L'ENSEIGNE DE GERSAINT

by

Shirley Helen Haskin

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Sheldon Reich

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Sheldon Reich
Professor of Art

4/26/70 Date
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ABSTRACT

In 1720 the French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau painted a large sign for Edme-Francois Gersaint's small picture gallery in Paris. This 5 foot by 10 foot oil on canvas did not last long as a piece of advertising and eventually became part of Frederick II collection of French masters. L'Enseigne de Gersaint or Shopsign for Gersaint is still in Berlin and considered as Watteau's final masterpiece and one of the landmarks of painting.

L'Enseigne de Gersaint has undergone numerous physical changes in construction since 1720. It has been pieced, cut, slashed, enlarged, painted over, and still endures as a beautiful work. This painting has been challenged as to its authenticity and verified by modern laboratory methods. The work has been copied several times. Watteau's last work, a scene of tranquil beauty, was the center of dispute between France and Germany after both World Wars.

This thesis is a compilation of as complete a background history as possible on this painting, together with descriptions of transformation of the canvas, and research and arguments about it. A significant connection between Watteau and his last painting and the work of the Impressionists is also touched on.

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INTRODUCTION

. . . It is a marvelous painting, the supreme flower of genius. For the freshness, for the composition, for the beauty of the color, for the mystery of poetry obtained with the simplest elements, it takes a place in the work of Watteau analogous to that taken in the work of Rembrandt and Velasquez by the Portrait of the Brunswick Family and Las Meninas.¹

Immediately after the Second World War the French poet Louis Aragon wrote that the only reparation France could accept for the destruction inflicted by Germany would be the return of a French painting which had been in Germany since the eighteenth century: L'Enseigne de Gersaint (see Figure 1).

I claim the purest work produced by the French genius, the most incomparable work bought at the price of each cry of a tortured man, at the price of each cry of a violated woman, at the price of the cry of a wounded man killed in these mountains of our suffering. For each tear taken through torture. For the incomparable suffering of the French, for the matchless spiritual greatness of a painter of France at the continually invaded borders of our country of Flanders.²

This highly valued and esteemed work, painted in 1720 by Jean Antoine Watteau, was the last major work of the


Figure 1. L'Enseigne de Gersaint (color), Gersaint's Shopsign, Jean-Antoine Watteau 1720.
French artist who died within months of completing the painting. *L'Enseigne de Gersaint*, Watteau's final masterpiece and the price of wars,\(^3\) was one of the most interesting background histories of any major art work.

*L'Enseigne de Gersaint*\(^4\) was originally conceived not as a painting but as a signboard to be placed before a picture gallery as an advertisement. This work's fate has been the most unusual for any piece of advertising.

Not only has the work been argued over by countries, but also by critics. It has also endured numerous alterations. Watteau's *Shopsign* has existed as two paintings and then as a reassembled single work; it has been slashed by sabres, cut from, added onto, reshaped, reformed, and enlarged. The painting has been discussed by others in terms of how it was achieved, and how it was hung. Its authenticity has been questioned and then affirmed by modern laboratory means.

Besides the unusual physical history of this painting, there is further fascination in its color and content. The painter of the *Shopsign*, Jean Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), represents a turning point in eighteenth

\(^3\) Watteau's painting was also part of the reparations demanded by France from Germany after the First World War. See: Pierre de Nolhac, "L'Art Francais en Allemagne--ce qui Peut Revenir," *Les Arts* (1919), 1-36.

\(^4\) To be referred to in this paper as the *Shopsign*. 
Watteau's *Shopsign* may be seen as a sort of bridge to the freedom of spirit and freedom of approach to everyday subject matter, expressed in a purely painterly technique, which one finds in the Impressionists.

This paper is an attempt to weave together as much of the material about this painting as possible to give a whole fabric for the story of the *Shopsign*. Included will be the history of the painting, placement in time, the iconographical attempts, and those attempts at interpretation. Along with this, a description of the canvas itself and the stages of reconstruction it has undergone. Bound with the changes the painting has undergone, is the question once raised about its authenticity and a description of the laboratory work which was done to verify the originality of Watteau's work.
THE REGENCY PERIOD; WATTEAU AND GERSAINT

The Shopsign was painted during that period in French history known as the Regency (1715-1723). In September of 1715, Louis XIV died, mourned only by Mme. Maintenon and celebrated by dancing in the streets. At the time of Louis' death the Court had already moved from Versailles back to Paris. At his Grandfather's death, Louis XV was only five years old and his uncle, Philippe, duc d'Orleans, was named Regent. Under this Regent the former austère life of the later court of Louis XIV took on a whole new direction. The attitude was one of more ease, freedom, independence and personal expression. People lived in their own hotels particuliers; social life and interior decoration took on a scale smaller and more intimate. The flamboyant style of the Baroque flowed into the gentler style of the Rococo.

Though recognition by the French Academy was still important to the artist at this period, the patronage of a King was not. With the Regency a new Bourgeoisie emerged to become private patrons and collectors of art. This was the period of the amateur; the educated, connoisseur-collector. These amateurs were also influential art patrons. The

5. Rococo—-from the French Rocaille, grotto or rockwork.
Regent himself was a talented painter. Philippe, duc d'Orleans, was noted before his Regency as an avid pursurer of pleasure. Nevertheless, while not abandoning his pursuits, he was also interested in the welfare of France.

Philippe's first major move as Regent was an economic one. To try to amend for the depleted financial situation left by Louis XIV, Philippe named a Scotch economist, John Law, as the Finance Minister. Law issued shares and paper money on speculation, with the fortunes of the new Louisiana Territory as security. This paper money brought great private wealth from 1715 to 1720. This sudden wealth was very important to the growth of French art. Fortunes became so great and common that the Princess Palatine, mother of the Regent wrote: "I am so tired of hearing people speak of nothing but stocks and millions that I cannot conceal my bad temper." These fortunes were the bases for fine art collections and for the first time he private gallery dealers, as we now know them, came into their own.

In the midst of this prosperity Edmé-François Gersaint opened his first art gallery. Gersaint bought his first shop from a painter, Antoine Dieu, in January of 1718.


This gallery was on the Petit-Pont, one of the many bridges over the Seine connecting the Île de St. Louis to Paris proper. This gallery already had a sign painted by Jean Antoine Watteau (see Figure 2). On April 28 of 1718, Gersaint married the daughter of another dealer and noted collector, Pierre Sirois. Sirois, whose shop insignium, or sign, was Aux Armes de France, had been a friend and patron of the young painter Watteau. On the evening of Gersaint's marriage to Marie-Louise Sirois there occurred what hardly could be called a marriage celebration, for 30 buildings on the Petit-Pont burned to the ground; among them Gersaint's newly acquired shop.

Undaunted, Gersaint opened another shop on a neighboring bridge, and Pont Notre Dame where he eventually would have another sign painted by Jean-Antoine Watteau. Watteau had come to know Gersaint through Pierre Sirois. In 1709 Spöede, a Flemish painter, brought to Sirois' shop a painting entitled Halte de l'Armee by his young Flemish friend Watteau (who was then 25). Sirois bought the painting for 60 livres (then about $40.00) and asked to meet Watteau to commission a companion piece. This was the first

8. Lost in fire of 1718 but an engraving was done by N. Larmessin.

Figure 2. Louis XIV Awarding the Legion of Honor to the duc de Bourgogne, Watteau -- Engraving made after Shopsign for Antoine Dieu, by Filleoul, n.d.
painting Watteau sold. Later Watteau would live for a period with the Sirois family (1711) and the future Madame Gersaint figures in several of Watteau's early paintings and drawings. 10

It was, in fact, through the kind of protection and patronage offered by men like Sirois and Gersaint that Watteau survived. When Watteau went to Paris from his native Valenciennes, 11 in 1702 he was 17 years old and penniless. His first experiences in Paris were those we now associate with the romantic picture of the bohemian artist; poverty, hunger, hard work, and isolation. Ironically, Watteau's first job in Paris was as a copier of paintings on the same bridge, Pont Notre Dame, where he would paint his final masterpiece, the Shopsign.

After selling his first painting to Sirois, Watteau began to eke out a living. He also applied to the French Academy, not for recognition, but as he wished to win the Prix de Rome so that he might study in Italy. Instead, Watteau was elected a member of the Academy in 1717. Beyond a few facts like this most of Watteau's life is difficult to trace as he seemed to wander from place to place and person.


11. Had Watteau been born 6 years earlier he would have been Flemish. In 1678 Valenciennes, a part of Flanders, was ceded to the French by the Treaty of Nijmwegen. Dacier et al., p. 1.
to person and his only recorded address is for his last year when he stayed with Gersaint in his shop in 1720.

