The Eighteenth Century

1. France

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Outside the Academy: **Private and Public Art**

Rococo

Despite all the sun in the 17th century, the reign of Louis XIV ended under dark clouds. Ten years of war against the alliance led by William III had finished in 1697 in serious defeat. Then through wanton acts of aggression Louis started the War of the Spanish Succession, which brought upon France the hammer blows of Marlborough. These unsuccessful campaigns forced Louis XIV to abandon long-held dreams of the expansion of France in Europe. If that didn't bring enough gloom to Versailles, Louis' mistress Madame de Maintenon established a pious atmosphere. *Comedie-Italienne* featuring the bawdy and comic intrigues of Harlequin and Colombine was popular at court, but in 1697 Louis expelled the company from France for putting on a play, *La Fausse Prude* (*The False Prude*) insulting Mme de Maintenon. Young nobles stifled by the dull sanctimony at Versailles began to leave for Paris even before Louis XIV's death in 1715.

Antoine Watteau, *Italian Comedians*, 1719

That shift was formalised when Regent Philip, Duke of Orleans, abandoned Versailles and took the court to Paris. Philip "the Debauched" was a rake, but also cultured, and society followed his example. Life was gayer in the capital anyway: the actors in *Comedie-Italienne* gave free performances (*forains*) in the Paris fairs which were immensely popular with all classes. When the *forains* were on, the *Comedie-Francaise Theatre* and the *Paris Opera* were deserted – by early 1718 the former was deep in debt. Aristocrats regularly played in their own amateur *forains* in their pleasure parks and estates. Harlequin in France was not the crude and greedy servant he was in Italy, but an ingenious manipulator prone to being undone by his own cunning plans. Pierrot/Gilles was the melancholy dupe, Colombine the coquette and Pantalone the despotic father or cuckolded husband. These characters gave great scope for tales of social and sexual intrigue, which the nobles loved.

This taste extended to the interior décor of their new Paris mansions; playful and gay scenes on wall-coverings, screens or in paintings. Added to this was the new favour for the colour of Rubens (over the classicism of Poussin) and the light-heartedness of Charles La Fosse [see 17th century notes]. These elements were brought together by Antoine Watteau to form the Rococo style (Blunt).

Antoine Watteau (1684 – 1721)

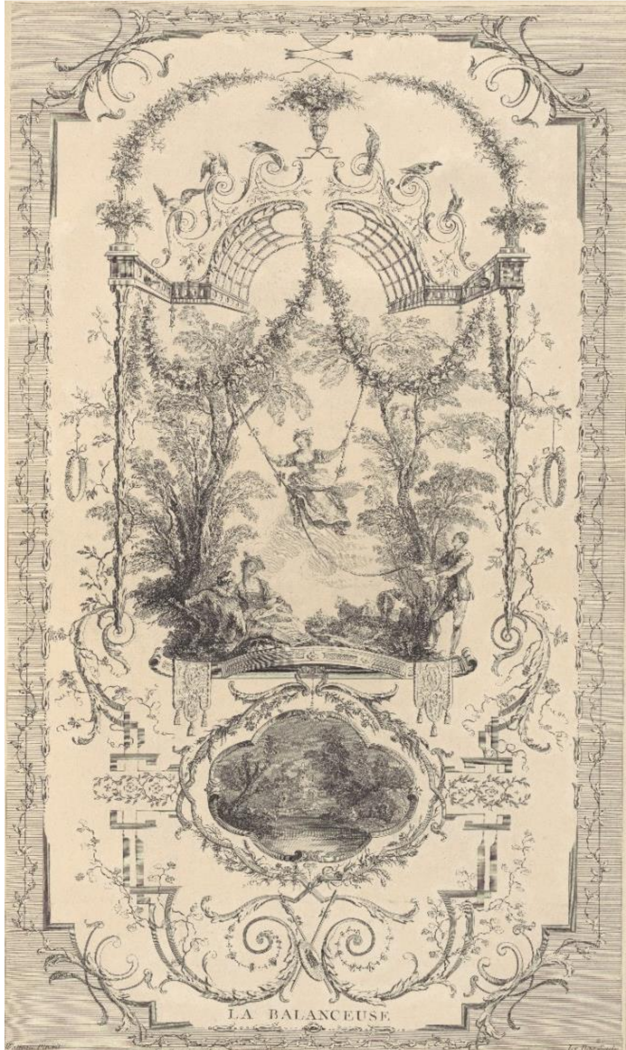
Antoine Watteau was born in Valenciennes. His father was a tiler who was for ever getting into brawls. Watteau inherited his restlessness and quick temper. Edme-Francois Gersaint, who was close to Watteau called him, "*a good but difficult friend.*" After learning the painter's trade from an undistinguished local artist, Watteau left home in 1702 to seek work in Paris. His poor training meant he joined day labourers who worked in shops mass-producing religious paintings which were sold by the dozen to provincial dealers. Copies from a model were done on an assembly line, one painter did heads, another drapery, another skies and clouds and so on: mind-numbingly repetitive work, which was poorly paid. Watteau struggled in these difficult circumstances for about five years. Eventually, his ability stood out - he was able to paint a whole scene of St Nicholas from memory and copy Dutch genre scenes - so the artist Claude Gillot took him on as a journeyman. Watteau stayed for a couple of years and learned much, particularly from Gillot's works depicting *Comedie-Italienne* theatre: the *forains* fostered a heavy demand for paintings and prints.

In 1708 Watteau left Gillot to assist Claude Audran, the famous artist who had originated the graceful and airy *arabesques* that were popular as Rococo decorations on ceilings, tapestries, screens, fans, coach doors and keyboard instruments. Audran employed assistants to fill the blank central spaces in his designs with little comic scenes, characters or animals (dressed monkeys being popular).

The use of *arabesques* is illustrated in a painting by ***Jean-Francois de Troy (1679 – 1752)***. His interior scenes were popular because of their accurate rendering of clothes and furnishings. The room is typical Rococo: flooded with light and of informal elegance. The low chairs were more heavily upholstered than normal inviting indolent relaxation. *Arabesques* can be seen on the screen and in the panels on the wall behind the ornate clock.

Jean-Francois de Troy, *A Reading from Moliere*, c 1728

Watteau’s talent for composition became evident and Audran allowed him to work independently. After a few years Watteau was being sought out by Audran’s clients. His most sophisticated designs date from around 1713.



Antoine Watteau, *The Swinger*, c 1713 (engraving)

Antoine Watteau, *The Swing*, c 1713 (engraving)

These compositions went far beyond Audran’s versions. In *The Swinger*, trees augment Audran’s usual decorative framing; in *The Swing*, the trees *are* the framing. These sophisticated *arabesques* were influenced by his easel paintings which by then Watteau had begun to sell. These were his *fete galantes*.

In the same year he started working for Audran, Watteau was admitted to study at the Academy, probably through the influence of Audran’s brother, Jean, who was a member. This was a huge step up for a provincial journeyman artist. After a year Watteau was chosen to take part in a competition in April 1709 from which four artists would be sponsored on study trips in Rome. Watteau’s work has not survived, but he was awarded second place. Nevertheless, he was not given one of the four berths; they went to those competitors with the most influence at the Academy. In 1712 the Academy decided to run a competition for previously unrewarded winners, so Watteau submitted one of his *fetes galantes*, *The Jealous*.

Antoine Watteau, *Les Jaloux (The Jealous)*, 1712

Two *Comedie-Italienne* characters and two ladies are gathered under a satyr, symbol of comedy and lust, with a heavily-shadowed sphinx in the foreground denoting the secret desires lurking beneath the geniality of the scene. The gentle Mezzetin is unaware that the girl playing her guitar is attempting to seduce him, and Pierrot, despite his female companion's inviting touch on the shoulder and admiring glance, is frozen in his usual incompetent mobility. To the right Scaramouche, the lady-killer, and Harlequin, the charming rake arrive: they would have managed the women far better.

Charles le Fosse at the Academy was so impressed with *The Jealous* that he arranged for Watteau to be promoted from student to Academy teacher. In order to claim his place Watteau needed to submit a new painting as a reception-piece. However, Watteau was upset: he wanted a trip to Rome, not a place in the Academy. Nevertheless, his championing by le Fosse and his Academic advancement impressed the art world and his *fetes galantes* were in great demand from 1713, when he left Audran to concentrate on them.

The commercial success enjoyed by Watteau meant that being a teacher at the Academy would bring few real advantages. He had to be reminded four times from 1714 to 1717 to produce his reception piece. Unusually Watteau was allowed to choose the subject, normally assigned by the professors. Reception pieces were important in establishing one's Academic standing. Only history painters could become professors.

