

THE PRISONER - Elizabeth Gardner Bouguereau (1837 – 1922)



Two young women in antique dress. One of them has just opened a cage to free the dove that nestles in her companion's arms.

The painting is by Elizabeth Gardner, an American artist who studied watercolour and went to Paris to perfect her technique. She was the first American woman to exhibit works at the Paris Salon, and the first one as well to be awarded the Gold medal in 1872. She became William Bouguereau's student and married him in 1896.

A sketch of the painting features in the catalogue of the 1883 Salon, with a double caption, in English and in French: 'The Prisoner ' and 'La Captive'.



The painting is also known in English as 'The Dove Fanciers', a title which fails to render the *'galant'* undertone of the scene, alluding to the sweet prison of love. Of course the prisoner is not simply the dove, but also the young woman whose heart must be the prisoner of a tender feeling.

The fan reproduces the pastel colours of the original, inverting them: the blue dress is pink and vice-versa.