What little information we have about Watteau's erratic life, difficult and diffident personality and his work habits, comes from the small circle of people who befriended him throughout his career in Paris,

... he so inspired the protective instinct, that from his late teens on he was befriended by a series of dealers, fellow artists and collector-patrons who form, in retrospect, a kind of Watteau benevolent society.\(^\text{12}\)

Mme Hélène Adhémar, one of the most eminent of Watteau scholars remarks, however (of this group), "... it was one of the most reputable artistic milieus of the epoch."\(^\text{13}\)

These patrons, and friends closest to Watteau, must have been long-suffering for he is described by them as restless, unstable, irritable, wandering and dissatisfied. These men were: Pierre Crozat, a fabulously wealthy collector and art patron whose famed collection of drawings by Italian masters is now in the Hermitage; the comte de Caylus, collector and patron; Claude Glucq, factory owner, collector, and Parliamentarian of Paris; Jean de Jullienne, cousin to Glucq, owner of a tapestry and dying works in the Gobelins. Jullienne, a devoted friend and admirer of Watteau is the

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man responsible for having engravings made of all available
Watteau paintings (published, 1726-1732) as the Receuil
Jullienne. This was a memorial to Watteau. Jean Marriette,
owner of a print shop and a noted connoisseur who later
published a fine work on Leonardo. These men, along with
Edmé-Francois Gersaint and Pierre Sirois all wrote about
Watteau after his death and it is from their notes and
memoirs that we have what little completely reliable
information there is on the artist. 14  But, as a later fine
scholar and admirer of Watteau, Camille Mauclair writes:

As a matter of fact, if we do not know much, it
is because there is not much to know about a man who
vegetated in poverty and obscurity, who worked
enormously, and who, when he was recognized, lived
a retired and austere life. Erudition loses its
rights over existences such as these which are
almost exclusively internal, and psychology and
love of art succeed to them. 15

The total impression left by the writings of his
friends, however, is of a fevered, difficult genius whose
whole effort was devoted to his art; a man who followed his
own vision and needed neither King nor Regent to survive.
Fortunately this small circle remained devoted to Watteau
until his death, were concerned for his finances and
welfare, and preserved his works.

14. Pierre Champion has collected these memoires in
their entirety in one volume, Notes Critiques sur les vies
Anciennes d'Watteau (Paris, 1921). Appended to Mme.
Adhémar's book of 1950 are several of these writings.

15. Camille Mauclair, Antoine Watteau (London,
1909), 191, 192.
Jean-Antoinne Watteau returned to Paris from a stay in London in the Fall of 1720. At that time Watteau was 36 years old and in the last stages of tuberculosis. Upon his return, the perpetually rootless Watteau sought refuge with one of these several friends in the Parisian art world, the dealer Gersaint. Gersaint lived then above his small three story shop at no. 35 Pont du Notre Dame. Here, not far from the palace of the Louvre, was the heart of Parisian art and merchant life.

During this stay with Gersaint Watteau painted, in probable appreciation for friendship and hospitality, a sign to be displayed in front of the dealer's shop. Fortunately, we have Gersaint's own description of the genesis of the Shopsign:

Upon his return to Paris, which was some time in 1721 [sic],16 and during the first years of my business, Watteau came to me and asked if I would receive him and if, I would permit him to "loosen up his fingers" (and those were his words) . . . if I would permit him to paint a signboard for my shop that I would exhibit outside.

I had some misgivings about letting him do this because I would have liked it better if he had undertaken something more serious. But, seeing that this would make him happy I consented. We know now the success of this piece. Everything was done from nature. The attitudes so perfect, easy and true, the harmony so natural, the grouping

16. See Paul Alfassa, "L'Enseigne de Gersaint," 9. Alfassa proves that Watteau was in Paris on July 22, 1720 for Jullienne's wedding, and that the Shopsign was probably painted between September and December of 1720.
so well understood. This work attracted the eyes of every passerby. Even the best painters came by several times to admire it. This signboard took eight days to complete and he worked only in the mornings, as his health was so delicate, or better said, he was so weak that he could not work any longer than this.

It is the only work which seemed to assuage his self esteem and he had no difficulty in telling me that. At the moment Jean de Jullienne has the work in his collection and an engraving of it has been accomplished by his efforts.17

Watteau had gone to stay with Gersaint at exactly the same time that the prospering French economy fell apart. On July 18, 1720, France went totally bankrupt. John Law's wild schemes had gone too far. While Mr. Law went into hiding, people were crushed in the streets in the wild frenzy to cash in stocks. Whether or not Watteau was also financially involved we cannot be certain, we do know that Largillière, Gillot, and Nattier all went bankrupt at this time.18 We do know that when Watteau painted his Shopsign, the streets of Paris were certainly not the scene of ease and grace he portrayed. By the fall of 1720 few people had bread and almost none had money and the fear of plague was spreading.

After completing the Shopsign in eight days, Watteau stayed on with Gersaint for six more months.


18. Dacier et al., 105.
Gersaint tells us that he then grew restless and, "desired to inconvenience me no longer." Gersaint found a place for Watteau to stay at Nogent sur Marne, not far from Paris. Watteau lived on only a short time and died, at the age of 37, in the arms of his friend Gersaint on July 18, 1921.\textsuperscript{19}

Gersaint,\textsuperscript{20} whose shop insignium was \textit{Au Grand Monarque}, later changed the name to \textit{A La Pagode} and Watteau's successor in creating Gersaint's next advertising work was the same painter now considered to be Watteau's successor in eighteenth century painting, Francois Boucher (1703-1770).

\textsuperscript{19} Gersaint, "Notes sur Watteau," 66-67.

\textsuperscript{20} Gersaint retains his place in art history not only for his association with Watteau. He was the first to catalogue the prints of Rembrandt and the G. noted by a Rembrandt print is from Gersaint's catalogue, \textit{Catalogue Raisonné de Toutes les Pièces qui forment l'Oeuvre de Rembrandt} (Paris, 1751; London, 1952). See also: Christopher White and K. G. Boon, \textit{Rembrandt's Etchings} (Amsterdam, 1969).
HISTORY OF THE SHOPSIGN

Gersaint tells us in his essay that the Shopsign was displayed in front of his shop for only fifteen days. After this the painting went into a private collection. The admiration for the obvious artistic merit of the sign, the inclement weather of a Parisian winter, or Watteau's need for money are all possible reasons for the speedy removal of the Shopsign from the front of Gersaint's shop.

After the removal of the sign from the front of Gersaint's shop, the first documented notice of its whereabouts was not until 1732. The newspaper Mercure de France carried the following notice in November of 1732; the last of three notices advising the public that an engraving of the sign was for sale:

The print is for sale, . . . The work (from which it was made) which is 9 feet six inches long and 5 feet high has always been considered the masterpiece of this excellent painter. . . . This famous Shopsign was exhibited for only 15 days and won the admiration of all Paris. It was sold to M. Glucq. At this time it is found in the collection of M. Jullienne who was responsible for having the engraving made.22

Sometime between 1744 and 1760, the Shopsign left the collection of Jullienne. By 1756 the work is no longer

22. Mercure de France (Novembre, 1732), 2449.
listed in the catalogue of Jullienne's collection and is not included in Jullienne's last will and testament dated May 25, 1764. Nor is the Shopsign included in the final sale of Jullienne's collection, March 30, 1767.\(^{23}\)

Between 1745 and 1760 Frederick II (The Great) of Prussia began acquiring works by modern French masters to decorate his newly built palaces; San Souci, Charlottenburg and Potsdam, near Berlin. Frederick, a noted francophile, had at his court the French painter Antoine Pesne who may greatly have influenced his taste. Frederick's picture buying envoy to Paris was Friedrich Rudolph, the comte de Rothenburg. The military man and diplomat Rothenburg first mentions the possible purchase of Watteau's sign in a letter dated Paris, 30, March, 1745. The "two large pieces" Rothenburg refers to may have been the sign because of reference to size:

I am also in the process of obtaining some Watteaus. It is very difficult to find paintings of these two masters [previously he had been writing of Lancret] \(^{24}\), but Your Majesty will be flattered to have two works so well done, so pleasing. Moreover, they are a good size to decorate your new quarters where you plan to put them. These works were not easy to find as this painter [Watteau], hardly produced anything more than small paintings.\(^{24}\)

We can be certain Watteau's sign found its way to Prussia by 1760 because of a letter to Frederick dated

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\(^{23}\) Dacier et al., 1, 34.

19 October, 1760, while he was fighting in the field during the Seven Years War. The Marquis Boyer d'Argens, Grand Chamberlin of the King of Prussia, reported on the damages done to the palaces of Berlin by the Austrians:

... there was no damage done at all at Potsdam nor at Sans Souci; as for Charlottenburg, they pillaged the tapestries ... but for some reason they did not damage the three most beautiful paintings there, among them the two signs of Watteau.25

However, a later report from a palace guard indicated that there was some damage to the painting: "... in Your Majesties' Concert Hall they damaged the tapestries and one of the signs received some sabre slashes which can be repaired."26

We note from these letters that the sign is referred to in the plural. These references indicate that as early as 1760 the Shopsign did exist not as one painting but as two separate works, as later description of the Shopsign's structure will clarify. It was not until 1931 that the Shopsign was reframed as one composition.

