

# The 17<sup>th</sup>/18th Centuries: Baroque and Rococo Art

Baroque: from Portuguese “barocco,” an irregular pearl

## Historical Context:

- Power of European countries expands – colonies in the New World and Asia create new wealth from trade. Spain, Portugal and England especially.
- Catholic counter-Reformation is in full swing, attempting to retain and return people to the Catholic faith.
- Important scientific discoveries: sun is center of solar system. \*New world view.

## Characteristics of Baroque Art:

- Evocation of dramatic emotional states
- Elaborate ornamentation and decoration
- Grandeur, sensual richness, exuberance, movement, tension
- Flamboyant and “over the top”

## Part 1: The Baroque in Italy and Spain



Caravaggio, *The Calling of St. Matthew*. Ca 1599-1600. Oil on canvas, 11'1" x 11'5"



- Caravaggio: uses ordinary people around him as models – not highly idealized figures.
- Matthew is a tax collector, the setting humble and everyday.
  - **Tenebrism**: selective use of dramatic light in darkness. Creates space & movement, and emphasizes the narrative – Christ's calling of Matthew.



- **Bacchus** – Greek god of wine

- Excess and celebration associated with Bacchus - he could be the patron god of the Baroque

- Homoerotic tones in Caravaggio's paintings of young men.

Caravaggio, *Bacchus*  
1595, oil on canvas  
37 x 33"



**Caravaggio, Judith Beheading Holofernes, 1598-1599. Oil on canvas, 57" x 77"**



The figures in this painting are clustered tightly together on a stone platform, aligned on an axis diagonal to the picture plane.

This **diagonal alignment**, and the **drama** of the scene – emphasized by the repetition of hands thrown up against the dark ground, and the **dramatic lighting scheme** – are typical of Baroque painting.

Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ*.



St. Peter's, Rome. Colonnade by Gianlorenzo Bernini, 1657.



- Bernini is a master sculptor and architect – sees himself as heir to Michelangelo. He is commissioned to complete the building and sculpture of St. Peter's that Michelangelo had begun.
- Oval courtyard with colonnade acting like “arms” drawing the faithful to the church
- Originally, colonnade also screened the complex from surrounding slums.





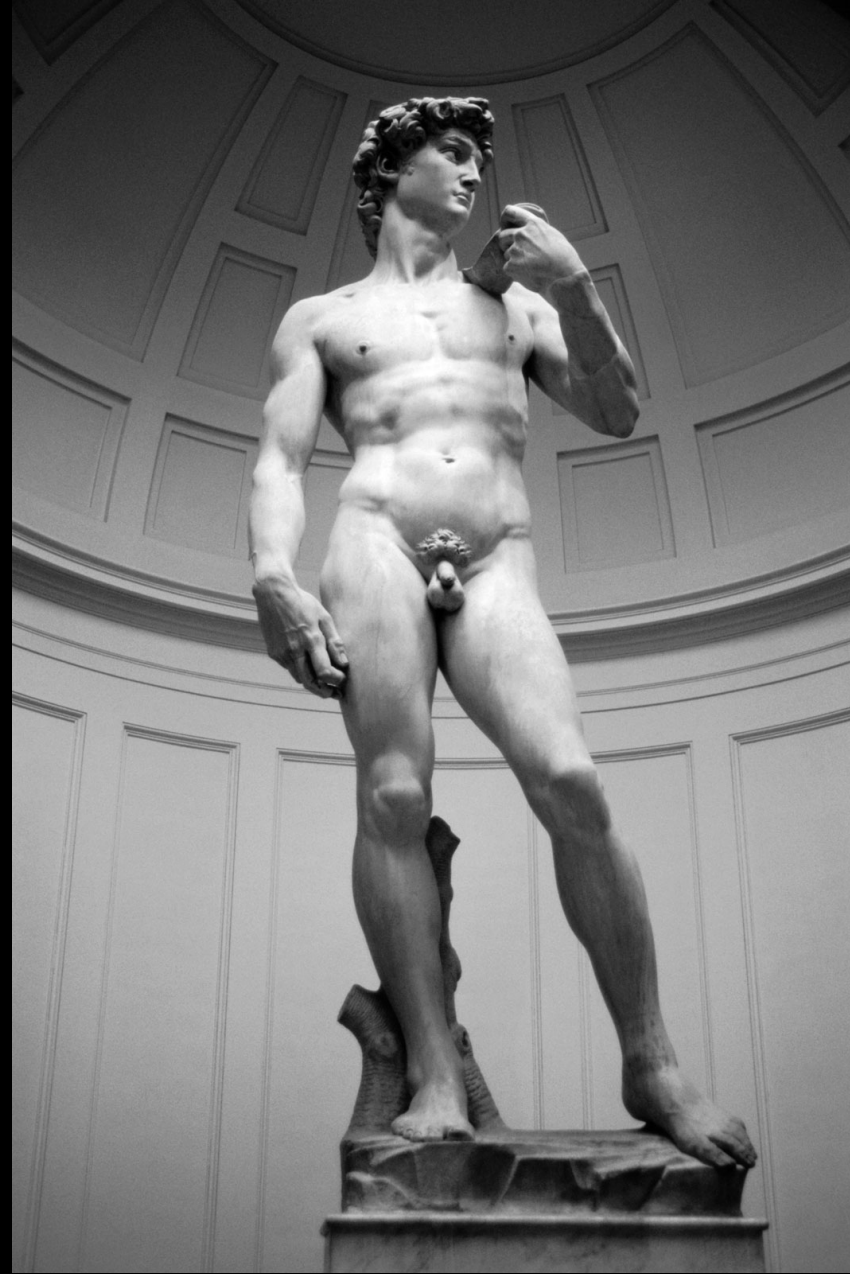
- Baroque features:
  - Strong sense of movement
  - Dramatic action and emotion
  - Bernini chooses moment of most tension: David is in the act of throwing the stone at Goliath.

