

Art

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Painting

The great formal portraits of Largillière and Rigaud are entirely Baroque in their approach, but in the late informal portraits of these masters a new atmosphere prevails. This atmosphere goes by the name of Rococo. The turn of the century marks the victory of Rubens' influence over the severe classicism of Poussin. The evolution of the Rococo style of decoration has been traced from its emergence at the beginning of the 18th century, and it must be emphasized that the Rococo is fundamentally a decorative style. It made relatively little impact on religious painting in France, and painters such as Pierre Subleyras continued to work in a Baroque idiom until the arrival of Neoclassicism in the second half of the century. It took the genius of Antoine Watteau to put together all the ideas current in Paris and to create the new style of painting. Rubens (in particular his oil sketches), the brush drawings and etchings of Castiglione, the naturalism of the Dutch painters, and the fantasy of the French artist Claude Gillot all provided important source material for early Rococo painting. The delicate sketchlike technique and elegant figures of Watteau's wistful fantasies, called *fêtes galantes*, provided the models for the paintings of Jean-Baptiste Pater and Nicolas Lancret, both of whom conveyed a delicately veiled eroticism. Eroticism was more explicit in the sensuous nudes, both mythological and pastoral, of François Boucher. Another painter with whom amorous dalliance is a hallmark was Jean-Honoré Fragonard, in whose soft landscapes flirtation and even seduction are conducted with gallantry. Such paintings formed an intimate part of the decoration of Rococo interiors, and more than any earlier secular paintings they were intended as a kind of two-dimensional furniture.

The furniture role also applies to the paintings of dead game and live dogs by François Desportes and Jean-Baptiste Oudry. But in the still lifes and tranquil scenes of domestic life painted by Jean-Baptiste-Simon Chardin there is a sobriety of colour and composition (although great richness in the handling), an often relatively homely subject matter, and a concern to order the mind rather than dazzle the eye. Some of Chardin's subjects - the labours of the servant class, the care of children - were shared by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, who was, however, more interested in narrative and sentiment. Unlike Dutch painters of lower-class life, Greuze endowed his peasants with the sensibility of their social superiors. The edifying moral sympathy he intended to inculcate was, however, often subverted by a sly erotic interest he could not resist giving expression to.

Despite his great success, Greuze was judged to have failed in his attempt at painting heroic narrative from ancient history. But then it is true that the "higher" class of painting was generally less successfully practiced in France than were the "lower" genres in the 18th century. The mythologies and altarpieces of the Coypel family, Jean-François de Troy, or Jean-Marc Nattier may have been underestimated, but their names are not as familiar as those of still-life and genre painters such as Watteau or Chardin or even those of such accomplished painters of capricious ruin pieces or of landscapes and seascapes as Hubert Robert and Claude-Joseph Vernet.

The middle decades of the 18th century saw more accomplished portrait painters flourishing in France than perhaps ever before in any country. Yet it is the informal, the convivial, and the intimate that are associated with the portraiture of Jacques-André-Joseph Aved, François-Hubert Drouais, Louis Tocquard, Louis-Michel van Loo, or Étienne Aubry. The heroic was seldom attempted and never achieved.

Sculpture

The sculptural style was made lighter, gayer, and more ornamental, in accordance with 18th-century taste, as seen in the famous Chevaux de Marly by Guillaume Coustou now marking the entrance to the Champs-Élysées in Paris but designed for Marly, as part of the most innovative outdoor display of sculpture since the 16th-century gardens of Italy. Coustou's bust of his brother Nicolas has a characteristic freshness and informality whereby 18th-century artists avoided the grandeur they found pompous in the Berninian tradition. This 18th-century style that reduced the Baroque to exquisite refinement was the art of the aristocratic salon and boudoir. The little marble Mercury (1744) of Jean-Baptiste Pigalle is almost wholly Berninian, except in its intimacy and deliberate unpretentiousness; even in Pigalle's most ambitious undertakings, the relative scale of the figures is much reduced and the whole composition opened up, in contrast to Bernini's tombs. Nevertheless, the narrative and indeed the allegory of his masterpiece, the tomb of the Maréchal de Saxe (1753; Saint-Thomas, Strasbourg), is as enthralling and memorable as any 17th-century sculpture, although the theme, significantly, no longer seems to be inspired by the Christian faith. At the same time, the more classical current of French sculpture continued and gained importance as the 18th century advanced. The clarified form and continuous, unbroken contours of Étienne-Maurice Falconet's marble Bather (1757) adapt the Classic tradition to a pretty and intimate Rococo ideal that is the quintessence of 18th-century taste. This Classicism was purified by Jean-Antoine Houdon, who avoided the playful air of the Rococo boudoir in his Diana (c. 1777) and his marble nude in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (1782). His portrait sculptures are the ultimate in the 18th-century refinement of Bernini's tradition.