At the palace of Charlottenburg the signs were hung first in the music room (Konzert Kammer). Transferred to the Empress's private Salon, or Red Room, the signs were not on public view until after 1900. After the Shopsign was


26. Ibid., 11.
exhibited in Paris in 1900, the work was returned to the music room again. During the Second World War the art works from the Berlin palaces were stored in the Berlin Dahlem Museum in Berlin. The badly damaged palaces underwent renovation in 1973 and the Shopsign hangs at this time in the Concert hall of the Charlottenburg Palace.\(^{27}\)

THE SHOPSIGN

As first mentioned in the Mercure de France article\textsuperscript{28} the Shopsign is a very large work. Assembled now into one painting the measurements are approximately five feet by close to ten feet (1.82 m x 3.07 m). These dimensions are almost colossal by eighteenth century standards, but we must remember that the work was meant as a piece of advertising, and not for the salon.

The Shopsign presents a glimpse from a street into the interior of a small shop or art gallery. The almost square, boxlike area is shown with the front wall cut away and appears to the viewer very much like a stage setting. On the left side of the scene is a stone wall providing a proscenium column. One step high up off the cobblestone street, runs the length of the composition and provides a kind of stage platform. On this small stage, the various daily activities of a small art world are carried on in miniature.

Grouped in the shop are twelve figures. Covering the two side walls and the back wall, almost from floor to ceiling, paintings are hung. Also displayed are mirrors, a clock and small art objects. In the exact center of the

\textsuperscript{28} Mercure de France, 2449.
back wall are french doors, one slightly opened. This mid-

division of doors cuts the composition exactly in half.

On seeing this picture, our attention is first
drawn to the fiture of a lady wearing a lavender satin gown
which flows freely in a sweep from her neck to the floor.
She enters up the step into the shop gracefully extending
her hand to a fashionably dressed and bewigged young gentle-
man. He faces full forward, extending a hand to greet her.
The lady glances to her left where two young men are
packing a crate. In the crate is a painting which appears
to be of Louis XIV. Leaning against the far left wall, a
young man, wearing a porter's brace, waits to carry the
crate away, or has just unloaded the bale of straw which
lies at his feet with pieces floating about.

The right side of the painting portrays the business
of the showing and appreciating of the art works in the
shop. A gentleman, who appears to be the proprietor, holds
up a very large oval painting. Before the painting, a lady,
dressed entirely in black peers through a lorgnette at the
picture, while a kneeling gentleman intently studies the
work. On their right, the lady of the shop sits behind a
long low counter displaying a set of red lacquer work to two

29. The name of Gersaint's shop Aux Grand Monarque
is probably represented by this painting of Louis XIV (a

copy of a LeBrun portrait) -- perhaps an allusion to a former
sign. The packing of 'Louis' portrait probably has nothing
to do with the King's death, which was 5 years before this.
attentive gentlemen. Before the counter lounges a sumptuously dressed lady who seems to be admiring herself in a mirror. Anchoring the scene on the lower right, a small dog lies on the cobblestones and scratches his fleas.

This large and rich scene is actually based on simple one-point perspective. Perhaps to achieve such a work in only eight days time, Watteau had to use the most elementary of compositions. Yet, super-imposed over the basic setting, are numerous subtle variations, curves, overlapping planes, and slow interactions of groupings. The arrangement of the figures seems to fall into two large semi-circles and the eye is led across the confined interior by slow fluid curves.

The fluid ease of figure grouping and movement is not achieved by line but, as with the background as well, by tones of color. The painting is built entirely in tones of grey, brown, and gold. Only the glowing lights of the lavender gown on the left half and the pink stripes of the gown on the right contain focal colors in pinks. The only small spots of pure intense color, as if small added jewels, appear in the emerald green shoe under the lavender gown and on the right side, in the ruby red of the lacquer work displayed on the counter.

This painting, created out of color values, seems to be bathed in a pearly glow. The lighting comes from many angles, but no one source. One notes that shadows do not
match on both sides. Silhouettes on one side of the composition seem to picot from points opposite to the other side. This strange lighting system, or lack of one, and the hazy glow throughout, remove this picture from the appearance of photographic pose or documentary recording (though the clock on the left side is at 11:05).

The lasting impression of Watteau's Shopsign is one of a hazy timelessness. There is an understatement and delicacy about the everyday scene depicted which leaves an impression beyond that of merely seeing an eighteenth century street scene. Lord Kenneth Clark observed, "... the Enseigne, in spite of the frivolity of its subject, gives one the feeling of an extremely serious picture."  

PEOPLE AND PAINTINGS DEPICTED (ICONOGRAPHY)

Some art historians have attempted to identify the people and paintings portrayed in Watteau's Shopsign. The following compilation of various identifications can only be accepted, however, as speculative\(^3\) (see Figure 3).

People in the Painting

1. Figure of a porter. This figure was probably not even painted by Watteau (to be discussed in section on laboratory study of the canvas), but may have been painted by Watteau's sometime pupil Jean-Baptiste Pater. In later study it will be noted that originally a haywagon was depicted on this side.

2 and 3. Shop workers or packers. The sketch for these two figures is the only known preparatory sketch for this sign, and probably the only sketch

Figure 3. Diagram—figures in the painting.
Watteau ever did specifically for any of his paintings (see Figure 4).

4. Unidentified lady. There are several drawings of a similar figure in long sweeping gown, seen from the back, both standing and sitting, in Watteau's works (see Figure 5). This figure is also similar to one in Watteau's *Judgement of Paris* (1720). The gown portrayed here is that gown which would later become very fashionable and known as "le style Watteau."

5. Gentleman. This figure has been speculated on, with no grounds, by several of the writers, to be Watteau himself.

6. Unidentified lady. There is an engraving by Watteau of a lady in a similar black gown (which may have been a mourning costume) (see Figure 5).

7. Antoine de la Rocque. De la Rocque was the publisher of the newspaper *Mercure de France* and a friend to Watteau. Shefer notes that de la Rocque had a wooden leg and probably would not have been portrayed in a kneeling position.


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Figure 4. Sketch—shop workers and packers.
Figure 5. Drawing and engraving of a lady—Watteau.
9. E. F. Gersaint. The position of the man, holding up the major art work in the composition, led to the suppositions that this must be the dealer himself.

10. Claude Glucq. Parliamentary Councilor of Paris and the collector who first purchased the Shopsign. The speculations are that he purchased the work because he was portrayed in it. This is without grounds.

11. Jean de Jullienne.

12. Madame Marie-Louis Gersaint. As she is also in a position of proprietor, it would seem easy to speculate this must be Mme. Gersaint. She was also portrayed many times in other paintings by Watteau, notably Retour de Chasse (1717).

13. The last figure, the little dog scratching its fleas, is probably the only truly identifiable figure in the scene. Not only is this dog seen in several of Watteau's paintings, but the exact dog is to be found in the lower right section of Rubens painting in the Luxembourg, the Coronation of Marie de Médici (see Figure 6). Several of the writers noted have seen this dog as Watteau's homage to the painter he admired the most, Peter Paul Rubens, and if there is any personal message involved in the Shopsign, it might well be the small dog.
Figure 6. Dog (detail) from *Coronation of Marie de Medici*, Peter Paul Rubens.
Parker and Shefer both point out that Watteau rarely actually made sketches or used models with any particular painting in mind. Rather, it was Watteau's practice to use his friends as models for drawings, with the drawing itself as the end product. Watteau's major preoccupation in fact, was with drawing. When he needed figures for a painting he worked from sketches already at hand. The comte de Caylus, who often drew with Watteau, leaves us this account of Watteau's drawing habits:

... Ordinarily Watteau drew without a specific objective. He never made a sketch or noted down an idea for any of his paintings... It was his habit to make his drawings in a bound book, so that he always had a large supply of them at hand. He owned cavalier's and actor's costumes in which, whenever he had the opportunity, he would dress up persons of either sex, who would pose for him. He drew them in their natural attitudes, preferring the simplest ones. When he was in the mood to paint a picture, he resorted to his collection of drawings and chose figures most suited for the occasion.\(^\text{33}\)

It is more than probable that the figures depicted in the Shopsign (the sketch of the packers is obviously hastily done) did not actually pose for the painting. But they may well be Watteau's friends taken handily from his past sketches. Actually, people themselves were likely of little interest to Watteau in the sense of exact

\(^{33}\) Comte de Caylus, from a lecture given before the French Academy, 3 February, 1748, "Vie de Watteau." Reprinted in Champion, trans. from Parker and Mathey, p. 8.
portraiture. In an age of portraiture, Watteau did very few. Claude Phillips notes more sensibly:

What interests Watteau . . . is swiftness, momentariness of movement and attitude, the strong physical sense of life, the definition of what is essential to their type, or the groups of individuals, rather than the expression of physical or mental individuality in the narrower sense.34

The Paintings

The paintings lining the walls of the Shopsign have also caused efforts at identification. Several of the writers attempting to identify the figures have done the same for the works in Gersaint's gallery. A few have even attempted to find some deeper meaning in these paintings. The collective results of these speculations are not without interest, but, also, are not very convincing. The paintings in the background of the Shopsign actually appear at first as hastily brushed on pastiches (see Figure 7). It would seem highly unlikely that, producing this work in eight days, Watteau really made any attempt to reproduce exactly the work of any other painter.