Bernini, *David*, 1623  
Marble, life-size.



Baroque – Bernini, 1623

Comparison:



Renaissance – Michelangelo, 1501-04



- Baroque artists use theatricality in service of faith

- Marble likenesses of the Cornaro family “watch” the scene from each side - a built-in audience.

- St. Teresa of Avila: one of the most popular saints of the Counter-reformation. She was “ravaged” by the holy spirit in the form of an arrow show by an angel.

**Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*  
1645-1652. Marble, life-size.  
Cornaro Chapel, Rome.**



“The pain was so great that I screamed aloud; but at the same time I felt such infinite sweetness that I wished the pain to last forever. It was not physical but psychic pain... the sweetest caressing of the soul by God.” – St. Teresa of Avila



- Spanish painters absorb influence of Caravaggio's **naturalism**

- Spanish artists like Ribera worked in Italy

- Velasquez gains fame and is made court painter to King Philip IV of Spain

- Here, a portrait of his Moorish assistant during a trip to Italy to paint the pope

*Velazquez, Juan de Pareja*  
1650, oil on canvas  
32 x 27 ½"



- Portrait of Princess Margarita of Spain with her handmaids and playmates

- Her parents, the king and queen, reflected in the mirror

- Velasquez himself shown at his canvas – he is part of the royal household

- Large dark space at top of painting contrasts and emphasizes the light, small figures at bottom

**Velazquez, *Las Meninas*  
1656, oil on canvas,  
10'5" x 9'**



Velasquez, *The Spinners*. C. 1657. Oil on canvas, 87.5 x 115.3 in.



There are several possible stories behind the scene in this painting. According to one theory, the women in the foreground belong to the Spanish court's weaving workshop. Another theory holds that the painting is based on the myth of **Arachne**, a mortal woman who boasted her powers were as great as those of **Minerva**, Roman goddess of wisdom and crafts. Minerva challenged Arachne to a competition, and was so enraged by the beauty of the weaving Arachne made that she destroyed it and slashed the girl's face.





