

Jean-Marc Nattier



Madame Le Fèvre de Caumartin as Hebe,
oil on canvas by ...

*Courtesy National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress
Collection, 1946.7.13*

Jean-Marc Nattier, (born March 17, 1685, Paris, France—died November 7, 1766, Paris), French Rococo painter noted for his portraits of the ladies of King Louis XV's court in classical mythological attire.

Nattier received his first instruction from his father, the portraitist Marc Nattier (c. 1642–1705), and from his uncle, the history painter Jean Jouvenet. He enrolled in the Royal Academy in 1703 and made a series of drawing of the Marie de Médicis painting cycle by Peter Paul Rubens in the Luxembourg Palace; the publication (1710) of engravings based on these drawings made Nattier famous. In 1715 he went to Amsterdam, where he painted portraits of the Russian tsar, Peter the Great, and his wife, Empress Catherine, though he declined the tsar's offer to go to Russia.

Nattier aspired to be a history painter, but the French financial crisis of 1720 all but ruined him, and he was henceforth obliged to turn to portraiture, which was more lucrative. He subsequently revived the genre of the allegorical portrait, in which a living person is depicted as a Greco-Roman goddess or other mythological figure. Nattier's graceful and charming portraits of court ladies in this mode were very fashionable, partly because he could beautify a sitter while also retaining her likeness. He served as official portraitist to the four daughters of Louis XV from 1745, painting those young ladies in innumerable guises and pursuits. Among Nattier's portraits using a more straightforward approach are *Portrait of Marie Leczinska* and *The Artist Surrounded by His Family* (1730).

"Jean-Marc Nattier". Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.

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<<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Marc-Nattier>>.

Jean-Marc Nattier

Dates	1685 - 1766
Roles	Artist, Designer
Nationality	French

Jean-Marc Nattier's father was a portrait painter, and his mother painted miniatures. Young Jean-Marc studied with them and attended the Académie Royale, soon winning a prize for drawing. He also gained attention by copying Charles Le Brun's battle pictures and Peter Paul Rubens's Marie de' Medici cycle in the Louvre. Nattier's godfather, Baroque painter Jean Jouvenet, encouraged him to study at the Académie de France in Rome, but Nattier never went to Italy because he was so busy in Paris. Except for working in Holland in 1717, he remained in his native city.

In 1718 Nattier was accepted into the Académie Royale. From then on, he made oil or pastel portraits, mostly of women, often turning his sitters into Greek or Roman gods and goddesses in a theatrical, mythological setting. Mythological portraiture allowed Nattier to synthesize his desire to be a history painter with the financial necessity of making a living, for portraits were in demand. After the 1740s, as tastes began to change, Nattier created more straightforward representations. Financial problems and illness finally caused him to stop painting in 1762.

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Nattier, Jean-Marc

French, 1685 - 1766

Nattier le jeune

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BIOGRAPHY

Jean-Marc Nattier was the son of an insignificant portraitist of the reign of Louis XIV, Marc Nattier (1642-1705), and his wife, the miniaturist Marie Courtois (1655-1703). Born in Paris on March 17, 1685, he was the godchild of the history painter Jean Jouvenet (1644-1717), who was to play a role in his early artistic training. Nattier's mother, a paralytic, had given birth to several children, including a son, Jean Baptiste (1677-1726). In their youth the lives and careers of the two brothers were closely entwined. They learned the practical aspects of painting in their father's studio and attended the drawing and theoretical classes of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, of which Marc Nattier was a member. The two were awarded a yearly stipend from the royal arts administration, the Bâtiments du Roi, and were prize winners in the Académie's student competitions. Their painting styles were remarkably similar, and Jean-Baptiste called himself *Nattier l'aîné*, while Jean-Marc often signed his early works as *Nattier le jeune*.

In 1702 Marc Nattier obtained a license to reproduce as engravings the twenty-four paintings comprising the monumental *Marie de Médicis* cycle by Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) in the Palais du Luxembourg. This was an enormous undertaking in which he involved his two sons, who executed the drawings (Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal) from which the most prominent French engravers of the time--among them Gérard Audran (1640-1703), Gérard Edelinck (1640-1707), Bernard Picart (1673-1733), and Gaspard Duchange (1662-1757)--made their reproductive prints. In 1709, at Jouvenet's instigation, Jean-Marc was offered a scholarship to study in Rome, but he declined the honor in order to further a lucrative career as a portraitist.