The following listing of identifications for the paintings are, as with the figures, a compilation of

34. Claude Phillips, Antoine Watteau (New York, 1907), 87.
Figure 7. Diagram--paintings in the Shopsign.
speculations. The listing must be prefaced, with one exception, as "in the style of":

1. **Portrait** — Anthony Moro.
2. Unidentifiable.
3. **Portrait** — Van Dyck.
4. **Landscape or Sunset** — Hobbema or Ruisdael.
5. **Sleeping Venus** — Correggio.
6. **Jupiter and Antiope or Pan and Syrinx** — Rubens.
7. **Nymph or Venus and Amour** — Giorgione.
8. **Nymph or Mars and Amour** — Castelfranco.
9. **Farm Scene** — Peter Potter or Watteau (early).
10. **Penitent Saint** (or St. Francis—1710) — Watteau (similar to a known engraving from the painting of Watteau by Filloeul).
11. **Still Life** — J. Fyt (or Dutch School).
12. **Still Life** — Dutch School.
13. **La Folie or Jester with Marmot** — Netscher (?).
14. **Nativity** — Jacopo Bassano or Italian School.
15. **Portrait** — Veronese or Titian.
16. **Silenus** — Rubens.
17. **Holy Family or Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine** — Venetian or Emilian style.
18. **Mercury and Argus** — Jordaens.
19. **Leda and the Swan** — Italian School.

35. See footnote 31.
If one takes the time and trouble to check these various identifications, there certainly are recognizable resemblances in composition, coloring and subject matter, to known styles and painters. The explanation for this might very well lie with the fact that Watteau's own training was never formal but was as a copier of the works of other painters. The apochryphal story exists that while Watteau was employed as a picture copier on the Pont Notre Dame during his first years in Paris, he could copy Gerard Dou's Portrait of an Old Woman Reading, so well that he did not need to consult the original (Gersaint). It had always been Watteau's practice to copy the works and drawings of other artists. From 1712 to 1716 Watteau lived under the patronage of the great collector Pierre Crozat. Crozat's collection of contemporary and Renaissance drawings numbered 18,917 and Watteau spent those years copying the collection. With such knowledge of style and technique at hand, it is little wonder that close imitations were so easily come by. Sir Kenneth points out that the paintings in the Shopsign were really not meant to be representations of exact works.

but were only a part of the total composition, "... they [the paintings] emerge from the penumbra only far enough to enrich the tone of the background with a play of muted color." 37

Certainly the subject of depicting the interior of picture galleries was not new to Watteau (Figure 8). Teniers, his Flemish forbear, had used the same idea and this subject matter became common in the age of enlightened collectors. S. F. B. Morse was later to do a similar famous scene of the interior of the Louvre. However, Watteau's Shopsign, though bearing a resemblance to this "genre" has no more to do with recording the interior of a fine collection room than it has to do with portraiture.

Several fine scholars have, nevertheless, tried to find some deeper meaning in the paintings and people depicted in the Shopsign. Their views should be noted. The eminent Madame Hélène Adhémar, a scrupulous scholar of Watteau, once wrote that: the young man greeting the lady entering the scene from the left is Watteau himself. He is present to lead the young lady in the lavender gown from the left half of the composition into the right half. Her theory is that Watteau is telling us something about the painting of time in his opinion and that the left half represents the "old" in painting and the right section is

37. Clark, p. 186.
Figure 8. **Interior of the Gallery of Arch Duke Leopold**, David Teniers.
the "new" direction in painting. She alludes to the fact that the old painting of Louis XIV is the past and that the large oval "Rococo" type painting on the right is the future, and that this was Watteau's message.

Louis Aragon, another zealous defender of the Shopsign, endeavoring to see a deeper meaning in a beautiful painting, saw the painting as Watteau's last will and testament. Possibly Aragon came rather closer to the truth than he knew:

Watteau died at the age of 37 like Guillaume Apollinaire. But he was not surprised by death, he knew it was coming. He knew that he had little time left to paint, and he undertook this work not on request but in order to follow his own desire, to create the sign destined for his friend the picture dealer Gersaint. There are few more famous paintings in the world and it seems to me that we have not understood the desire of this dying painter who, with his last strength painted this outstanding work. One has not realized enough that which blinds me; that this work is both a complete statement and his last will and testament.

In the literal sense, it is hard to accept the idea that Watteau was seeking to portray graphically what he felt he knew or thought about painting; certainly not that he could have been making any kind of social statement. But, perhaps M. Aragon touched upon a significance in Watteau's Shopsign, if indeed there is any.

In his final great work Watteau may well have combined in full fruition all he knew of his art, technique; his craft. Just as Beethoven, in his last great Sonata (Op. 161, no. 32) combined beauty, effortless ease and the consummate mastery of a lifetime's technique into a final work, so did Watteau bring together in one masterwork a lifetime of experience to achieve not just an advertising sign but a landmark in the craft of painting.
THE STRUCTURE OF THE SHOPSIGN

The Shopsign is painted with oil on canvas. The canvas on which the sign was painted has undergone several changes. The composition, as we know it today, has survived in composition through several sizes. For most of its existence the Shopsign hung not as one painting but as two separately framed works.

Rarely has a work of art undergone so many metamorphoses and endured. The changes in the physical shape of the painting are confusing and complicated. An attempt at explanation of these changes is further confused by many explanations attempted about the changes.

If we study even a reproduction of the Shopsign closely, several demarcation lines become visible in the canvas (see Figure 9). There are three major divisions. First, the center dividing line, through the french doors, divides the painting exactly in two. Besides this elementary division are two other major visible demarcation lines. Across the entire composition, about one-fifth down from the top, is a horizontal. (Another line divides the composition in two from left to right, but this line is barely visible and remains a mystery solved only by conjecture with the rest of the total painting.)
Figure 9. Diagram—showing divisions in the canvas.
The most curious line of demarcation is that which forms the shape of an arc. This arc shaped line extends from the top third stone on the left side, over the doorway and down to the top of the lower right side of a frame (see Figure 9).

These lines describe sections into which the canvas had either been divided or had been pieced together. How these obvious divisions were made has been the basis for several studies of the painting and for even more speculations.

The arc shaped line has been the source of most speculation. The reason for this arced line is also the key to the other alterations of the canvas. In 1931 Dr. Oskar Fischel felt he discovered the answer to the arc found within the Shopsign. As he was strolling down a street in Austria, Fischel looked up at a sign placed into an arched recess over the door of a tobacco shop. It occurred to him that Watteau's sign originally might have been cut to fit and be displayed in just such an arched recess over the front of Gersaint's shop. 40

The French critic Louis Reau also felt that the Shopsign was originally displayed in an arc over the entry to Gersaint's shop. Reau found a painting done by Hubert Robert (1786), a French painter noted for his fondness for

40. Fischel, p. 34.
painting ruins. Robert's painting, Demolition of the Pont Notre Dame (1786), depicts exactly what the shops on the bridge looked like at the time of Gersaint's business (see Figure 10). "The openings on the front of the shops on the Pont Notre Dame were arched and it would clearly be natural that the sign would be exhibited in the space over the door." 41

Réau also points out, as does Mme. Adhémar, 42 that the basic composition of the figure groups in the Shopsign follow the motif of curves or half circles (see Figure 1).

On the other hand, if one closely examines the quickly sketched paintings on the walls of Gersaint's shop, one finds that the figures are arranged in such a fashion that they form a circle. Finally, and this argument is not, in my opinion, the least convincing, the groupings of the people, clients in the process of making their choices and the packers of the portrait of the Grand Monarque, all are conceived in the form of lunettes. Contrary to the custom of Watteau, the people do not form a frieze (as in Assembly in the Park), nor an arabesque (as in Embarkation for Cythera), but they form a half-circle. All of this together confirms the original form of the Shopsign was arched. 43

We also know that in the late seventeenth century signs were hung flush with building fronts, not out into the streets of Paris. As far back as 1698 there had been a

41. Louis Réau, "Le Premier État de l'Enseigne de Gersaint," Gazette des Beaux Arts, Ser, 6 (1931), 60.
42. Adhémar, Watteau, 30.
43. Réau, p, 60.
Figure 10. Demolition of the Pont Notre Dame, Hubert Robert 1786.
ruling against displaying signs into the streets. Martin Lister commented on this in his Diaries of 1698.

'Tis pretty to observe how the King disciplines this great city by small instances of obedience. He caused them to take down all their signs at once, and not to advance them above a foot or two from the wall, not to exceed such small measure; which was really done; so that the sign obscure not the street at all, and make little or no figure as tho' there were none; being placed very high.44

Returning to Gersaint's original statement, we should note here that he uses the word en plafond (see note 17, Appendix A), in relation to the way the sign would be shown. This word translates badly into English but indicates something similar to a ceiling—something to be hung high, at an angle as seen from below. The logical conclusion about the original shape and placement of Watteau's Shopsign would be: that it was conceived of in the form of an arch, was hung high over an entryway and at a slight angle.