- Zurbarán painted many works for monastic orders
- Here, St. Serapion, who was martyred-killed by pirates
- He fills the canvas, heroic scale
- Zurbarán's paintings have a quiet, ascetic quality that is uniquely Spanish
- **Contrast of light and dark** shows Caravaggio's Influence and adds to hushed drama of the scene
- **Reduced color palette** adds to quiet, contemplative mood

Zurbarán, *St. Serapion*, 1628  
Oil on canvas, approx 48 x 41"



Zurbarán, Agnus Dei (Lamb of God). Oil on canvas, 1635-40. Approx. 15 x 24"

Notice the **textural realism** in how Zurbarán painted the lamb's fleece. His intimate observation of the lamb compels us as viewers to feel sympathy and compassion.

## Part 2: The Baroque in the Netherlands

### Historical Context:

- 1581: the Northern Netherlands declare independence from Spanish rule.
  - 1648: The Dutch Republic becomes an independent state. Flanders to the south remains under Spanish, Catholic rule. (Flanders = modern Belgium and northern France)
  - In the Dutch Republic, merchants become primary patrons of the arts. The Dutch East India Company brings wealth as well as exotic wares back to the Netherlands.
  - In Flanders, the Catholic Church remains a major patron of the arts. Merchants there are also patrons.
- \*Dutch Netherlands = Protestant
- \*Flanders = Catholic



Rubens, *The Raising of the Cross*, 1610-11. Oil paint.

• Rubens works in Antwerp, Flanders. Spends 8 years studying in Italy, absorbs Italian tradition. **Epitome of Baroque virtuoso artist**, Rubens acts as diplomat and royal advisor



- Rubens style is noted for his lush use of oil paint, voluptuous fleshy female nudes (“**Rubenesque**”) and dramatic sense of movement

- Here, in a commission for the French court, **he blends history and myth**: the arrival of Marie from Italy to marry the French king. She is greeted by rejoicing Nereids and Neptune.

- The entire “Marie” cycle is 21 paintings.

Rubens, *Marie de Medici, Queen of France, Landing in Marseille*. 1622-25. Oil on Canvas, approx 13' x 10'



Rubens, detail



## The Dutch Republic:

### 1) Frans Hals

Hals is based in Haarlem and paints mainly Individual and group portraits.

- His style is noted for the immediacy he brings to his sitters through **spontaneous, quick brushwork**.
- Hals' portraits have a fresh, modern quality because of his use of paint and the active gestures and poses he chooses
- This piece may be an allegory of taste (he extends a glass).

Frans Hals, *The Jolly Toper*.  
1628-30. Oil on canvas.  
Approx. 32 x 26"



This detail shows Hals' spontaneous, textured brushwork, especially in the sitter's hair and collar.

Hals, detail





• **Tronie**: a genre portrait. Not a specific individual, although a model may have been used.

• “Malle” implies “crazy”

• She is shown drinking, possibly in a tavern.

• However, the owl on her shoulder may be a symbol of **Minerva**, the Roman goddess of wisdom

• **Loose brushwork** adds to sense of movement and immediacy in the painting

Frans Hals, Malle Babba  
Oil on canvas, 1633-35.



## Haarlem, Dutch Republic: Judith Leyster

- Women artists were few and far between
- Leyster gained admission to the painter's **guild** in Haarlem with this self portrait. She shows herself working at her easel, mouth open as though she might speak to us.
- Leyster is influenced by Hals' style of painting and also trains pupils of her own

Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*  
C. 1633. Oil on canvas,  
Approx 29 x 25"



Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Night Watch*, 1642. Oil on canvas, 12'2" x 14'7"  
An early masterwork by Rembrandt, commissioned by a private militia in Amsterdam.



- Rembrandt completes many self portraits, both etchings and paintings.

Rembrandt, *Self Portrait*  
Etching.



- Use of oil paint to create **simulated texture** is one of Rembrandt's hallmarks. Flesh feels like flesh, fabric like fabric, etc.
- He uses both **impasto** (thick paint) and thin glazes to create varied textural and atmospheric effects.
- Throughout his life he experiments with costume and varied expression in his self-portraiture.

Rembrandt, Self Portrait, c. 1630's. Oil on canvas.



This detail from a later self-portrait shows Rembrandt's use of **impasto** to convey the folds and texture of his skin. He is also known to have used the wooden end of his brush to scratch lines into his hair.



Rembrandt, *Self Portrait*  
c. 1660. Oil on canvas.