By 1716 it was clear to Watteau that his *fetes galantes* were much more original and marketable than history paintings. He hedged his bets by calling the picture he submitted as his reception piece *Pilgrimage to Cythera* – the Greek island considered to be the birthplace of Venus. Mythological scenes were regarded as history paintings. The title also reflected the new vibrancy of life under Regent Philip, Duke of Orleans: as Cobban puts it, among the aristocracy *"there was a general embarkment for Cythera."*

Jean-Antoine Watteau, *The Embarkation for Cythera*, 1717 (Louvre)

The composition is anchored by the strong vertical the pair in the middle. They link the two halves of the painting. He looks and gestures towards the couples to his left, which include country boys and girls as well as urbane ladies and gents. She glances back to the seated couple on the far right where the man whispers words of love, encouraged by a young cupid with his arrows on the ground behind him, and the couple where the man lifts his lover. These three couples work as a sequence emotionally and compositionally (nascent attraction, promised intimacy, mature love) and they are painted much more boldly.

Are folk leaving or going to Cythera? The answer seems to lie in how the work is interpreted. Levey believes Watteau is saying that all love comes to an end, and everyone must eventually leave Cythera. Others suggest the more optimistic view of people looking forward to a journey of love. Posner thinks to-or-from is irrelevant. The indistinct landscape and sketchy brushwork depict a dream: *"a vision of the power of amorous instincts, of the urgent search for partners and of the intoxicating dream of Love fulfilled."* The painting does not depict a physical place – Cythera exists in every human heart: if romance and love prove illusive in life, we can nonetheless visit this place in our minds as often as we desire and dream. Watteau painted another version a few years later (now in Berlin) which is brighter, busier and more highly finished. Evidently Watteau preferred the Berlin version, but the original version in the Louvre is customarily favoured. The idea that love resides in our heart and mind does not fit so well with the more polished, less dream-like Berlin work.

The Academy minutes initially recorded it as "*a pilgrimage to or on Cythera*" but it dawned on the professors that accepting a mythological scene would give Watteau the rank of a history painter. So, the original title was cancelled and replaced in the books with "*une fete galante*." Ironically, this recognition came at a time Watteau believed his genre had run its course and he was to paint only one more.

Les Fetes Venitiennes, a consummate masterpiece, reflects Watteau's growing interest in his later years for portraits. Like *Cythera*, couples appear in various types of love conversation, and the central figure provides the axis. Her form is repeated upside-down, by the vase on the monumental pedestal behind her. As the music begins the dancers extend a foot, symbol of the coming sexual congress. The male dancer is Nicolas Vleughels, a close friend of Watteau (who is thought to have depicted himself as the musette player on the right). The girl dancer is perhaps the actress Charlotte Desmares from *Comedie-Francais.* Watteau depicted her in other works. She was a mistress to Regent Philip, hardly an exclusive position.

Antoine Watteau, *Les Fetes Venitiennes*, 1719

Bryson makes the point that Watteau usually hides faces or paints them so small that it is impossible to read their expressions. Instead, Watteau conveys emotion between a couple by the tilt and inclination of their heads, conveyed by emphasising the eyebrows, ears and hairline. His sketches reveal many experiments to get the mutual position of heads correct. These characteristics are evident in *Cythera* and *Venitiennes*; the viewer must examine each couple and interpret the nature of their conversation and relationship largely from the orientation of the heads. Couples are what Watteau is best at and is less successful with groups which often have very little emotional impact.

Watteau's other interest late in life was in large scale works. *Pierrot* is life-size – 6 feet by 5 feet. This work is often thought to be melancholic, perhaps even of self-identification: Watteau was struggling with tuberculosis when he painted it, *Pierrot* is sad and miserable. However, in Watteau's time, Pierrot was not sad, merely coarse and stupid, foil for the clever Harlequin. Moreover, all stock *Comedie-Italienne* characters had a specialised physique: Pierrot's was rigid, arms flat by his side, his head never turning (just as Watteau depicted him in *The Jealous*); Harlequin is always posed in the air, his feet never flat on the stage. The scene painted by Watteau is not unusual. At the end of a *Comedie-Italienne* performance, Pierrot would stand centre stage in front of the other characters and sing or give a short speech to explain the moral, much like Feste at the end of *Twelfth Night*.

Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot*, 1718-19 (Louvre)

Pierrot may also be an example of Watteau's interest in portraits. In *Comedie-Italienne* the Doctor is usually hunched and arthritic, masked under his wide hat aboard his trademark donkey. The donkey or mule was the attribute of the medical profession. Moliere's comedy *L'Amour Medecin* has a scene of four doctors bragging about the distances their mounts could carry them around the city. In a *Comedie-Italienne* skit of Watteau's time, Pasquariello tells Harlequin how to become a doctor, *'first of all you must get a mule and parade up and down the Paris streets.'* There follows a debate about whether the mule should accompany the doctor up the stairs to see the patient. In *Pierrot* the Doctor is unmasked and young, and so may be a portrait. Art historians generally agree that because of its size Pierrot was made as a poster or sign-board, which also explains why the picture is not mentioned in any 18th century art literature or catalogues, and why no engraving was made (almost all of Watteau's works were re-produced because they were so popular.) Posner reports that French art historian Helene Adhemar has an appealing theory that Pierrot was one of two shop signs made for cafes opened in 1718-19 by the actor Belloni, whose Pierrot was his most accomplished role. Belloni, who was around same age as Watteau, left the theatre because of illness which would kill him in the same year that Watteau died. The theory would mean that Pierrot was a portrait of Belloni, and the Doctor was one of his fellow-actors.

Watteau's famous large-scale work is the shop sign painted for his friend Gersaint. In autumn 1719 Watteau went to London. Whilst the Anglo-French alliance made this a good time to visit, the foul damp air of London wrecked Watteau's consumptive lungs. He returned to Paris in August 1720 with his health very poor indeed. He went to stay with Gersaint who two years earlier had opened a shop, *Au Grand Monarque*, dealing with paintings and luxury items. Society in Paris was getting larger and the building of mansions and country houses produced a great demand for art. Watteau wanted to paint a shop sign just *"to get the stiffness out of his fingers."* Gersaint did not like the idea, wanting the master to use his effort on serious art. By this time Watteau rarely had a day of good health and worked only in the mornings.

The sign was made on two separate canvases to fit the arched storefront (the original curved outline can still be seen) and it was about 19 inches wider (where the lackey stands, x-rays show a cart filled with hay which extended beyond the present left edge). Watteau insisted the work was hung outside but after two weeks Gersaint took it down and after Watteau's death sold it. By 1732 it was in the collection of another devoted friend of Watteau, Jean de Jullienne, with the changes made seemingly by Jean-Baptiste Pater who had briefly been a pupil of Watteau in 1713. The changes don't seriously affect Watteau's original.

The sign is magic, very much like the pretended wonderful reality of a Watteau *fete galante* – nothing like the actual shop which was a poky stall with a small room behind on the Pont Notre-Dame. The name of the shop is reflected by the portrait of Louis XIV in the crate. The young woman glances at it, but *"youth and beauty not power and fame, genuinely fascinate"* – the spirit of the Regency: the man of the elderly couple kneels to inspect the charms of the flesh; the young woman studies her reflection in a mirror in which she is joined by the admiring men. Ignoring the added lackey, the figures weave a dance, in-and-out, across the two panels.

Watteau was pleased with the picture, but it was his last. Soon, he became too ill to work. In the spring of 1721 in the hope of finding better air Watteau went to live in the country at Nogent-sur-Marne 9 km from Paris. The change didn't help and he decided to return home to Valenciennes for his last days. It was too late; he was too weak to travel and died on 18 Jul 1721, aged 37.

Antoine Watteau, *L’Enseigne de Gersaint*, 1720

According to Gersaint, Watteau was happier drawing than painting and Levey comments that it was *“perhaps in Watteau’s drawings that the essence of his genius lay.”* Using a brush and palette slowed him down. His natural speed of expression was better suited to drawing. His works are mostly in chalk. He used three crayons: black for costume and hair, sanguine to colour the flesh and white for highlights.

Watteau bequeathed his drawings to Jean de Jullienne (the friend who ended up with Gersaint’s shop-sign), who arranged for engravings to be made. Two volumes of *Figures* were published in 1726 and 1728. By 1739 de Jullienne had completed four books of prints which included all of Watteau’s drawings and paintings. These four volumes were known as the *Recueil Jullienne*: Gainsborough owned a copy.

Watteau’s view that he had exhausted the possibilities in his *fetes galante* was shared by Francois Boucher. In his pastorals, ladies and gentlemen were replaced by well-dressed shepherd boys and shepherdesses – the latter made-up glamorously. In *Spring* her left hand invites the mood Boucher wants to invoke.