From this original state of the Shopsign, the next question must be, how did the work come to exist as two separate paintings and in rectangular forms. This means the sign was not only divided into two halves but that the curved upper sections would have to have been pieced onto in order to square up the top sections. To understand this

44, Martin Lister, A Journey to Paris in the Year 1698 (Urbana, 1967), 17.
transformation we must go back to the first owner of the Shopsign, Claude Glucq.

The wealthy Glucq maintained a fine collection or cabinet of paintings. Mme. Adhémar points out that, "... as it would be exhibited in such fashionable surroundings as C. Glucq's, it was no doubt then that the painting was repaired and preserved in two sections..." Certainly the curved tops would have to have pieces sewn on in order to facilitate framing and hanging.

Framing was very important in this Rococo period and it was not unusual to take liberties with a picture in order to have it fit a frame. Another of Watteau's paintings, La Toillette (London, Wallace Collection) existed originally as an oval and pieced on four sides to facilitate framing. At this period frames were often more important than what was put into them.

It was the heyday of frames. They were used everywhere, to enclose and ornament almost any flat surface, from mirrors and fire screens and other small objects; to break up surfaces of walls and ceilings into smaller, decorative fields. Ornate framing devices appeared in areas where one would not expect to find them. They turn up in the design of fabrics... they enclosed title pages... appeared on invitations and at times even adorned the most prosaic advertisement.


It seems that when the signs hung as two separate works, they were not then of the same dimensions. In 1883 the two signs were taken from their frames and were photographed side by side. This photograph showed that the two sides did not match and that the right panel was some 8 cm less in height than the left side. It was also noted that, in addition to the pieces added to square up the curved shape, additional sections were added across the top. It is these added horizontal bands, which were not of equal height. The works were cleaned in 1899 and a strip was added to the top right making two equal panels. This restoration was done so that the work could be exhibited again in Paris in 1900.48

If we believe that the Shopsign entered the collection of C. Glucq as two panels meant to be framed, then we must also assume that the piecework on the signs was done almost immediately after the Shopsign was removed from its place before Gersaint's shop. It can only be a matter of guesswork about who repainted the added sections, however. We do know that Watteau was seriously ill at the time and we also know that Watteau quite often had other people work on his canvasses. In one of the very few letters left by

Watteau he commented on another canvas he was working on in 1720: "... it was necessary that Gersaint bring me that good man La Serre in order to enlarge this canvas on the right side." As well as having others change the size of his canvasses, he also had some painters work on his canvasses. The most notable of these was Watteau's sometime pupil and follower Jean Baptiste Pater (1695-1736). At the end of Watteau's life they were again working together, after a long feud. Pater mastered Watteau's technique so well, there are still mixed attributions between the two men. Because the repainting of the top sections flows so freely, without break, it would appear that Watteau himself may have done the extension painting. Yet, the figure of the porter on the far left is so still and lacking in the usual grace of Watteau's other figures that Mme. Adhémar gives this figure to Pater.

Probably the most extraordinary piece of research done on the Shopsign is that written in 1910 for the French Academy by M. Paul Alfassa. Not only had Alfassa already discovered the painting by Robert of the Pont Notre Dame shops, but also an engraving by Aveline pére of a similar

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49. Letter by Watteau to Jullienne, September 1720 (Alfassa, "L'Enseigne de Gersaint," 106). The painting referred to is Retour du Chasse.


scene. From these he had already accepted that the original sign was arch shaped and hung over a portal. Alfassa went even further. He tried to deduce just how and where the sign itself was painted. His final conclusion was that the sign was also never cut into two parts after completion but that it was painted in two sections meant to be placed together.

M. Alfassa searched the Archives of Paris and found the exact measurements of the shops on the Pont Notre Dame. These boutiques measured only 11 feet from pillar to pillar. The interiors of the shops measured 10 feet 3 inches in depth. If we recall that the Shop sign assembled measures 5 feet by almost 10 feet, we see that if it had been painted flat inside the shop itself only one foot of space would have been left. Had the painting then been done at Gersaint's shop it is clear it could not have been accomplished except in sections. Mme. Adhémar too concurs with Alfassa's opinion, "... to our way of thinking, this large composition was painted by Watteau in the first place as two separate canvasses which were meant to be assembled together over the door with the idea that the center join would not be visible from a distance."52

The painting, which is on canvas, would also have to have been mounted together on something other than a  

canvas stretcher in order to be exhibited in arch form. A study done on other shopsigns of this period points out that usually signs were painted on canvas and then glued to board. Because of the sign's size and shape we might conclude that it was painted on two canvasses divided through the center on each side as well (see Figure 11). Therefore, the French writers who later were to claim that the Shopsign was desecrated by the Germans by cutting it in two, and those Germans who said the Austrian sabres mutilated the work, and M. Thiebault-Sisson, who is quoted as claiming that Jean de Jullienne did it (but that "... he mutilated [it] with respect"), were all incorrect. Probably Watteau himself was responsible for the division and piecing of his Shopsign.

The fine study by Alfassa on the size of Gersaint's shop, brings up two further questions about the Shopsign. The first is, that contrary to some thinking, the scene portrayed was never really taken from life at all. As the shop itself would have been only one foot larger than the picture, it seems impossible that twelve people, a dog and 24 paintings fit into a 10 by 11 foot space. More


Figure 11. Diagram--stages of reconstruction of the canvas.
realistically, the Shopsign is just as much a picture of Watteau's fantasy in an everyday setting, as Watteau's fêtes galantes were fantasy landscape. No doubt, as a present to his friend who was newly rebuilding his business, Watteau gave Gersaint a scene of the ideal shop complete with hints of the great masters and meant to attract the eye of the passerby.

The second question hinted at in Alfassa, and it is the only time this is mentioned in writings on the sign, is that the work might have been done in situ. Alfassa, in a second work on the Shopsign includes an observation made to him by one of the editors of the reprinting of the Recueil Jullienne, M. Albert Vuaflart:


\[56. \text{Ibid., 358.}\]
the viewer from below, and if the work were done in eight days without specific careful preparation, perhaps the work was painted while already placed over the portal. If the canvas had already been pieced onto board, hung at an angle over the door and then worked on, it would be understandable that a painter of Watteau's accomplishments could have made this kind of visual compensation as he was working.

Though Watteau's figures are normally slender and elongated, in the case of the two female figures in the foreground, they are unusually so. These figures measure nearly ten heads high. "... in the familiar classical formula, the figure is only 7-1/2 heads high."^57

If we suppose that Watteau painted his sign from a ladder or platform in front of Gersaint's shop, several of Gersaint's original statements make sense as well. That Watteau was so fatigued he could work only half a day at a time. Also, that even though it hung for fifteen days many people came to see it, some several times. Perhaps this was to watch the progress. Further, if the work were done outside, the changing light patterns would be more explainable by the changing times of day. As the work was evidently so immediately seen as purchasable or desirable by those of Watteau's circle, it would seem that such

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amateurs would not have permitted the work to be hung outside at all once completed. Perhaps its merits were seen only on completion and that is the reason for the speedy removal of the sign.

Watteau was no novice at sign painting. His first master in Valenciennes, Albert Gerin, painted signs and decorations for carriages. Also, Watteau had painted a sign for Antoine Dieu, left behind at least two sketches (see Figures 12 and 13) for other signs, and his famous painting Gilles (17 ) (now the Official Treasure of France, replacing the Mona Lisa) was originally a sign done for a restaurant.

In sum then we see that the first state of the Shopsign was pieced canvas glued to board, the sections painted separately, or on separated sections of the same canvas which was meant to be placed into an arched door portal. It was intended to be seen from the street, from below where it was hung overhead at an angle. We must assume that the painting does not really represent what Gersaint's looked like and that the work may have been done in situ. Finally, that the Shopsign was repieced and

58. Original lost in fire on Pont Neuf, 1718. Sign entitled Louis XIV mettant le cordon bleu a la duc de Bourgogne was engraved by Nicolas de Larmessin (see Figure 2).

Figure 12. Sketch—Wigmaker's Shop, Watteau (n.d.).
Figure 13. Sketch—Draper's Shop, Watteau (n.d.).
repainted for exhibition and by this Watteau's great painting was not mutilated but was, in fact, restored and preserved.
CONTROVERSY ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SHOPSIGN

When the two signs were first exhibited outside of Germany for the first time since entering Frederick's collection, in 1900 at the Petit Palais, a controversy arose over their authenticity. At that time a French collector, M. Leon Michel-Levy came forward and claimed that the German paintings were not the originals from the hand of Watteau but that a painting he owned, the left panel only, was actually the original half of the sign. Michel-Levy owned a much smaller version (dismissing the right side as simply being lost). Michel-Levy's left panel came to be known as the "Paris fragment." Bringing forth his painting put M. Michel-Levy in the middle of somewhat of an art world controversy.