In this late painting, Rembrandt deftly and tenderly paints his wife Hendrijke bathing in a river.

The scene has no particular narrative – it is simply a lovingly observed portrait Hendrijke, a 17<sup>th</sup> century woman engaged in an everyday activity. Its **content** has to do with the timelessness of the scene, and with Rembrandt's love for her.

Rembrandt, *Hendrijke Bathing*  
Oil on canvas.





- Throughout 17<sup>th</sup> c. views of recognizable landscapes grow as popular subjects for Dutch painting.

- Flat land and huge sky are typical of Dutch countryside.

- Haarlem was a center of fabric production; in the foreground here we see lengths of fabric laid out to bleach in the sun.

Jacob von Ruisdael,  
*Bleaching Grounds Near Haarlem*. c. 1670. Oil on canvas, approx 22 x 24"



- Egmond is a coastal town with sand dunes.

- Here, a close foreground with dead tree, and distant town with church tower. Figures process towards town; bird in the sky visually links dead tree to church tower. Metaphor for religious renewal?

- Collection of the Currier Museum, Manchester, NH

Ruisdael, *View of Egmond*  
Oil on canvas.



Ruisdael, detail



Willem Claesz. Heda. *Still Life*, c. 1630's. Oil on panel.

**Still life** becomes another popular new genre of Dutch oil painting. Artists such as Claesz display masterful handling of oil paint to create **simulated texture**.



Jan Steen, *The Dissolute Household*, 1668. Oil on canvas.



**Dutch Genre Painting:** some genre scenes are **moralizing**, like Steen's, others are more meditative/contemplative.

•“**Jan Steen household**” became a Dutch proverb meaning a chaotic household



- Vermeer's genre paintings generally have no clear narrative.

- They show figures, mostly women, engaged in private moments of action in domestic interiors lit by soft, buttery light.

- Her balance contains *nothing*.

- Camera Obscura* may explain the dewy, shimmering points of light in Vermeer's works

Jan Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*.

Oil on canvas, approx 17 x 15"



- Curtain in foreground frames the scene and sets the figure back in space.

- Sense of discovery and voyeurism, as though we have just pulled the curtain back.

Jan Vermeer, *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window*  
c. 1658.





Jan Vermeer,  
*The Milkmaid*, 1660.  
Oil on canvas  
Approx 18 x 16"



## Part 3: The Baroque in France and England

### “Baroque Classicism”

#### Historical Context:

- 16<sup>th</sup> century wars of religion and conflict between nations had drained both England and France’s coffers.
- Political tumult continues throughout 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially in England where kings struggle to hold on to power; Charles I is executed 1649; Oliver Cromwell’s Roundheads rule for a time; 1689 Bill of Rights establishes supremacy of Parliament over the monarchy (called a Constitutional Monarchy).
- England becomes predominantly Protestant, France remains Catholic.
- French kings continue to rule with absolute power until the French Revolution of 1789. Divine Right of Kings – monarch’s authority seen to come from God.
- **Baroque Classicism:** the dominant style of the French and English courts. Roman & Greek forms are used more deliberately than in Italian/Spanish/Netherlandish Baroque Art. This is especially true in architecture in London and Paris of the time.



Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with St. John on Patmos*, 1640. Oil on canvas, 39 ½ x 53 ¾"