Before his death, Marc Nattier had deeded the Luxembourg engraving project to his sons, and in 1710 the prints were issued under the title *Galerie du Palais du Luxembourg*. Jean-Baptiste's official career as a history painter was launched when he was made an associate member (*agrégé*) of the Académie, and as his diploma piece he painted *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* (St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum). Around 1712 Jean-Marc made an elaborate drawing (Phoenix Art Museum) after Hyacinthe Rigaud's (1659-1743) famous *Portrait of Louis XIV in Coronation Robes* (Paris, Musée du Louvre); the sheet was the basis of Pierre Drevet's (1663-1738) reproductive engraving, and for it Nattier received 500 livres and encouragement from the king himself.

Jean-Marc prospered under the Regency. In 1715 his ambitions led him to seek membership in the Académie as a painter of history subjects. For the painting that was to earn him his reception three years later, he was assigned the mythological subject of *Apollo Presiding over the Arts of Painting and Sculpture*, for which he ultimately substituted *Perseus Petrifying Phineus with the Head of the Gorgon* (Tours, Musée des Beaux-Arts). In 1717 he was invited to join Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) in Holland, and while in The Hague he began a portrait of the czar's peasant-born second wife Catherine Alexeyevna (St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum) and executed a generic battle piece

intended to commemorate Russia's victory over the troops of Charles XII of Sweden at either Lesnaya or Poltava (Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts). He then returned to Paris, where he painted from life a portrait of the czar wearing a suit of armor (Munich, Residenz Museum). The autocrat took serious umbrage at Nattier's refusal to settle in Russia as his court painter. In 1725, the artist sent his full-length military portrait of comte Maurice de Saxe (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) to the Exposition de la Jeunesse.

Jean-Marc Nattier's practice as a court and society portraitist was firmly established by 1729, when he painted a likeness of Mademoiselle de Clermont (Chantilly, Musée Condé), the sister of the young Louis XV's prime minister, the duc de Bourbon. In this work, he combined portraiture with history painting, presenting his subject in the guise of a water nymph. For several decades his glamorous portraits of women made up as Greco-Roman deities and men outfitted as warriors or fabled heroes were all the rage. His mythological, allegorical, and fancy-dress portraits, set in luxurious interiors or serene landscapes, relied for their effect on sumptuous displays of fabrics and accessories. Moreover, while flattering his sitters, sometimes outrageously, he somehow managed to capture near-perfect likenesses. Such pictures were the staple products of his brush, and he was well within the tradition established by Pierre Mignard (1612-1695, cat. 72), Nicolas de Largillier (1656-1746), and Jean Raoux (1677-1734). In contemporary minds, such idealized portraiture struck the same chords as the grandiloquent poetry of Voltaire (1694-1778) and the lush strains of the music of Jean Philippe Rameau (1683-1764). Because of their pseudo-mythological resonance, many of Nattier's works were treated as history pictures and replicated in engravings from which he derived income.

At this juncture the artist painted likenesses of two members of the house of Lorraine, Mademoiselle de Lambesc as Minerva and her brother, the comte de Brionne (Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts, on deposit from the Musée du Louvre). A second portrait of Mademoiselle de Clermont depicting the sitter as a lady of the seraglio served by slaves (London, Wallace Collection) was an outstanding example of the eighteenth-century genre, the *Turquerie*. He also produced a full-length image of the duc de Richelieu wearing the elaborately decorated costume of a knight of the order of the Saint-Esprit (Lisbon, Museu Calouste Gulbenkian), a masterpiece of post-baroque French portraiture.

In 1734 the chevalier d'Orléans, grand prior of the order of Saint John of Jerusalem, engaged Nattier to complete the decoration of his painting gallery in the Palais du Temple, which Raoux had begun. There Nattier painted a series of six history pictures, the subjects of which have never been fully elucidated but are likely to have included several *Muses* (perhaps the *Thalia and Terpsichore* in the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, painted in 1739) and allegorical representations of *Justice* (Great Britain, private collection), *Prudence* (formerly collection of baron Maurice de Rothschild) and *Fortitude* (sale, New York, Christie's, November 2, 2000, no. 237), as well as a large, full-length portrait of his patron the grand prior as a military commander (location unknown).