Antoine Watteau, *Seated Young Woman*, c 1716
(Black, red and white chalk)

Francois Boucher, *Four Seasons: Spring*, 1755

Francois Boucher (1703 – 1770)

Boucher was born in Paris, son to a minor painter who trained him. Despite his scenes of leisure and being maligned as a sybarite, Boucher was a very hard worker. "*Constant work for more than twelve hours a day, from the moment in childhood when he first took up his pencils to the very end of his life, did not cause his imagination to run dry"* observed the *Mercure de France* in its obituary in September 1770)". *"M Boucher hardly ever went out, and his sorties were limited to Versailles, to the Gobelins, of which he was director, to the Opera, where he was likewise head of the department of sets and costumes"* wrote a contemporary (Rosenberg in Laing). In 1723 he won the Grand Prix but the Academy had no money to send him to Rome. Boucher earned his living for the next few years engraving Watteau's drawings for de Jullienne. Eventually in 1728 he funded his scholarship trip himself from his savings. His health was poor in Rome, preventing him from competing for prizes. He was drawn to Arcadian scenes – ruined temples and distant blue mountains – which influenced his reception piece for the Academy, *Rinaldo and Armida*. Later, Boucher would generally shun architecture and clutter, but reception pieces were supposed to be demonstrations of skill. There are hints for the future. The figure of the sorceress Armida would be repeated and the alluring woman inviting intimacy would become a motif. Putti abound: a bold move as the Academy had ordered them to be banished from history painting.

Francois Boucher, *Rinaldo and Armida*, 1734

Boucher's first commissions in 1735 came from the crown, but tapestries provided his first real break. They had long been popular in France, partly for decoration but initially mostly as insulation. The building of new mansions and country houses in the 1720s and 1730s sparked a high demand for tapestries of light-hearted pastoral scenes. The Gobelins and Beauvais factories met that demand. Oudry [see below] was appointed the official painter, designing six pictures a year, at Beauvais in 1726. In 1734 he was invited to a more prestigious post at Gobelins, and from 1735 he entrusted Boucher with supplying designs to the weavers. Boucher's first set depicted the romance of Italian village life and was a huge success. The scenes caught the eye of Louis XV who, in 1737, ordered tapestries from Beauvais to be designed by Boucher representing the *Story of Psyche*. These were coming off the looms in 1741.

Francois Boucher, *The Charlatan and the Peep Show* (*Fetes Italiennes* tapestry series), 1736

Francois Boucher, *Psyche and the Basket-makers* (*Story of Psyche* tapestry series), 1737

These commissions mark the start of Boucher's association with Beauvais which lasted for two decades. The directors of the rival state-run establishment of Gobelins wrote in 1754, *"for almost the last 20 years the Beauvais Manufactory has only been sustained by the appealing pictures made for it by M Boucher."* Boucher then followed in Oudry's footsteps, becoming director at Gobelins in 1755. That ended his work with Beauvais, but his designs, including those for the *Story of Psyche* continued to be woven there until 1770. Boucher was soon inundated with commissions for theatre and opera designs. The demand for his paintings mirrored that for his tapestry designs; works suitable for a salon rather than a huge gallery and depicting romantic or intimate scenes. Boucher produced such works for Louis XV's new Petits Apartments at Versailles.

One of Boucher's finest paintings is *The Triumph of Venus*, apparently an un-commissioned work sent to the 1740 Salon where it was bought by the Swedish Ambassador. Most of Boucher's best work is set outside in nature. The expanse of sea and sky in *Triumph* evokes freedom and a sense of timelessness.

Francois Boucher, *The Triumph of Venus*, 1740 (Stockholm)

An idyllic sense of rest and relaxation is apparent in one of Boucher's masterpieces; *Diana Resting after her Bath*. The "effortlessly delightful" huntress casts a spell. The composition is perfect – the diagonal formed by the bolt of blue velvet, helped by the tree roots, blades of grass and falling foliage, culminates in Diana's gorgeous lower leg, foot and toes; the focus of her friend's attention.

The golden flesh and blonde hair are set off by the green of the nature. The simplicity of the scene is emphasised by the detail of the dogs opposite the caught game, the quiver and arrows mirroring the bow.   The material in the banner in *The Triumph of Venus* appears again, evidently of some significance to Boucher.

Francois Boucher, *Diana Resting after her Bath*, 1742 (Louvre)

In 1745, Jeanne-Antoinette Lenormand d'Etoiles became the official mistress of Louis XV and, so she could appear at court, was given the title Marquise de Pompadour. She is more commonly remembered as Madame de P, and rather unfairly, actually, as she was an intelligent and cultured woman with Enlightenment beliefs. She supported the *Physiocrates* and defended Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste D'Alembert and their *Encyclopedie* when the French Church sought to suppress it. She was never a fan of clerics and was very much in favour of them losing their privilege of being exempt from taxes.

She was great patron of the arts and it is to her name that Boucher is linked. He painted her portrait many times. A portrait of her inside emphasises her intellectual pursuits – she is surrounded by books and papers and the mirror shows her bookcase, which is clearly used (as well as reflecting a beautiful rendering of her hair and the bow of her ribbon). The roses at her feet reminds us that she was the Queen of Love too.

Francois Boucher, *Marquise de Pompadour*, 1756 (Munich)

Delightful though she is, the painting shows how important open, airy scenes are to Boucher's art. The interior scene seems to hem in the Marquise, whereas Venus and Diana are free and at their ease. Rococo painters, in Italy and France, abandoned the portraits and history paintings in elaborate interiors or city scenes which were the stock of the Academies and headed outdoors. We naturally feel much happier outside in space and air surrounded by trees and birds, rather than being couped up indoors. That goes against Reason – we are surely safer indoors (and certainly would have been in the 18th century) – but Rococo artists had the imagination to combine nature with artifice to produce idylls of pleasure.

After her role as royal mistress came to an end, the Marquise continued to be a close friend, confidante and advisor to Louis XV. Not all of her decisions about his ministers and generals were helpful, but she remained consistent in her views. She was faithful too in her patronage of Boucher. *The Rising of the Sun* and *The Setting of the Sun* were commissioned by the Marquise for the small Chateau de Bellevue built for her in 1750. She appears as the nymph Tethys. In *Rising* she is next to Apollo in the centre but is not overly prominent among the female courtiers seeing him off to mount his chariot drawn by white horses.

Francois Boucher, *The Rising of the Sun*, 1753

Rising of the Sun is curiously bereft of emotion, not really showing the anxiety and regret over the imminent parting. However, the companion piece captures the loving delight of reconciliation. Tethys dominates *The Setting of the Sun,* openly welcoming Apollo with tender yearning as he descends from the chariot, his day's work done. Her feelings and desire are clearly replicated by Apollo and everyone else pales into significance against their love.

The patronage of Louis XV and the Marquise de Pompadour made Boucher (and other Rococo painters) wealthy. They did not have to rely on commissions and salary from the Academy. Boucher was earning about 50,000 livres a year (Crow) at a time when a comfortable bourgeois was living well off an annual income of 3,000 – 4,000 livres, and a Sorbonne professor was paid 1,900 a year. Levey believes that the middle years of 18th century French art belong to Boucher.

Francois Boucher, *The Setting of the Sun*, 1753

However, Denis Diderot who regularly reviewed the Salons in the 1760s was a vehement opponent. Diderot was not a stern man. Catherine the Great, who saved him and his library [see Russia art notes: Russia Academy 19th Century chapter] described him as dedicated but boyishly enthusiastic, *"in certain ways … a hundred, in others not yet ten."* Yet, to his art criticism Denis brought a stern morality and, naturally for the author of the *Encyclopedie*, placed a high value on the instructive and elevating. On Boucher, Denis wrote;

> *"What a waste of talent and time! This man is the ruin of our young painting students. As soon as they are able to hold brush and palette, they begin to sweat over garlanded putti, to paint rosy and dimpled behinds, and to indulge in all sorts of extravagances … "*

By the time Denis wrote this, Levey considers Boucher was past his best art; *"he was done by 1760, a spent furnace, but the previous 30 years blazed with talent: the creator of ravishing landscape paintings and genuinely enchanted pastorals as well as tapestry and stage designs, portraits and the finest of those mythological pictures at once famous and yet little studied."* One constant was Boucher's handling of the female nude, certainly the best of the 18th century and probably since the Renaissance. Another constant was his inventive compositions.