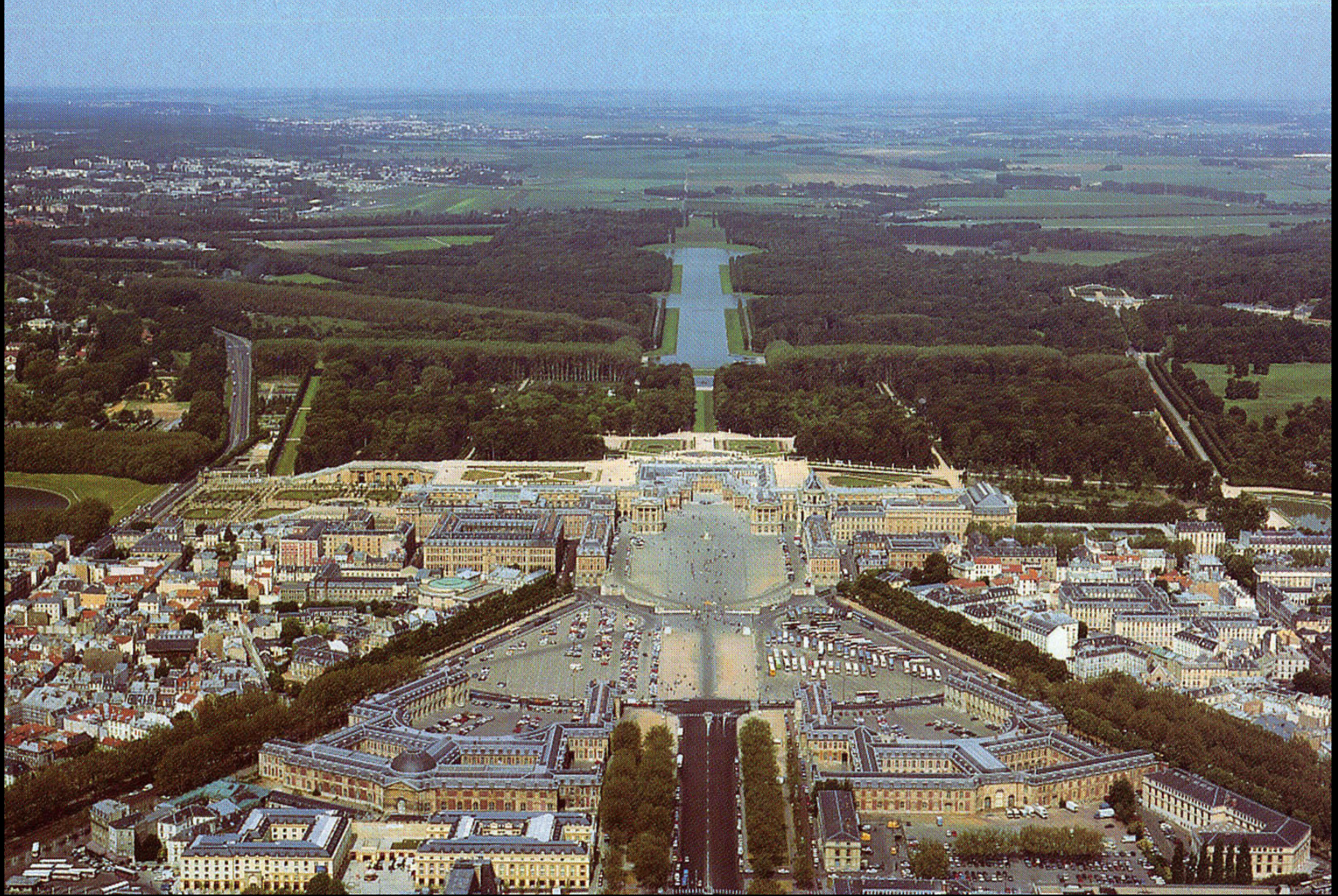
• Poussin works almost entire career in Rome, absorbing Italian tradition. Here, the saint is shown in an idealized, somber Greek landscape with ruins.



Poussin, *Achilles With the Daughters of Lycomedes*, c. 1651.

• Poussin's style is adopted as the ideal by the **Royal Academy founded in Paris 1648 to set standards in art**. Study of perspective and anatomy to "represent noble and serious human actions." Theatricality: viewer can "read" figures' emotions clearly.





Versailles Palace and Gardens seen from the air. France. Begun 1669.

- Louis XIV builds a palace at Versailles, a suburb of Paris, in order to isolate his court and maintain better control over his courtiers.



•Versailles is the project of King Louis XIV, “The Sun King.” Under his reign, Paris begins to rival Rome as Europe’s art capital. Sun is symbol of Apollo. Louis patronizes the arts and uses art to make concrete the glory of his reign.





Versailles, garden front of center block of the palace. Architects: Louis Le Vau and Jules Hardouin-Mansart.



Classicizing columns on porches punctuate Versailles's façade.



Versailles gardens.

•Idea: King's absolute power extends to nature as well.