In the context of the rather restrained French sculpture of the 18th century, the blatant sensuality of Clodion (byname of Claude Michel) is the exception rather than the rule. Portrait busts by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne and Pigalle follow the direction taken by Coysevox in his Robert de Cotte, but Augustin Pajou and Houdon soon abandoned the Rococo in favour of a Neoclassical approach. Edmé-Bouchardon, however, flirted only briefly with the Rococo and otherwise remained firmly attached to the classicizing tradition of French sculpture.

Notable Artists

- AUGUSTIN, Jacques-Jean-Baptiste — French miniaturist (b. 1759, Saint-Denis, d. 1832, Paris)
- BOUCHER, François — French painter (b. 1703, Paris, d. 1770, Paris)
- CHARDIN, Jean-Baptiste-Simon — French painter (b. 1699, Paris, d. 1779, Paris)
- COYPEL, Charles-Antoine — French painter (b. 1694, Paris, d. 1752, Paris)
- COYPEL, Noël-Nicolas — French painter (b. 1690, Paris, d. 1734, Paris)
- DESPORTES, Alexandre-François — French painter (b. 1661, Champigneulle, d. 1743, Paris)
- DROUAIS, François-Hubert — French painter (b. 1727, Paris, d. 1775, Paris)
- DUPLESSIS, Joseph-Siffrède — French painter (b. 1725, Carpentras, d. 1802, Versailles)
- FRAGONARD, Jean-Honoré — French painter (b. 1732, Grasse, d. 1806, Paris)
- GILLOT, Claude — French painter (b. 1673, Langres, d. 1722, Paris)
- GRAVELOT, Hubert-François — French engraver (b. 1699, Paris, d. 1773, Paris)
- GREUZE, Jean-Baptiste — French painter (b. 1725, Tournus, d. 1805, Paris)
- LA TOUR, Maurice Quentin de — French painter (b. 1704, Saint-Quentin, d. 1788, Saint-Quentin)
- LANCRET, Nicolas — French painter (b. 1690, Paris, d. 1743, Paris)
- LARGILLIÈRE, Nicolas de — French painter (b. 1656, Paris, d. 1746, Paris)
- LEMOYNE, François — French painter (b. 1688, Paris, d. 1737, Paris)
- LÉPICIER, Nicolas-Bernard — French painter (b. 1735, Paris, d. 1784, Paris)

- LOO, Carle van — French painter (b. 1705, Nice, d. 1765, Paris)
- LOO, Louis — French painter (b. 1707, Toulon, d. 1771, Paris)
- NATTIER, Jean-Marc — French painter (b. 1685, Paris, d. 1766, Paris)
- OUDRY, Jean-Baptiste — French painter (b. 1686, Paris, d. 1755, Beauvais)
- PATER, Jean Baptiste Joseph — French painter (b. 1695, Valenciennes, d. 1736, Paris)
- PERRONNEAU, Jean-Baptiste — French painter (b. 1715, Paris, d. 1783, Amsterdam)
- PESNE, Antoine — French painter (b. 1683, Paris, d. 1757, Berlin)
- RESTOUT, Jean — French painter (b. 1692, Rouen, d. 1768, Paris)
- RIGAUD, Hyacinthe — French painter (b. 1659, Perpignan, d. 1743, Paris)
- ROBERT, Hubert — French painter (b. 1733, Paris, d. 1808, Paris)
- SUBLEYRAS, Pierre — French painter (b. 1699, Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, d. 1749, Rome)
- TOCQU+ë, Louis — French painter (b. 1696, Paris, d. 1772, Paris)
- TROY, Jean-Fran+ois de — French painter (b. 1679, Paris, d. 1752, Roma)
- VERNET, Carle — French painter (b. 1758, Bordeaux, d. 1836, Paris)
- VERNET, Claude-Joseph — French painter (b. 1714, Avignon, d. 1789, Paris)
- VIG+ëE-LEBRUN, +ëlisabeth — French woman painter (b. 1755, Paris, d. 1842, Paris)
- WATTEAU, Jean-Antoine — French painter (b. 1684, Valenciennes, d. 1721, Nogent-sur-Marne)
- WATTEAU, Louis-Joseph — French painter (b. 1731, Valenciennes, d. 1798, Lille)

Examples of their paintings can be found here: <http://www.wga.hu/tours/french/frame4p.html>

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