Nattier became a regular exhibitor at the Salon from 1737 on. The publicity brought him a ceaseless flow of commissions from private and state sources. The famous Madame Geoffrin posed for him as a Sibyl (location unknown); and in contrast, her daughter, the marquise de la Ferté Imbault, is dressed for a masked ball (Tokyo, Fuji Museum). In 1740 the artist painted portraits of two daughters of the marquis de Nesles, both paramours of Louis XV (known from replicas in the Castle of Drottningholm and Versailles), whom he treated as personifications of Silence and Dawn. When shown at Versailles, these likenesses created such a stir that Queen Marie Leszczyńska commissioned the artist to paint her daughter Madame Henriette reclining in a landscape and holding a crown of flowers, an attribute of the goddess Flora (Musée des Châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon). This was the first in a long series of portraits of the royal princesses, some done from life at the Abbaye de Fontevault in Anjou, the works for which Nattier is perhaps best known (also in Versailles). Most of these paintings gave rise to autograph replicas and studio copies that were distributed to members of the royal family, other crowned heads, officers of the diplomatic corps, ministers, courtiers, and favorites of the Bourbon family.

Nattier exhibited seven works at the Salon of 1745, the year he painted a now-lost portrait of *Louis XV* (replica in St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum). In 1745 the artist was promoted to the rank of associate professor at the Académie. At the Salon that year, he showed a number of portraits, including the National Gallery of Art's *Joseph Bonnier de la Mosson* (1961.9.30). Nattier was soon called to the Château de Fontainebleau to paint the king's new mistress, the marquise de Pompadour, provocatively dressed as Diana, goddess of the hunt (Versailles). The following

year he executed a knee-length portrait of Louis XV's son and heir, the *Dauphin* (replica in Musée de Dijon), clad in armor and standing before the field of the Battle of Fontenoy, a work that earned him the title of Painter in Ordinary to the King. In 1748, the artist sketched from life head studies of Louis XV's children--the twins Élisabeth, Duchess of Parma, and Henriette; Adélaïde; Victoire; and the dauphin, Louis Ferdinand--that were models for future portraits. When the opportunity arose, the fashionable Nattier was also capable of recording his sitters' features with a certain amount of psychological insight. No allegories were necessary to sustain his inspiration when he painted his sympathetic likeness of Marie Leszczyńska (Versailles).

In January 1750, the dauphin commissioned Nattier to paint as overdoor decorations for his Grand Cabinet at Versailles portraits of his sisters disguised as the Four Elements (São Paulo, Museu de Arte Assis Chateaubriand), works that were exhibited at the Salon of 1751 along with a portrait of the dauphine Marie Josèphe de Saxe (Versailles). In 1752 the artist was made professor in the Académie.

By the mid-1750s Nattier's reputation was on the wane. His submissions to the Salon of 1755, which included the masterful portraits of Henriette playing the bass viol and the infant duc de Bourgogne (both in Versailles), elicited some vituperative commentary on the part of certain critics, who found his compositions pretentious and his coloring weak. In 1759 he was elected an associate member of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art, and as his reception piece he executed a replica of a portrait of his son-in-law, the painter Louis Tocqué (Copenhagen, Royal Museum of Fine Arts). That year he exhibited a magnificent portrait of Madame Adélaïde holding a musical score (Paris, Musée du Louvre) and a *Vestal* (Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art), which aroused the scathing hostility of Diderot. In 1761 the sight of Nattier's posthumous portrait of the *Duchess of Parma* (Versailles) at the Salon prompted Diderot to exclaim: "Does that man not have a friend who will tell him the truth?" The old and infirm artist found himself in such difficult financial straits that he was obliged to sell his art collection and the contents of his studio. Jean-Marc Nattier died on November 7, 1766, in his eighty-first year, and his remains were entombed the following day in his parish church of Saint-Eustache.

[Joseph Baillio, in *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue, Washington, D.C., 2009: 334-335.]