An aspect of this invention was identified by Bryson: Boucher ensures that the attractive woman is available to the viewer, by avoiding perspective lines and vanishing points and setting the scene on a very shallow stage. Thus, the woman is close to the viewer and there is no distraction from her. To reduce depth to the minimum Boucher dispenses with the architecture he used in *Rinaldo and Armida*, and instead forms a near back-drop of sky and water (*The Triumph of Venus*) or clouds and putti (*Setting of the Sun*). *Diana* is the epitome. There is hardly any depth at all; the nearby reeds fill up the space through which a distant vista might naturally have appeared, leaving just a small patch of sky, and the huntress is brought close to the picture plane – we can almost reach out and touch her.

Men make very little impression in Boucher's paintings, usually gazing at the beautiful woman. Bryson suggests that in some paintings the man enhances the sexuality by being a surrogate for the viewer: they are in the place we would like to inhabit. The point can be seen in the *Venus and Mars* series. Mars looks admiringly at his lover, whilst she lowers her eyelids in the traditional expression of modesty. Bryson's idea is manifest as Vulcan in the second work – his viewpoint soon to be repeated by Fragonard. Of course, *Surprised by Vulcan* is made more erotic anyway by the pose of Venus: her eyelids lowered again, but this time in an emotion quite different from modesty, and with legs parted. The hooking of her left leg over her man's thigh is familiar to lovers of any age in any century.

Francois Boucher, *Venus and Mars*, c 1754 (Wallace Collection)

Francois Boucher, *Venus and Mars Surprised by Vulcan*, c 1754 (Wallace Collection)

Diderot found the truth he was seeking from other artists, but he admired Boucher's powers, was even allured by the paintings; *"C'est un vice si agreable"* (*It is a pleasant vice*). Boucher had a strong feeling for nature, which he depicted far better than Watteau as his landscapes attest. He knew that Arcadia is a magical dream, and his paintings beguile with this impossible but charming prospect.

The final five years of Boucher's life were beset with illness and culminated in criticism of his declining powers and monotony of expression; the latter prompted by the death in 1764 of his great patron the Marquise de Pompadour. He died in his Louvre studio. He painted many poetic landscapes throughout his career. They recall his formative scholarship years in Italy, ruins forming the backdrop to country life.

Francois Boucher, *Autumn Pastoral*, 1749

Francois Boucher, *Landscape with Water Mill*, 1740

Jean-Honore Fragonard (1732 – 1806)

In the 1760s, the Academy was under fire on two fronts: for allowing the grand tradition of history painting to decay and failing to nurture promising young artists. Jean-Honore Fragonard was cited as the prime example of the latter. He was born in Grasse, just north of Nice. His parents were quite well off. In 1734 his father invested in a scheme to install fire hydrants in Paris. When that failed the family moved to Paris in 1738 to try to reclaim the money. Aged 13, Jean-Honore was given a job as a clerk in a notary's office, but spent his working days drawing. He was taken to Boucher, who arranged for the youth to learn the rudiments of painting with Chardin, in return for studio chores. In 1752 Boucher encouraged Fragonard to enter the Academy's Grand Prix. Fragonard pointed out that only students at the Academy were allowed, but Boucher dismissed that; *"it doesn't matter, you are my pupil."* Certainly, Boucher had the influence to swing this: at the time he was the favourite artist of the Marquise de Pompadour whose brother, Marigny, had just taken over as Director of the Academy. Fragonard won the competition with his response to the set subject of *Jeroboam Sacrificing to Idols*.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *Jeroboam Sacrificing to the Idols*, 1752

Jeroboam, a king of Israel, had founded a cult of the Golden Calf, hence the beast on the plinth. As he was about to make a sacrifice in the temple at Bethel, a man of God implored the Lord to rent the pagan altar in pieces. We see the stone breaking and dust rising. For a young artist the painting is astonishing, it is an almost perfect academic work. The composition reminds one of Rembrandt's temple scenes with towering architecture. The triangle formed by the two attendants in the foreground, and the *repoussier* girl bring Raphael to mind. One can imagine the excitement this work produced among officials and professors who were keen to find talented young artists.

As winner of the Grand Prix, Fragonard was enrolled at the Royal School for Sponsored for training before taking up his scholarship in Rome. For the next two and a half years, Fragonard had a dual education; academic studies under Carle Van Loo at the Royal School and decorative painting with Boucher. Then came five years in Italy. The next time the Academy and the public of Paris saw a work from Fragonard was on his Salon debut in 1765. His *Coresus and Callirhoe* was a sensation, drawing unanimous praise. The work was bought by Louis XV who had it reproduced as a tapestry at Gobelins, and commissioned Fragonard to produce a companion piece.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *Coresus Sacrificing Himself to Save Callirhoe*, 1765

As plague ravaged the Greek city of Calydon, the oracle told the inhabitants that killing the beautiful Callirhoe or finding someone to die in her stead would end the disease. Quite what the poor girl had done to offend the Gods was unexplained. She was brought to the temple to be sacrificed by the priest Coresus, who had always loved her. At the last moment he plunged the knife into his own heart. There are hints about Fragonard's future in this painting; the priest is curiously feminine, two figures float over the scene on smoke, and Callirhoe might have swooned out of love instead of mortal dread.

Nevertheless, amid the criticisms endured by the Academy, Fragonard must have seemed a godsend. Now a member of the Academy, Fragonard's career seemed set. He simply had to submit a second painting to earn academician status which would allow him to obtain official commissions and pensions. Yet, he never did so. Moreover, for the 1767 Salon he submitted only two minor paintings. The *Mercure de France* (which reported on each Salon) commented; *"the public was expecting a more significant painting from the author of Callirhoe*." The writer Louis Bachaumont in his *Memoires Secrets* asked; *"Why has Monsieur Fragonard, on whom such high hopes were based at the last Salon, suddenly stopped still?*" The answer to this question came in the form of Fragonard's next great work later that year, which must have been a profound disappointment to the Academy and those hoping for a revival of history painting.

In September 1767 a gentleman of the court sent for the painter Gabriel-Francois Doyen; *"I should like to have you paint Madame (pointing to his mistress who was present) on a swing that a bishop would set going. You will place me in such a way that I would be able to see the legs of the lovely girl and even more of her if you wish to enliven your picture …"* The gentleman was once thought to be Baron de Saint-Julien, the Receiver General of the Clergy (essentially Finance Minister to the French Church - hence, presumably, the joke of having a bishop pushing the swing). Doyen was shocked and passed on the commission to Fragonard who produced *"a universal image of joyous, carefree sexuality (Honour & Fleming).*"

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *The Swing*, 1767 (Wallace Collection)

Although Doyen refused the commission, he did plant an idea in the patron's mind, "*Ah Monsieur, it is necessary to add to the essential idea of your picture by making Madame's shoes fly into the air and having some cupids catch them."* In paintings at that time a naked foot and lost shoe often replace the more familiar broken pitcher as a symbol of lost virginity. However, it was Fragonard's genius to create a scene depicting the pleasure of impetuous surrender: the girl in a "*frothy dress of cream and juicy pink, rides with happy thoughtless abandon, her legs parted and skirts open."* The ropes of the swing focus on the salient point. With this work Fragonard abandoned history painting and official commissions for the Academy.

Little is known about Fragonard's scholarship in Italy, but notably (just like Boucher), he became entranced by landscape, and especially large trees. One of Fragonard's works in Italy may have been decisive. *The Stolen Kiss* is probably his first private commission from a French Ambassador in Rome. The group has been playing cards. One of the shepherdesses has lost and must yield to a kiss from the winner. She tries to draw back, but her companion gently holds her wrists, allowing the youth to take his prize. Fragonard enjoyed the success of this first sale, and it may have convinced him that decorative amorous art was where his future lay.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *The Stolen Kiss*, c 1760

Private collectors in Paris appreciated his genius for this type of painting, so turning his back on the opportunities offered by the Academy did Fragonard no harm. Among his clients was Louis XV's last mistress, Madame du Barry who commissioned him in 1771 to produce paintings to decorate a new pavilion in the gardens of her chateau in Louveciennes. The *Progress of Love* follows two lovers through their romance. The order of the paintings (*The Pursuit, The Surprise/The Meeting, The Lover Crowned* and *Love Letters*) is disputed but in all of them nature dominates – trees and flowers everywhere; a legacy of his Italian trip.