This "Paris fragment" was never shown next to the paintings from Berlin. However, he chose to show it privately to a select few writers and critics who seemed to accept Michel-Levy's claim with no question. One of these viewers, M. Andre Maurel (who seems to have no claim to distinction in art history outside of this affair), wrote of this showing:

"A thousand details of history, of chronology, even of legend, confusing in other's minds, did not trouble us much. But we were too happy to stop there. We possessed the Shopsign which we had thought to be in exile. Too bad
tant pis) about the details which the historians will end up taking care of. . . . that is their business.60

Obviously the men who would quickly become partisans of M. Michel-Levy's painting were quick to accept it as original. Yet, the charge that the Berlin painting was not an original Watteau caused a good deal of discussion and argument in 1900 but it quickly died down. However, the question of which Watteau was an authentic one, flared up again and into a full fledged battle in 1910. At this time M. Michel-Levy put his painting up for sale as the original.

At this time, 1910, not only did historians, critics and art dealers take sides,61 but there was imminent trouble between France and Germany as well. The Franco-German relations between the two countries just before the First World War were even more unstable than usual. The person who would be left with a fake Watteau, should Michel-Levy's be the original, was not just any collector, but the Kaiser himself. The government of France found itself in the position of having to defend a German possession to preserve French integrity.

The art dealer Nathan Wildenstein summed up the affair:

... Michel-Levy claimed that he has the real one (Shopsign) and that the Kaiser's is a fake.

60. Maurel, 4.

61. See Appendix B for a partial listing of writers and articles on both sides of this question.
Wilhelm had no intention of selling, but wanted an authentication. France was falling all over herself to help him. Above all, the French Government, which was so afraid of upsetting him and brought all the big guns to bear. Our ministers triggered off the Society of French art, which, through the mediation of Alfassa, the art writer, was charged with refuting every one of the Michel-Levy's arguments. The entire Louvre got orders to march against Levy. Everyone was quaking, and if Wilhelm's had been the copy, the government would have given orders to transform it into the original. 62

The two central writers in the argument over the Shopsign's authenticity were M. Andre Maurel and M. Paul Alfassa. 63 The foolish reasonings and arguments of M. Maurel, when placed against the clear, logical and proven deductions of M. Alfassa, could be a study in itself. Suffice it to say that there was probably also a great deal of chauvinism involved. M. Maurel at one point calls Alfassa the "Berlin Evangelist" preaching the "... Gospel according to Berlin." 64 So personal did Maurel's attack become in his book that Alfassa felt called upon to write a

62. Quote by Nathan Wildenstein in Rene Gimpel, Diary of an Art Dealer (New York, 1966), chapter "On Authenticating a Watteau, p. 7. Parenthetically, Gimpel and Wildenstein believe the "Paris fragment" to be an authentic Watteau. However, they were, at that time, the chief dealers of Watteaus and the attribution would have been to their financial benefit.

63. Maurel, p. 4; Alfassa, "L'Enseigne de Gersaint."

64. Maurel, p. 84.
second paper on the **Shopsign** in 1913, not only to refute Maurel's claims but to defend his own honor as a scholar. 

Maurel's book concludes that the painting in Berlin must be a copy and that the Berlin **Shopsign** is actually an enlargement of the Paris original and that it was done by Philippe Mercier. His conclusion is based on nothing at all and his conclusion was recently called by Jean Ferre, "... one of the most bewildering propositions in all of art history." 

After Alfassa's article of 1913 no more was heard of the "Paris fragment" until 1925 when it was quietly sold into a private collection (see Figure 14).

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65. Alfassa, "A Propos d'un Recent Livre sur l'Enseigne de Gersaint."

Figure 14. 'Paris fragment' L'Enseigne de Gersaint—only known photograph of painting owned by Leon Michel-Levy.
LABORATORY INVESTIGATION OF THE SHOPSIGN

Studies were published in 1964 of work done on the Shopsign by means of X-ray and ultra-violet ray. These studies were begun in 1934 in Germany by Margarete Kühn, Director and Conservator of the Palaces of Berlin and continued in 1951 by M. Madeleine Hours, Director of the Laboratories of the Louvre. Their results prove that the work in Berlin is very likely that work which hung before Gersaint's shop. They also confirm the theories that the work was reshaped and repainted shortly after the original sign was done.

These laboratory studies were written up in 1964 by Mme. Helen Adhémar who notes, concerning the arguments on authenticity, "... there would have been neither controversies nor quarrels on the subject of the authenticity of the Berlin painting if our predecessors had had at their disposal the modern means of investigation which the Louvre now has." 67

The findings of the laboratories are most remarkable. It was discovered that the center join when placed side by side had no corresponding points and thus never had been one canvas cut into two. It was further shown that the painting

on the added top sections and on the added upper band had been done at the same approximate time as the major portion of the work. Most interestingly it was also discovered that the original Shopsign was a good deal longer than its present state. Pieces had been cut from the sides and it is these pieces which were used to add onto the top. A few of the sections from Mme. Adhémar's published summation are of further interest:  

In our opinion, this large composition must have been painted by Watteau on two separate canvasses destined to be joined by a framework over an opening; observations concerning the material, technique, and style support this thesis.

The scene which we see now was slightly different from the original. The painting was wider by several centimeters and much less high; it measured, as we will demonstrate later, about 3.55 cm in length; the left part was modified; we see on the X-ray a wagon full of hay [this is now on the extreme top left] located at the end of the left side.

We also note some differences in the street porter who was no doubt added later, and the young man who takes the mirror in his hands [which was itself a painting]. The over-painting having been done while the paint was still fresh, as the initial pattern does not read easily on the X-ray.

On the negatives rubbing marks due to framing and possibly to certain nails are visible along the sides. I noticed that these same marks were visible under X-ray on part of the added pieces on top [indicating the top had been added before framing]. Mme. Hours informed me that these added pieces came from a canvas the same as that of the

68. Ibid., 9.
painting, abut the grain in the opposite direction [indicating that the top pieces came from
the sides].

The study written up by Mme. Adhémar verifies that the Shopsign was painted on two canvasses and pieced
together. It also shows that the original work was much longer. It confirms that the added sections of canvas are
of the same canvas as the main body of the painting and that the work was reshaped not once, but twice. Also, the
dating of the repainting shows that the extensions might have been done by Watteau himself, or, at least, with his
knowledge or under his direction.

With the identification of the piecework in the Berlin Shopsign, the age of the canvas and the X-ray
evidence of the underpainting, it seems highly unlikely that the Berlin painting was a fake. Surely a fake or an
enlargement would not have had so intricate a physical construction. Mme. Adhémar concluded:

This scientific study gives us the certitude that the Berlin painting is the Shopsign which was painted by Watteau for Gersaint's shop Au
Grand Monarque, on the Pont Notre Dame. We have seen that for reasons of the kind of material, techniques and style agree to this sign conceived in two parts.69

No writing has been located on how and why the two panels were finally placed together in one form in 1931.

69. Ibid., 11.
There is only a notice in *Art News* in 1931,\textsuperscript{70} that it had been done. In this restoration we know that a 2 cm strip had to be added through the center join so that the two sides could be united.

Though the laboratory examinations seem to have cleared up most questions about Gersaint's *Signboard*, one small mystery remains about it. Why, until 1900, no one was permitted to view the work? Why, before 1954, no one outside of Germany could examine the work? \textsuperscript{22} M. Maurel wrote in 1900 that he was "permitted" to view the painting in Berlin. In 1899 Lady Emily Dilke wrote that she was refused permission to see the painting. "I went to Berlin in hope of seeing this work for myself, but the application made on my behalf by our Embassy was refused by the Director of the Collections in the Royal Palaces."\textsuperscript{71} She adds that this was the only work she was not permitted to see. Louis Reau saw the painting in 1931, just after it had been reassembled, but only in the company of one Dr. Huth.\textsuperscript{72} Mme. Adhémar prefaces her article with the words "... and now Mme. Kühn has authorized us to publish the present observations."\textsuperscript{73}


\textsuperscript{71} Lady Emilie Dilke, *French Painting of the XVIII Century* (London, 1899), 83.

\textsuperscript{72} Reau, 59.

\textsuperscript{73} Adhémar, "L'Enseigne de Gersaint," 7.
Of course two world wars passed in this time span, yet there seems no concrete explanation for the seeming secretiveness on the part of Germany.

The Shopsign is now on public view, but no further studies have been done on it. The 300th anniversary of Watteau's birth is already being forseen and possibly further investigation and more documentation will appear at that time.
COPIES OF THE SHOPSIGN

Besides the spurious "Paris fragment" several copies of the Shopsign exist. There is a greatly reduced copy done by Pater (approx. 1730); this is now in the Paris collection of Edgar Stern and is known as the "schoolhouse copy." There is the engraving done for the Recueil Jullienne by Pierre Aveline in 1732. This print also was involved in the questions about the authenticity of the Berlin Shopsign.