Saint Paul's Cathedral, London. Designed by Sir Christopher Wren. 1675-1710.

- Wren spearheads rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666. Wren is an intellectual prodigy and “Renaissance Man.”



- Wren visited Paris and knew the Italian architect/sculptor Bernini (who built St. Peter's in Rome)

- **Influence of French Classicism** is evident in the double columns, a feature of the Louvre palace in Paris.

- **Basilica plan** used is same as in most Catholic churches of the time, even though this was a Protestant church.

Sir Christopher Wren, St. Paul's Cathedral, façade. London.

## Part 4: The Rococo

c. 1700-1789

### Historical Context:

- “Rococo” from the French “rocaille” (pebble) combined with “baroque.” “Rococo” was coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a disparaging term meaning rough, excessive, ornate. Today the negative connotations have mostly fallen away.
- The Rococo period corresponds roughly with the reign of King Louis XV of France; The style also appears in England and western/central Europe.

### Rococo Style:

- Like the Baroque, deals with dramatic emotion and subject matter, and ornate decoration
- Unlike the Baroque, The Rococo tends towards **small-scale works** for private enjoyment. The French aristocracy purchased paintings, ceramics and other objects to decorate their homes in Paris, reasserting themselves as patrons.
- Rococo painters display new interest in themes of love and eroticism



Watteau, *A Pilgrimage to Cythera*. 1717. Oil on canvas, 4'3" x 6'4 ½"

- “Rubenistes” vs. “Poussinistes” in the French Academy debate the primacy of **color vs. drawing as the foundation of painting**.
- Here: a fantasy realm; aristocratic lovers on Greek island of Venus’s birth.



Watteau,  
Chalk drawing.





- Scene of erotic fantasy commissioned by private patron

- A “boudoir painting”
- Two lovers cavort in a lush, secretive wooded setting.

- “The swing” may be a metaphor for sexual climax.

- Cupid at left “hushes” us, makes us complicit in the scene as voyeurs.

Fragonard, *The Swing*. 1767.  
Oil on canvas, approx 33” x 26”



Fragonard, detail



Chardin: still life and **genre interiors** inspired by Dutch examples.

- Aristocratic patrons value such scenes as exemplary of hard work, honesty, family life.

- Sense of stillness and beauty found in the everyday liken him to Vermeer.

- Softer brushwork - *suggesting* rather than defining forms.

Chardin, *Back from the Market*, 1739.

Oil on canvas, 18 ½" x 14 ¾"



Chardin



Chardin



- Rococo interior decoration integrates sculpture, painting furniture and stucco mouldings in a total design.

- Rich ornamentation and decorative organic forms dominate.

- The Rococo is one period where the applied arts (crafts) are valued on equal terms with the “high arts” of painting, sculpture and architecture.**

Nicolas Pineau. Varengville Room.  
c. 1735. (recreation)  
Carved, painted and gilded oak.



*O Family of youthfull Bloods, / So by Mirth to poison good,  
 Woman, ferid for Social Love, / But turn'd to Vice, all Plagues above,  
 Fairest gift of Powers above, / Foe to thy Being, Foe to Love,  
 Sweetest of every Household Blessing, / All Charms in Sinners piping,  
 Sweet Divine to outward Viewing, / Alas! Murther of Ruin!  
 And Thou, no less of gift divine, / Sweet Poison of Misused Wine,  
 With Freedom led to every Part, / And secret Chamber of Vice,  
 Dost Thou thy friendly Host betray, / And show thy riotous gang of Tray,  
 To enter in with avert Face, / O'erthrow the drowsy guards of Reason,  
 So ransack the abundant Place, / And revel there with wild Excess!*

Invented, Painted, Engrav'd, & Publish'd by W. Hogarth June 27. 1735. according to Act of Parliamt.

Hogarth: like Jan Steen, morality scenes that teach by bad example.

- “The rake” is a young man indulging in all manner of questionable pleasures.
- Detail and humor make the message palatable and not overly didactic
- Hogarth’s prints are widely popular in England and affordable to many

William Hogarth, *He Revels (The Orgy)*, from *The Rake's Progress*. Engraving, 14" x 16 ¼"