In *The Surprise/The Meeting*, both figures look off to the left. Posner believes this is the first painting in the series. The girl is looking for help as her privacy has been invaded. Honour & Fleming think this is the second painting where the soon-to-be lovers have agreed to meet secretly, and both look left in fear of discovery. The amorous event to come is anticipated by an *"ejaculatory force in the composition, echoing the subject matter, with lines shooting upwards and outwards, and the girl in a pure white dress in the centre of it all (Honour & Fleming)*." Posner disputes that consummation is in the offing, because of the way Fragonard has painted the statue: Venus is withholding the arrows of love from Cupid; "not yet" she says. Whatever the order, Madame du Barry did not like them, perhaps she disliked the hints of eroticism – as a former prostitute one imagines she would be sensitive to such things. She returned the paintings to Fragonard and engaged an older conservative artist, Joseph-Marie Vien to paint the theme with classical temples in the background and older figures in antique dress. Fragonard kept the paintings until 1790, when he returned to Grasse for a year and gave them to his cousin.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *The Surprise/The Meeting* from *The Progress of Love*, 1771-3

All these works were highly finished. However, Fragonard was a great experimenter with styles. Indeed, perhaps his most important legacy comes from such works which would inspire the Impressionists (including his great-niece Berthe Morisot), who admired his handling of local colour and expressive brush. The best examples come from Fragonard's *Figures of Fantasy*. These 14 works, all with the same dimensions, are of half-length figures and, despite the title, the majority are portraits. Marie-Madeleine Guimard was the most famous ballerina in France, star of the *Paris Opera*, and equally well-known for her love affairs in which a string of admirers kept her in high luxury. The brushwork rendering her dress is free but produces transparency, yet her face is highly finished, appropriate for a woman loved by all Paris. Fragonard's travelling companion to Italy, Abbe de Saint-Non, is more abbreviated and the face finished in a sketchier style. The influence of Rembrandt and Hals is clear. Although his time with Chardin was short, Fragonard must have noticed the fantastic effects that the master achieved with different styles of brushwork.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Guimard*, 1768-9

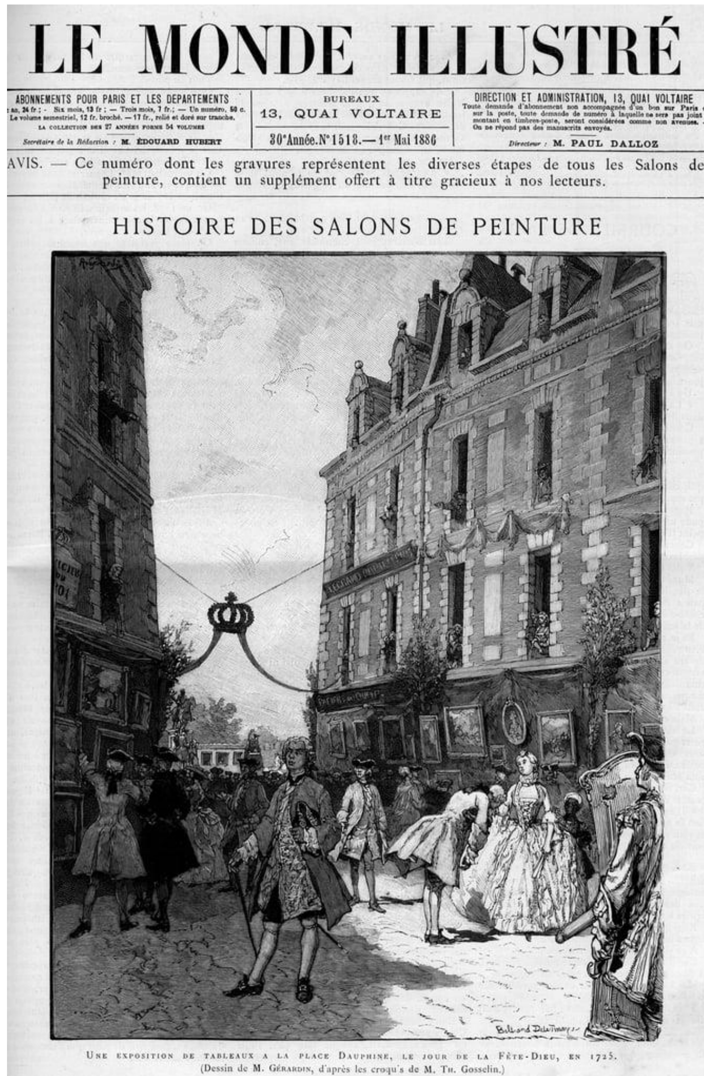
Jean-Honore Fragonard, *Portrait of Abbe de Saint-Non*, 1770

Although listed among the *Figures of Fantasy* by Cuzin, the *Young Girl Reading* is the only one in which the subject is shown in profile. It is easy to imagine how the brushstrokes rendering the material and the mixture of colours in the face (including blue, green and grey) and the hair, would have enthralled the Impressionists.

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *Young Girl Reading*, 1770-72

A compelling reason for Madame du Barry's rejection of *The Progress of Love* was the growing opposition to Rococo. This had begun after the death of the Marquise de Pompadour. The poor Salons of the 1760s increased the demand for the re-instatement of classical history painting. The clamour against Rococo grew deafening. Du Barry could ill-afford to fly in the face of this opinion. She was already being pilloried for commissioning a very large portrait of herself almost nude as Muse for the 1771 Salon; indeed, she was present at the opening day and heard the public derision. Displaying Fragonard's canvasses after that would have been social suicide. Rococo was finished.

France was moving to a much more serious form of art, just as the country was moving to a much more serious period in her history. From 1793 to 1800 Fragonard was busy in Paris. With the backing of David *("Fragonard is both a connoisseur and a great artist and will devote his later years to looking after masterpieces whose number he helped increase in his youth")*, he helped chose works for a special museum of the French School. He also received the most votes in a ballot of artists to serve on a jury to select the best works of the Revolution. Despite this appreciation, he was consistently omitted from 19th century art histories. Both Renoir and Morisot rediscovered him when copying works in the Louvre.



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HISTOIRE DES SALONS DE PEINTURE

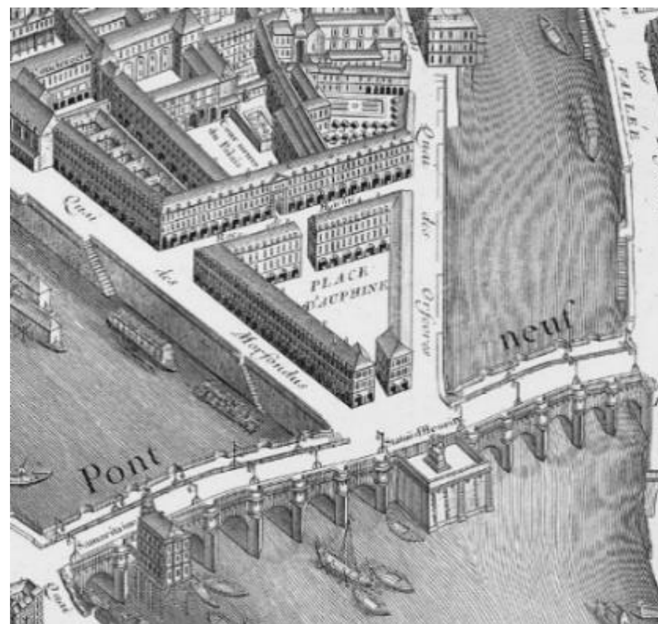
UNE EXPOSITION DE TABLEAUX A LA PLACE DAUPHINE, LE JOUR DE LA FÊTE-DIEU, EN 1725.
(Dessin de M. GÉRARDIN, d'après les croquis de M. TH. Gosselin.)

Exhibition of paintings at Place Dauphine on Corpus Christi Day in 1725

There was a long tradition of young artists exhibiting their work on the walls of Place Dauphine on Corpus Christi Day. The religious procession on that day was very popular with the Parisian public. Its route passed the display of paintings, which remained on view all day.

At the start of the century, this was the only chance for the public to see art. Academy Salons, which were free, were held rarely; the last in 1704. There was a short one in 1725, but regular Salons did not start until 1737. During the early decades of the century, the exhibition in Place Dauphine gave artists an opportunity to gain public acclaim and catch the attention of Academy members. The exhibitions were well attended and reported by the weekly journal *Mercure de France* edited by Antoine de Roque, a friend of Watteau and later great patron of Chardin.