That fact that the Berlin painting and the Aveline engraving, supposedly done from the Shopsign in 1732, when it was in Jullienne's collection, are rather dissimilar was brought out in M. Maurel's defense of the Paris painting (see Figure 15). When comparing the print and the painting it is obvious that the print has a much higher space on the top and that more pictures are depicted on the walls. The center line of division on the print is not through the doorway, but through the dress of the lady in black. Also, several parts of the clothing do not match.

Alfassa answered the question of the print and the painting not matching exactly by pointing out that the print-making practices of the eighteenth century had to be taken into account. As M. Vuaflart comments in his introduction to the reissue of the Recueil Jullienne, when a painting was too large to be engraved from directly, a
Figure 15. Engraving by Aveline, 1732, copy by Pater, 1732 (?).
smaller copy would be made from the painting first. He also notes that engravers were not above taking liberties with a work to suit the size of the plate or the format of the volume it would appear in:

The Shopsign for Gersaint, by its very dimensions, did not lend itself easily to engraving. Pater made a reduced copy of it, in order to give it a format more in rapport with the other engravings [in the Recueil Jullienne] he added some frames in the upper area and a pillar on the right side on the painting which gave the shop more symmetry. A

This copy by Pater has the same format as the engraving (see Figure 15). Ferdinand Laban approached the question of the difference between the Berlin painting, the Aveline engraving, and the Pater copy by the simplest means; he measured the engraving and the Pater copy and found them to be nearly the exact size.

The size of the Pater painting is 20 x 32-3/4 by English measure. This would be 50.8 cm x 83.2 cm. The size of the Aveline engraving is 51.8 cm x 83.4 cm. Copy and print then have practically the exact measurements. That this can be no accident is obvious. Also, if we divide the copy in the middle, the line would not go through the door division. This exact identification between the two copies of the Shopsign is clear to my opinion, naturally, that the copy in oil by Pater served as model for the print by Aveline. There is no other explanation.

74. Dacier et al., Vol. 2, p. 163.

Still another Shop sign surfaced in Belgium in 1955. Described by Lucie Van Heule,76 the copy seemed to disprove itself when seen. Even from a photograph (see Figure 16), we see a picture much more rigid than the Berlin painting, cleared away of paving stones and hay. The gentleman extending his arm in greeting appears to be none other than Louis XIV himself.

Figure 16. Shopsign--Belgian copy (n.d.).
INFLUENCE OF THE SHOPSIGN

The painting of Watteau was to influence the whole of the eighteenth century, as the Goncourt brothers wrote: "He has brought under the influence of his style, his taste and his vision, all the painting of the 18th Century." 77 The themes of Watteau extended into clothing (the ladies wearing the long flowing gowns of le style Watteau). 78 Furnishings, silver and china decoration, 79 even opera scenes were written in as les joli Vateau (sic). 80 It was Watteau's total oeuvre, however, which was to influence the period after him. There followed no vogue by noted artists to paint Shopsigns. Although the only notable sign painted before Watteau was one done by the young Holbein, and the only sign after Watteau of note was by Chardin (for a barber surgeon, now lost). Reportedly signs were painted for a bit of cash by Millet, Gericault, Courbet and

77. Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, "La Philosophie de Watteau," L'Artiste, 6e Série (7 Septembre, 1856), 127.


Rousseau, none of them entered the realm of a valued painting, as did Watteau's. 81

The influence Watteau and his sign would leave behind was something rather different than mere emulation by painting advertising pieces. Watteau brought to a century filled with conformity and rules a sudden liberation by his free life style and by his personal choices in subject matter. With Watteau came a break from formal academic art to an art done only by a personal vision. Watteau's life style and attitude relate him strongly to that bohemian attitude so dear to the heart of the mid-nineteenth century painter. For as Watteau ignored or threw over the traditional art practices of his period, so did the Impressionists after him.

Beginning with the admiration, in the mid-nineteenth century, of Delacroix and Turner for the work of Watteau, so also his works became greatly admired by the later Impressionists. They saw in Watteau a pure and direct use of color, used to build up form and mood and this went along with their own experiments. Monet came to use color, by working in tone and juxtaposition of color to build form just as Watteau did. Beyond the similar use of paint and color, perhaps the greatest influence on the Impressionists was that of the subject matter of the Shopsign.

Certainly Watteau painted his sign almost according to the formula of other signs painted at that period—that is—showing the interior of the shop being advertised.\textsuperscript{82} But to this idea Watteau brought the free and easy nonchalance of his \textit{fêtes galantes} and not the frontal posing design. Watteau painted his sign as if it were a scene in everyday life. He did not paint gods or heroes or ennobling scenes but, like his Flemish forebears, Teniers and Vermeer, Watteau recorded a scene of human beings caught at a brief moment in life.

Watteau's \textit{shopsign} is sometimes called frivolous, or having no deep significance. But, frivolity should not necessarily be a defect. The \textit{shopsign} may well have been the bridge to the idea that subject matter alone is not what makes a great work of art and that the human and everyday has a grandeur as well. "He pictured that world as the Impressionists pictured theirs, in its momentary unselfconscious aspect, catching its denizens unawares, or not caring, that they are observed,"\textsuperscript{83}

Watteau used figures in a purely compositional manner. There are no personalities in the \textit{shopsign}, no human interaction or compassion. The people depicted are devices of composition and vehicles for color. This was

\textsuperscript{82} Jacques Wilhelm, "Francois le Moyne and Antoine Watteau," \textit{Art Quarterly}, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1951), 228.

\textsuperscript{83} Canaday, 537.
seen surely by the Impressionists as it was before them by
Manet. Watteau could have painted chairs, tables or vases
of flowers just as, after the Impressionists, even the
flowers and vases disappeared into pure color and composi-
tion. The Shopsign is not just a representation of an
eighteenth century scene but it is of space, form, color
and direction and we cloth this painting in a period because
it so closely resembles, outwardly, a period.

In Watteau it is the execution, and above all the
pure and intangible spirit which subdues our mind
with a thrill and a power. In Watteau the small-
ness of the subject is swallowed up in the greatness
of the painting. Here is the sight of skill as
accomplished as that of the most celebrated
masters. 84

84. Mauclair, 82.
APPENDIX A

TRANSLATIONS

Note 1:

... C'est un tableau merveilleux, la suprême fleur du génie. Pour la franchise, la décision de la facture, pour la beauté de la couleur, pour le mystère d'une poésie obtenue avec les éléments les plus simples, il tient dans l'œuvre de Watteau une place analogue à celle que tiennent dans l'œuvre de Rembrandt ou de Velasquez le Portrait de famille de Brunswick ou les Menines.

Note 2:

Je réclame ce que le génie français a fait de plus pur, de plus inégalable pour le prix de chaque sanglot d'un homme torturé, d'une femme violée, d'un blessé achevé dans ces montagnes de notre passion. Pour chaque larme arrachée dans la torture, pour l'inégalable de la souffrance française, l'inégal de la grandeur spirituelle d'un peintre de France aux marches toujours envahies de nos Flandres ... L'Enseigne de Gersaint ...

Note 17:

A son retour à Paris, qui étoit en 1721, dans les premières années de mon établissement, il vint chez moi me demander si je voulais bien le recevoir et lui permettre, pour se dégourdir les doigts, ce sont ses termes, si je voulais bien, dis-je, lui permettre de peindre un plafond que je devois exposer en dehors. J'eus quelque répugnance à le satisfaire, aimant mieux l'occuper à quelque chose de plus solide; mais voyant que cela lui ferait plaisir, j'y consentis. L'on sçait la réussite qu'eut ce morceau; le tout étoit fait d'après nature, attitudes en étoient si vraies et si aisées, l'ordonnance si naturelle, les groupes si bien entendus, qu'il attiroit les yeux des passants; et même les plus habiles peintres vinrent à plusieurs fois pour l'admirer. Ce fut le travail de huit journées, encore
n'y travaillait-il que les matins; sa santé délicate, ou, pour mieux dire, sa faiblesse, ne lui permettant pas de s'occuper plus longtemps. C'est le seul ouvrage qui ait un peu aiguisé son amour-propre; il ne fit point de difficulté de me l'avouer. M. de Jullienne le possède actuellement dans son cabinet, et il a été gravé par ses soins.

Note 19:

La langueur dans laquelle il vivait alors, occasionnée par un tempérament délicat et usé, lui firent appréhender, au bout de six mois, de m'incommoder, s'il resoit plus long-temps chez moi... sa maladie augenta; son ennui redoublea; son inconstance se ranima; il crut qu'il seroit beaucoup mieux à la campagne; l'impatience s'en mêla, et enfin il ne devint tranquille que quand il apprit... dans sa maison de Nogent.

... je l'y conduisis, et j'allais le voir et le consoler tous les deux ou trois jours... Il mourut entre mes bras audit Nogent peu de temps après, le 18 Juillet 1721, âgé de 37 ans.

