Moscow and Florence 1986, no. 101. *Summer* was one of a series of *The Four Seasons* painted for Leriget de La Faye which Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), p. 70, dates 'before 1730', but which on stylistic grounds (on which see Wintermute 1992, cited in note 4) and from the biography of Lancret's friend and contemporary, Ballot de Sovot, must be a decade earlier: Ballot de Sovot, *Éloge de Lancret Peintre du Roi*, ed. J.J. Guiffrey, Paris 1874, pp. 19–20.

18 For this painting, see M.T. Holmes, 'Deux chefs-d'oeuvre de Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743)', *Revue du Louvre*, 1991, Vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 40–2, and more particularly *Musée du Louvre. Nouvelles acquisitions du département de peintures (1987–1990)*, Paris 1991, pp. 110–13.

19 J. Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection Catalogue of Pictures III French before 1815*, London 1989, P408, where dated 'somewhat later' than 1725

20 See Marianne Roland-Michel, 'Observations on Madame Lancret's Sale', *Burlington Magazine,* 111, October 1969 (Advertisement supplement edited by J. Cailleux).

21 *A Catalogue of the Works of Art from the Collection of the Kunsthalle Bremen Lost during Evacuation in the Second World War*, 2nd revised edn, Bremen 1997, no. 887. The inventory number of this drawing missing from the Bremen collection is 09/696.

22 *Institut de France. Musée Jacquemart-André. Dessins français de la collection*, Chennevières, Paris, n.d., no. 10 (catalogue entry by Florence Gétreau).

23 In a typescript catalogue entry for the drawing in the Musée Jacquemart-André, Gétreau identifies the Épinal drawing as that listed among the anonymous drawings in André Philippe, *Musée Départemental des Vosges. Catalogue de la section des Beaux-Arts*, Épinal 1929, p. 147, no. 72. That publication notes a manuscript notation on the reverse identifying the drawing as a study for *Morning* which had been in the 1883 Schwiter sale.

24 Inv. no. KDZ 4359.

25 Martin Davies, *National Gallery Catalogues. French School*, 2nd edn revised, London 1957, p. 128 and p. 129, n. 6. There is a reproduction of the drawing in the Witt Collection.

26 Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), no. 34.

27 Holmes 1991 (cited in note 7), p. 108.

28 See *Claude to Corot: The Development of Landscape Painting in France*, ed. A. Wintermute, New York 1990, no. 31

29 See I. Horovitz, 'The Materials and Techniques of European Paintings on Copper Supports', in *Copper as Canvas: Two Centuries of Masterpiece Paintings on Copper 1575–1775*, exh. cat., Phoenix Art Museum, Oxford 1998, pp. 63–92. This catalogue essay is the most up-to-date and comprehensive published description of techniques for painting on copper panels.

30 S. Smith and M.T. Gnudi, *The Pirotechnia of Vannoccio Biringuccio*, Cambridge, Mass., 1952, p. 369.

31 According to the *Wallace Collection Catalogue 1989* (cited in note 19), Lancret's *Birdcatchers* on copper also has a silver-coloured coating, described as 'tinned'.

32 Analysis of the paint binding medium, and the detection of resin, was carried out by Raymond White and Catherine Higgitt using gas-chromatography–mass-spectrometry (GC–MS).

33 A. Massing, 'French Painting Technique in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries and De La Fontaine's *Académie de la peinture* (Paris 1679)', in *Looking Through Paintings*, ed. E. Hermens, London 1998, pp. 319–76.

34 Infrared reflectography of the paintings was carried out by Rachel Billinge.

35 M. Swicklik, 'French Painting and the Use of Varnish, 1750–1900', in *Conservation Research, National Gallery of Art Washington*, Washington, DC 1993, pp. 157–4.

36 See note 19.

37 See note 17.

38 In addition, the standing female's pose in the centre of *Diana and Callisto* included in Wildenstein 1924 (cited in note 4), p. 119, known to him only through a process-engraving, is similar to that of the female figure at the prow of the boat in *Evening*. It is unclear whether this print is a reverse image of the painting.