Crow reports that during the 1720s the favourite paintings among Place Dauphine visitors were the hunting scenes of **Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686 – 1755)**: for example, *"half the commentary of the 1725 event in the official Mercure de France was devoted to him, his work captivating a countless number of spectators".*



Michel de Turgot, *Map of Paris* (detail), 1734-9

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *The Dead Wolf*, 1721

Oudry followed in the footsteps of Alexandre-Francois Desportes [see 17th century notes], who had taken the still life of dead game and fruits into the country hunt. Because of his popularity at Place Dauphine, Oudry was appointed in 1728 as the official painter to the Royal Hunt, and most of his output was for Louis XV: hunting scenes, portraits of his dogs and so on. Oudry's appeal continued when Salons started. In 1741 Oudry's still-life works are praised by the educated critic Gresset; *"You could take the Horns of a Stag in your hand. They seem to stand against planks that are so deceiving that one can scarcely keep from believing that the artist did not work directly on these very boards, and though we know that we are in a Salon of painting, we must apply our powers of reasoning to convince ourselves that this is only a work of art."*

The appeal was the apparently magical realism of still life. This was all rather galling to the Academy: exalted history paintings and portraits were ignored in favour of a lowly genre. Truth and realism, however, dominated the attention at the exhibitions in the Place Dauphine, and became an important force in French art. In the 1732 exhibition Oudry was replaced as the crowd favourite by an artist who the *Mercure* concentrated on, mentioning few others.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Bizarre Antlers of a Stag Taken by the King on Last July Fifth*, 1741

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin (1699 – 1779)

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Skate (The Ray)*, 1728

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Buffet*, 1728

On Corpus Christi Day in June 1728, Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin exhibited for the first time, showing about ten paintings. *The Skate* caught the eye. The lurid intestines and the hook seeming to appear as a grin caused a sensation. On the urging of the venerable portrait painter Nicolas de Largillierre, Chardin presented *The Skate* and *The Buffet* to the Academy in September, and was admitted as a painter of animals and fruits (Academy-speak for still life).

Neither of these works proved typical of Chardin. His friend Cochin, secretary to the RA, remarked that *"Monsieur Chardin was small in stature, but strong and muscular … with a great store of good sense and excellent judgement."* Chardin judged that *The Skate*, compared to the clean and high finish of Oudry's works, would stand out at Place Dauphine and draw public attention. While the disorder and simple objects in a plain setting would contrast with Oudry, Chardin decided that for presentation to the Academy, a rather different painting was required. Hence, the more ornate *Buffet*. The game dog and parrot, fruit and silverware suggest a more upper-class residence (the cat is poor compared to the dog, but Chardin had a blind-spot here: unconvincing cats appear in several of his later works). Rosenberg says that Chardin used these two works as *"showpieces for his precocious technical skill … and soon outgrows this kind of exhibitionism."*

These were fine calculations by Chardin. The more polished finish and detail of *The Buffet* led to his first commission. Count Conrad-Alexandre de Rothenbourg, brilliant soldier and now diplomat refurbishing his Paris mansion at great expense, asked Chardin in 1730 to paint three large canvases of musical instruments as over-door panels, and two large paintings on Science and the Arts for the library. The versatile Chardin adopted a polished style for the panels, but the library pictures are more subdued and reflective; closer to his heart. The globe, inspired by one engraved in 1696 by Vincenzo Coronelli, navigation instruments and maps, sculpture and Turkish carpet refer to the Count's travelling. The rendering of smoke from the incense burner would become a Chardin motif, usually as steam.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Attributes of the Sciences*, 1731

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Attributes of the Arts*, 1731

This commission and several smaller ones for still life set Chardin on his way. He had been born in the heart of Paris. His father, a master cabinetmaker, was keen for his son to be an artisan. Chardin studied drawing under Academy tutor Pierre-Jacques Cazes. By 1720 Chardin was working as an assistant to Academician Noel-Nicolas Coypel, son of the director of the Academy and half-brother to the famous Antoine. Coypel taught Chardin to paint from life: Desportes and Oudry made drawings of plants and animals from life and then painted from those sketches in the studio. Evidently, Chardin did well as he was soon painting still life accessories on Coypel's canvasses. He became engaged to Marguerite Saintard in 1723. Marguerite's parents insisted he should establish himself before the marriage could take place.

Having demonstrated his ability to earn a living as an artist, Chardin and Marguerite married in 1731. He painted kitchen still life, perhaps reflecting his settled domestic bliss. The marriage contract and the inventory taken on Marguerite's early death in 1735 show that many of the objects were hers: copper saucepans, copper water urn, green jug and tea pot were used many times.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Fast Day Meal*, 1731 (oil on copper)

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Feast Day Meal*, 1731 (oil on copper)

Chardin rarely painted on copper – the medium didn't really support his technique – but the *Meals* show his skill in composition across the companion pieces and within them, with contrasts and sympathies. Colour is organised well too; the cold tones of *Fast Day* become warmer for *Feast Day*.

Chardin's early still life paintings were much simpler than these, usually only a few objects appear. They represent a revolution in the genre: they are not decorative like Desportes' or Oudry's. Chardin *"undoubtedly succeeded in raising a lowly secondary genre to the level of high art (Bryson)."* This was achieved partly by his painting technique and partly by Chardin's approach. Delacroix later commented on one aspect of the latter,

> *"When we look at the objects around us, we observe a sort of liaison between them, produced by the atmosphere that envelops them and by all kinds of reflections which somehow make each of them partake of a general harmony … Yet how few of the great masters have been concerned with this."*

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Pewter Jug with Tray of Peaches*, c 1728

This appreciation of light creating a unity between objects is evident in *Pewter Jug* (one of Chardin's possessions which he used in *The Buffet*), and recurs in other works. Another aspect of the approach is mentioned by the artist himself: quite early in his career after completing a commission for a painting of a duck, Chardin said,

> *"I must forget everything I have seen so far and even the manner in which such objects have been treated by others … I must place them at a distance where I no longer see the details. I ought to occupy myself above all with imitating the general masses well and with the greatest truth – those shades of colour, the volume, the effects of light and shade."*

The study of masses and the subtlety of tones can be seen in *Copper Water Urn*. The range of colours is restricted. Every bright area is balanced by a dark mass: saucepan and jug; urn surface below the tap and surface of water in bucket. The sharp highlights of the handles of the cistern and the tap emphasise the mass. An element of Chardin's painting technique is mentioned with this work: Cochin said that the artist balanced the colours: *"he went over all the shadows again, whatever colour they were." "When the picture is done,"* Chardin himself said, *"it must be gone over once again with these colours already employed in order to harmonise it."*

Wild Rabbit is a similar work: a narrow range of tones with a few highlights (clasp of powder flask, loop of game bag, hook). Here there is a contrast in surfaces: soft fur, chamois of bag, stone ledge. Chardin took these contrasts further in *Rabbit*. The copper cauldron is solid against the limp body. The drips of blood suggest the animal has just been killed, and we seem to feel the warmth through the softness of the fur against the cold, hard metal. A shadow unifies these two with the acid yellow quince wonderfully highlighted to balance the cauldron. Quince is an important ingredient in a rabbit recipe: in another dead game work, Chardin portrayed a duck next to an orange. Chardin made other contrasts in his still lifes; sweet food against sour, rich wine or coffee against water.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Copper Water Urn*, 1733/4

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Wild Rabbit with Gamebag and Powder Flask*, 1728/29

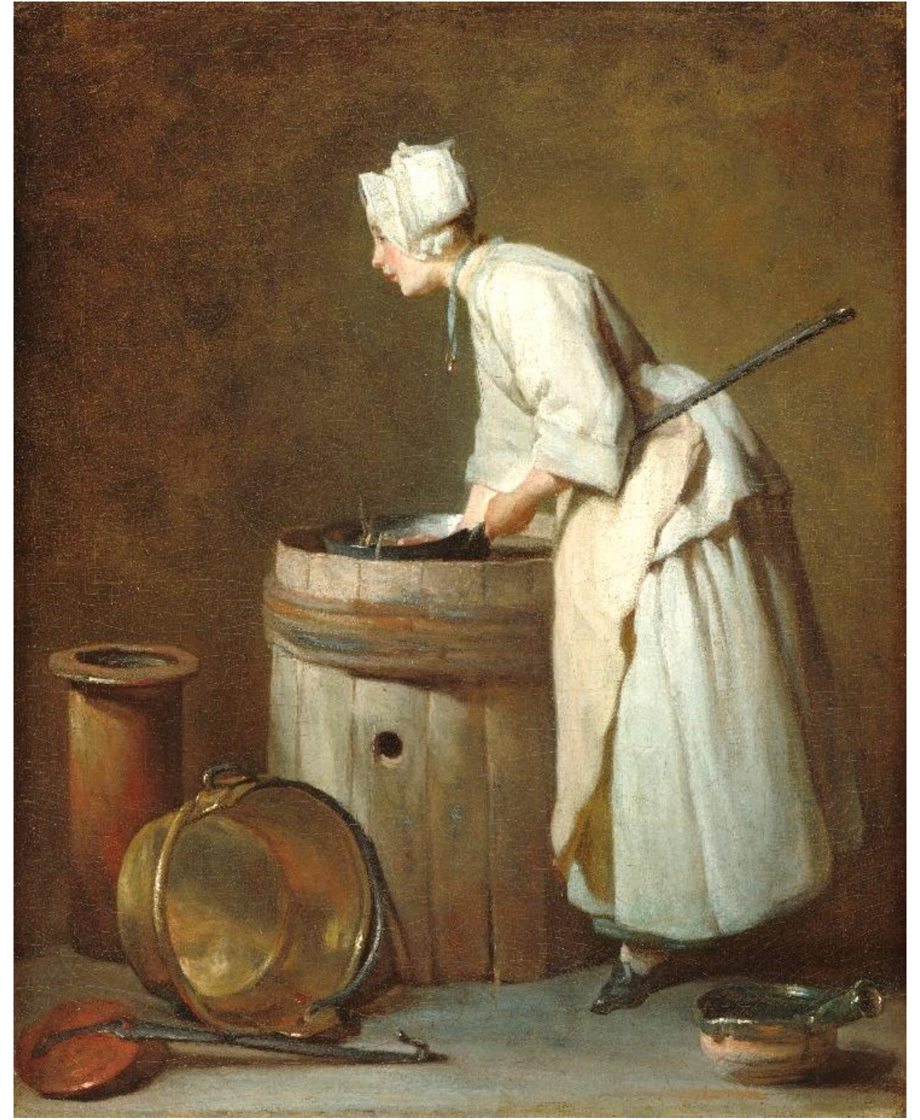
Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Rabbit with Copper Cauldron and Quince*, c 1735