Note 22:

La gravure est en vente... ce morceau qui a 9 pieds 6 pouces de large, sur 5 pieds de haut, a toujours été regardé comme le Chef'd'oeuvre de cet excellent peintre. Il représente le magasin d'un marchand, qui est rempli de differens (sic) tableaux des plus grands maîtres; on y reconnoît le caractère et le goût de chacun de ces maîtres. Cette fameuse Enseigne ne fut exposée que quinze jours; elle fit l'admiration de tout Paris. Elle fut vendue à M. Glucq. On la voit à Présent dans le cabinet de M. Jullienne, qui l'a fait graver pour la suite de l'oeuvre, qu'il fait toujours continuer.

Note 24:

Je suis aussi en marche pour avoir des Watteau. Il est très difficile de trouver des tableaux de ces deux maîtres... mais V. M. se pourra flatter d'avoir deux sujets aussi bien traités et aussi agréables, qu'il y en a du (cette?) peintre; de plus ils sont d'une belle grandeur pour bien orner votre nouvel appartement, où vous comptez les mettre ce qui a été
fort difficile à trouver, ce peintre n'ayant guère travaillé qu'en petits tableaux.

Note 25:

... vous savez déjà, sans doute, Sire, que l'on n'a pas causé le moindre dégât à Potsdam, ni à Sans Souci; quant à Charlottenburg, on a pillé les tapisseries et les tableaux, mais par un cas singulier, on a laissé les trois plus beaux; les deux Enseignes de Watteau ... .

Note 26:

... Mais, dans le rapport du garde du château, il est fait mention du dégât survenu à l'un d'eux: "Un des grands tableaux de Watteau a reçu des coups de Sabre, mais qu'il peut se réparer." Ce coup de sabre est très visible sur la radiographie.

Note 39:

Watteau meurt à trente-sept ans, comme Guillaume Apollinaire, Mais, il n'est pas surpris par la mort, il la voit venir.

Il sait qu'il a peu de temps encore pour peindre, et il entreprend, non sur commande, mais pour suivre sa seule fantaisie, cette enseigne qu'il destine à son ami Gersaint, le marchand de tableaux, il y a peu de tableaux au monde qui soient plus célèbres, et pourtant il me semble qu'on n'a guère compris la volonté du peintre mourant, qui de ses dernières forces a peint cette composition singulière dans son Œuvre. On n'y a pas assez vu ce qui m'y aveugle; que c'est à la fois un manifeste et un testament.

Note 40:

Wenn die Enseigne als ein Firmenschild gemalt ist, wie und wo hat sich Watteau den Platz einer solchen Komposition Gedacht?

Note 43:

... d'autre part, si l'on examine attentivement les tableaux sommairement esquissés qui tapissent la boutique de Gersaint, on constate que les figures sont disposées de telle façon qu'elles s'inscrivent dans un cercle. Enfin-et cet argument n'est pas à mes yeux le moins probant--le groupement même des personnages; clients en train de faire leur choix et commis préposés à l'emballage du portrait du Grand Monarque semblent conçu pour étoffer une composition en forme de lunette. Contrairement aux habitudes de Watteau, les personnages ne forment ni une frise (comme dans l'Assemblée dans un parc) ni une arabesque (comme dans l'Embarquement pour Cythère), mais un demi-cercle, tout s'accorde donc pour confirmer l'hypothèse d'une toile primitivement cintrée.

Note 45:

... lorsque le tableau serait exposé dans un salon tel que celui de Glucq. C'est, sans doute, alors qu'on en fit des pendants. Les deux parties furent coupées sur les bords extérieurs afin de centrer la composition, et les bandes ôtées sur les côtés furent ajoutées dans le haut. Cette transformation qui s'est faite très rapidement après l'exécution même du tableau sur une peinture récente, n'est pas très visible sur les radios comme nous l'avons déjà dit. La transformation a-t-elle pu être faite par Watteau lui-même? Ceci n'est pas impossible, mais cependant, on peut penser que son état de santé ne lui a pas permis de se livrer à ce travail fatigant; il est plus probable que c'est Pater qui fut appelé à le faire, et qu'à la suite de son maître et dans son esprit il a repeint les adjonctions, et apporté les modifications que nous avons signalées. Ainsi s'expliquent les légères anomalies relevées par de nombreux historiens, entre autres la botte de paille qui ne repose pas sur le sol, le manque d'équilibre du jeune portefaix sur la gauche.
Note 49:

... Il a fallu que Gersaint m'ammenât le bon homme La Serre pour agrandir la toile au costé droit, où j'ai ajouté les chevaux dessous les arbres, car j'y éprouvais de la gêne depuis que j'y ai ajouté tout ce qui a esté décidé ainsi.

Note 54:

... il accuse Julienne (sic) d'avoir coupé lui-même l'oeuvre de Watteau. Je me hâte de dire qu'il ne le prouve pas. Mais, pour qualifier un tel meurtre, M. Thiebault-Sisson a trouvé un mot charmant: "Il mutila respectueusement."

Note 56:

... M Vuaflart m'a fait remarquer la proportion tout à fait anormale des figures de femmes placées au premier plan de l'Enseigne. Il pense qu'elles "plafonnent" légèrement et que l'allongement du corps était destiné à compenser pour le spectateur l'inclinaison du tableau. La mention "peint en plafond" inscrite sous l'estampe ne serait, en somme, que l'explication fournie à celui qui regarde la gravure de cet allongement singulier des figures principales.

Note 60:

Mille détails d'histoire, de chronologie et même de légende, confus dans les esprits, nous troublaient bien quelque peu. Mais on était trop content pour s'y arrêter. On tenait l'Enseigne que l'on avait crue exilée; tant pis pour les détails dont les historiens finiraient bien par s'arranger--c'est leur métier.

Note 67:

... Mais il n'y aurait ni controverses ni querelles au sujet de l'authenticité du tableau de Berlin si nos prédécesseurs avaient eu à leur disposition les moyens d'investigation qu'a fournis cette fois le Laboratoire du Louvre. Mme. Hours a procédé à son étude scientifique en 1951 lorsque le tableau fut exposé au Petit-Palais, et maintenant Mme. Kuhn, Directrice et Conservatrice des châteaux de Berlin, nous a autorisé à publier les présentes observations.
Note 68:

À notre avis, cette large composition a dû être peinte par Watteau sur deux toiles séparées destinées à être jointes par un encadrement sur l'auvent; des constatations d'ordre matériel, technique et stylistique viennent à l'appui de cette thèse, et confirment qu'il s'agit bien du tableau de Charlottenbourg.

La scène que nous y voyons actuellement représentée était légèrement différente à l'origine. Elle était plus large de plusieurs centimètres et beaucoup moins haute; elle mesurait, comme nous le montrerons plus loin, environ 3,55 m; la partie gauche a été modifiée, nous voyons sur la photographie en rayons X une charrette remplie de foin occupant l'extrémité de cette partie. On peut noter également quelques différences dans le portefaix qui a été, sans doute, ajouté par la suite et le jeune garçon qui prend à pleins bras une glace (qui était un tableau?). Les surpeints étant intervenus lorsque la toile était encore fraîche, le dessin initial ne se lit pas facilement.

... Sur les photographies des marques de frottement dues au cadre et peut-être à des sortes de clous, sont visibles sur les côtés. Je remarquai que ces mêmes marques se voyaient, aux rayons X, sur une partie des bandes ajoutées dans le haut. Mme Hours m'a signalé que ces bandes provenaient d'une toile semblable à celle du tableau, mais étaient posées dans le sens contraire.

Note 69:

Cette étude scientifique vient donc nous apporter la certitude que le tableau de Berlin est bien l'Enseigne qui a été peinte par Watteau pour la boutique de Gersaint Au Grand Monarque, sur le Pont Notre-Dame. Nous avons vu qu'il y avait des raisons d'ordre matériel, technique et stylistique pour que l'Enseigne ait été conçue en deux parties.
Note 74:

L'Enseigne de Gersaint, par ses dimensions, ne se prêtait pas facilement à la gravure; Pater en fit une réduction et, pour lui donner un format plus en rapport avec les autres estampes, il ajouta quelques cadres dans le haut et un pilier à droite (sur le tableau) qui limite ainsi la boutique avec symétrie.

Note 75:

APPENDIX B

WRITERS' CONTROVERSY

In Favor of the Collection of Michel-Levy

Arsene Alexandre, Les Arts, 1902, no. 4, p. 10.

Le Figaro, 6 Mars, 1910.


Gustave Babin, l'Illustration, 12 Janvier, 1910.

Armand Dayot, le Matin, 1er Mars, 1910 (aussi les 5 et 6 Mars).

Gabriel Mourey, Revue de Paris, 1 Avril, 1910, p. 569.

Other writers:

Andre Maurel

In Favor of Berlin Painting

Ferdinand Laban, Jahrbuch der Königlichen preussischen Kunstsammlungen, 1900, p. 54.


Jean Guiffrey, Ibid., 1910, p. 85 (12 Mars).


Other writers:
Paul Alfassa
Emile Dacier
Albert Vuafart
M. Thiebault-Sisson

Note: There is a complete dossier of articles on this controversy in the Bibliothèque d'Art de l'Université de Paris. These papers could not be borrowed.
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