Although Chardin's still lifes had ousted Oudry as the public's favourite, he soon abandoned them. There seem to be two reasons. First, his friend Jacques Aved, a portraitist, astonished Chardin by refusing commissions with fees far greater than Chardin was happy to accept for one of his still life paintings. Aved explained that it was much more difficult to paint a portrait than to paint a sausage. Second, despite the success of works produced for Count de Rothenbourg, Chardin had failed to receive another commission from rich folk decorating their Parisian houses. Dutch genre paintings of middle-class domestic life [See Dutch Golden Age chapter] were all the rage. The Marquis d'Argens, devotee of the grand style, lamented, *"today, to the enduring shame of the arts, one sees so-called lovers of painting forming large collections of little Dutch pictures which they buy at exorbitant prices."* At first Chardin produced half-length or three-quarter-length figures. His first attempt, *Lady Sealing a Letter* (which seems to aim at replicating Vermeer) had quite an awkward figure. *Lady Taking Tea* was more successful. Once again his wife's belongings are used, and she also serves as the model.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Lady Taking Tea*, 1735 (1739 Salon)

Chardin attracted only one wealthy patron, the very rich banker and jeweller Charles Godefroy, who commissioned portraits of his sons Charles-Theodose (entitled *Boy with Violin*) and Auguste-Gabriel (*Boy with Spinning Top*). The lack of portrait commissions, prompted Chardin to try genre scenes with complete interiors. Chardin often portrayed only one figure through whom he creates stillness. Both *The Scullery Maid* and *The Cellar Boy* (painted as a pair) have stopped their work, distracted by a sudden thought. We've all experienced an entrancing idea springing to mind during routine drudgery. In that moment of contemplation and break from their labours, they are frozen and timeless. There are subtle colour highlights here again: the touch of rouge on the lips, and the ribbon and pendant round the maid's neck, which is repeated in the blue ribbon and key dangling from the *Boy*'s waist. Chardin painted only a few of these 'servant' scenes in 1738 and 1739: *Woman Cleaning Turnips* and *Return from Market* being the other notable ones. He soon climbed a storey to depict the education of children by their mothers, occasionally by a governess. He was to have far more commercial success with those.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Cellar Boy*, 1738



Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Scullery Maid*, 1738

Royal tutor Francois Fenelon's *Treatise on the Education of Girls (1687)* and John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693)*, translated into French in 1695, had great influence in France. Mothers were considered crucial to children's education. Chardin depicted the education of boys by women in *The Young Schoolmistress (1737)* and *The Governess (1739)*, but his greatest successes were scenes of mothers teaching girls.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Diligent Mother*, 1740

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Saying Grace*, 1740

The Diligent Mother and *Saying Grace* (another pair) were acclaimed at the 1740 Salon. The mother might be hard-working, but she is also a woman, as Chardin reminds us with stylish shoes and blue stockings. A few months after the Salon Chardin gave the two paintings to Louis XV, prompting a rush of commissions from foreign rulers. In the 1750s Chardin was at the height of his fame. The king awarded him the first of several pensions. Now, Chardin returned to still life works and they reflected his status, richer objects in more elaborate compositions.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *The Kitchen Table*, 1756

Some of Chardin’s late still lifes were simpler. In a rare flower piece, the whites of the carnations and tuberoses and the blue sweet peas mirror the vase.

The slight depth formed by the shadow cast by the vase is lost as the eye travels upwards. A similar homogenous surface is apparent in *Lady Taking Tea* – the depth created by the drawer and the chair-back is soon lost. In contrast to this flat picture plane, Chardin's paint in these two pictures is anything but smooth, a characteristic not obvious from photographic reproductions. Like Rembrandt's, Chardin's works should be seen in the flesh: *"through the dribbles, the impasto, the stippling, the layering of successive strokes, the picture plane is broken and begins to develop a contour (Bryson)."*

Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo in 1885 wrote; *"But Chardin! I have often wished to know something about Chardin the man … I am more and more convinced that true painters do not 'finish' their pictures … pictures are made up of strokes of colour placed closely together. They do not make their effect until you stand a certain distance away from them."*

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Vase of Flowers*, 1761

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Glass of Water and a Coffee Pot*, c 1760

Glass of Water and a Coffee Pot repeats the flat surface of *Vase of Flowers* and returns to Chardin's preoccupation of how light and shadow relate nearby objects. The glass and the pot each have a chip on their lips, which are mirrored by a dent in the ledge: they are used and familiar. Diderot observed; *"You halt in front of a Chardin instinctively, just as the weary traveller will sit down, almost without noticing it, in a spot that offers him greenery, silence, shade, and water."*

Chardin was also in demand for highly-finished decorative works and gained a series of commissions for "Attributes" paintings. In 1766 Catherine the Great, huge fan of Chardin (she owned four of his paintings, including a later version of *Saying Grace*) commissioned the *Attributes of the Arts* for the Academy at Saint Petersburg. She was so delighted, she installed it in her private apartment instead.

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards*, 1766

Chardin made this a homage to sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle [see later], who was a good friend and owned several of Chardin's works. Pigalle's *Mercury* holds pride of place, representing the dominance of sculpture over art and architecture. Pigalle was awarded the Order of St Michel – the cross on the ribbon on the left – in 1765. Chardin painted another version of this for the Saint Petersburg Academy. Another set of three Attributes paintings were commissioned as over-door decorations for two rooms at Louis XV's Chateau de Choisy. That was quickly followed by another royal commission in 1766: *Attributes of Military* and *Civilian Music* for the royal chateau at Bellevue.

Despite these successes Chardin had much to endure in the late 1760s. In 1767 his son, Jean-Pierre who had trained as painter at Academy and had won the Grand Prix for painting, committed suicide in Venice by drowning himself in a canal. His friend Marigny was replaced by Comte d'Angiviller at the Academy and his great friend Cochin was forced to retire. Chardin resigned from his Academy posts. He was also beginning to suffer from an eye affliction, caused by lead poisoning. The latter caused him to turn to pastels, a medium in which he produced fine portraits of himself and his second wife. Marcel Proust describes one of them in *Portraits of Painters*:

"Go to the gallery of pastels and see Chardin's self-portrait, which he made when he was seventy. The huge spectacles are perched on the end of his nose, pinching it between their two brand-new disks of glass, and above them the dim pupils of his failing eyes look upwards with an air of having seen much, twinkled much, and loved much. They seem to be saying half-boastfully, half-wistfully: 'Yes, indeed, I'm an old man now.' Though softened and subdued by age they have not lost their glow, but the tired eyelids – like clasps worn down with use – are red-rimmed.

Like the old coat he has thrown round his body, his skin has become stiff and faded. The pink tints of the flesh, like those of the material, are still undimmed, indeed almost heightened, and here and there the skin has taken on a golden, pearly sheen … the slightest fold in the skin, the slightest moulding of a vein is an exact and meticulous rendering of three corresponding features of the original: character, life and feeling."

Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin, *Self-Portrait*, 1771 (pastel)

Two strands now from Chardin; first, pastels

Portraits and Pastels

The most significant innovation in portraits came in pastels, sparked by the arrival in Paris in 1720 of ***Rosalba Carriera (1673 – 1757)***. She stunned society with her pastel portrait of the Dauphin. Rosalba's work is an exhibition of pastel technique. The different materials all look natural; the soft and smoothness of skin and fur, the silkiness of hair, the fine mesh feel of the lace, and the rougher taffeta. Rosalba was in Paris only for a year or so but *"the powdery, delicate effect of pastels enchanted aristocratic clients, yielding a fashionable art which repeated the same pose, same smile, same absence of background (Chastel)."*

Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Louis XV as Dauphin*, 1720-21 (pastel on parchment)

Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702 – 1789)

Liotard's father was a French Protestant who fled the country after Louis XIV's shameless Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He was trained in enamels and miniatures and arrived in Paris in 1723 to study oil painting. However, he was converted to pastels by the effect of Rosalba's visit. Liotard spent his career travelling between capitals fulfilling portrait commissions, sometimes in oils but more often and with great distinction in pastels. His skill in adapting his style to his sitter is clear in the portraits of Marshall de Saxe and Maria Frederike.

The three decades of peace which allowed France to recover from the ruined finances left by Louis XIV ended with the War of the Austrian Succession which established Maria Theresa's succession to the Hapsburg throne. France had objected to this (perhaps presciently as Maria's daughter would later cause much trouble for the French monarchy as Marie-Antoinette). Marshall de Saxe led French forces to a much-needed victory in the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745 against the British, Dutch and Austrian allies. Liotard depicts the marshal as clear-sighted victor: from the portrait it is unimaginable that de Saxe could be defeated. We shall return to him soon.

Jean-Etienne Liotard*, Marshall Maurice de Saxe*, 1748 (pastel on parchment)

Liotard's portrait of Maria Frederike, the young daughter of a Dutch aristocratic family, is very different from the crisp and hard manner of Marshall de Saxe. He repeats Rosalba's tour de force of materials - the blue ribbon and stiffer lace collar against the soft fur, the starched headcloth over the satin hair, skin and hair. Beyond these marvels, he conveys the delicacy and vulnerability of childhood.

Jean-Etienne Liotard, *Maria Frederike van Reede-Athlone at Seven Years of Age*, 1755-6 (pastel on vellum)

Liotard travelled to Rome, Vienna and London in the mid-1730s and then stayed for a long time in Constantinople, where he produced works which were of great interest to the rest of Europe – genre pieces of the life of Ottoman princesses. Liotard seems to have captured the sultry atmosphere of ennui with, as Levey describes it, *"shadowless and exquisitely uncluttered effects."* His richly dressed Turkish woman against a creamy cool wall would inspire Ingres [see 19th century France].

Jean-Etienne Liotard, *Woman in Turkish Dress Seated on a Sofa* (1752, Met) (pastel over red chalk on parchment)

Delicious as these works are, they are surpassed by the virtuosity of Liotard's *Chocolate Girl* in which pastels *"simulate a gamut of textures and dazzling effects – most brilliantly the glass of water (Levey)."* The painting is also a realistic portrait too, evidently a real servant. There is a feel of Vermeer, but the details of the chocolate cup and saucer, the decoration of the tray's edge magnified by the water, the shadows on tray, the pristine details of head-dress and clothes (the crumpled ironing lines on the apron are brilliant) and shoe recall a different artist, as Francesco Algarotti who bought the work from Liotard in Venice in February 1745, remarked in a letter to a friend in 1751:

“I have bought a pastel picture about three feet high by the celebrated Liotard. It shows a young German chambermaid in profile, carrying a tray with a glass of water and a cup of chocolate. The picture is almost devoid of shadows, with a pale background, the light being furnished by two windows reflected in the glass. It is painted in half-tones with imperceptible graduations of light and with a perfect modelling...and although it is a European picture it could appeal to the Chinese who, as you know, are sworn enemies of shadows. With regard to the perfection of the work, it is a Holbein in pastel.”

Jean-Etienne Liotard, *The Chocolate Girl*, 1743-4 (pastel on parchment)

Sculpture

The second strand from Chardin comes from his inclusion of Pigalle's *Mercury* in *Attributes of the Arts and their Rewards*. Painters received these rewards far more often than sculptors. Pigalle was the first sculptor to receive the Order of Michel. There was a feeling that sculpture was a mechanical art, a view dating back to Leonardo. While painters might make a living outside the Academy, artistic life was much less secure for sculptors. Royal patronage was vital for securing commissions.

Guillaume Coustou the Elder (1677 – 1746) was from a famous family of sculptors. His uncle was Antoine Coysevox from whom Louis XIV commissioned many pieces for the gardens at Versailles and the Chateau de Marly (built from 1701-1709 so the king could escape the aristocratic crowd). Guillaume helped his uncle on Coysevox' most famous work; the winged horses bearing Mercury and Fame.

Antoine Coysevox (with assistance from Guillaume Coustou the Elder, *Mercury and Fame*, 1702

Guillaume became a member of the Academy in 1704, and was appointed Director in 1735. He was held in high regard. Regent Phillip gave him commissions and in 1739 Louis XV asked Guillaume to replace his uncle's horses at Chateau de Marly. Guillaume's *Marly Horses* are one of finest achievements of century (Levey). They are entirely natural, savage beasts fighting their equally natural handlers who struggle to prevent their escape. The horses rear more convincingly than the originals. Rough rocks replace the trophies and attributes which appear in Coysevox' horses. Guillaume designed the beasts on low plinths and placed them among the woods and ponds at Marly, which emphasised further their naturalness, and allowed the spectator to get close and be awed. Unfortunately, they can now be seen in a courtyard at the Louvre surrounded by bricks rather than nature. At least that's better than when they were moved to Place de la Concorde in 1794 and placed on high columns.

Guillaume Coustou the Elder, *Marly Horses*, 1743

Sculptures for royal palaces were commissioned only from Academy members. As well as garden pieces, portrait busts for the interior were popular. ***Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne (1704 – 1778)*** admitted to the Academy in 1738 did both. His statues for the gardens of Versailles include Vertumnus who wore a disguise of an old women to gain entry first to Pomona's garden and then (as hinted by the naughty cupid) to her virtue.

Lemoyne's fame rests on his royal busts. He was Louis XV's favourite sculptor *"and the king's taste is as much to his credit as George III's preference for Gainsborough (Levey)."* Lemoyne worked with his father on the equestrian statute of Louis XV at Bordeaux (1743) and on his own for a monument to Louis at Rennes (1754).

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, *Vertumnus and Pomona*, 1760

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, *Louis XV*, 1757

The king was so impressed by these pieces that he commissioned Lemoyne to sculpt portrait busts periodically for the rest of his life. Academy records list six, all rendered with the same pose and costume, but reflecting the passage of time.

In this bust, Lemoyne shows the king beginning to go to seed: the paunchiness in the cheeks, the hint of jowls forming, the slightly saggy eyelids and wrinkles starting to mark the neck. Yet, Louis' warmth and good humour shine – after all, Lemoyne could not record solely the degradation of life and expect future commissions. This bust was treasured by the Marquise de Pompadour.

Lemoyne's work for the king brought him lots of private commissions for bust from courtiers, magistrates, scholars and actors, all from French society (except for a bust of David Garrick, now lost). Lemoyne's empathy with his sitters charmed. His male busts are considered superior than his females.

Royal patronage helped artists get private commissions. However, whereas painters might thrive solely on them, sculptors outside the Academy who produced a portrait head or bust for anyone who could afford to pay were deemed of lowly status. This changed in the middle of the century when statuettes for the boudoir became popular. This trend was started by the Marquise de Pompadour when she founded the royal porcelain factory in 1753 at Sevres. Demand blossomed in 1759 when, faced with (yet another) financial crisis, Louis XV ordered all dinner services of gold and silver plate to be melted down. Marquise de Pompadour had long favoured porcelain – placing the Vincennes factory under her protection in 1738.

The biscuit of Sevres was particularly well suited to statuettes, and little figures, preferably of partially-undressed young females, replaced the demand for garden pieces: new Parisian mansions had only small outdoor plots.

Such small-scale cabinet pieces had been made long before. ***Robert Le Lorrain (1666 – 1743)*** produced *Galatea* as his presentation piece for the Academy. She was a little taller, at 30 inches, than would become popular, but that height was enforced because Lorrain intended her to be the pendant to Corneille van Cleve's reception piece Polyphemus (1681), which repeats the pose in Annibale Carracci's fresco in the Farnese Gallery. *Galatea*, elegant and delicate, was the first of the feminine nudes sought from Lorrain.

Robert le Lorrain, *Galatea*, 1701 (30 inches tall)

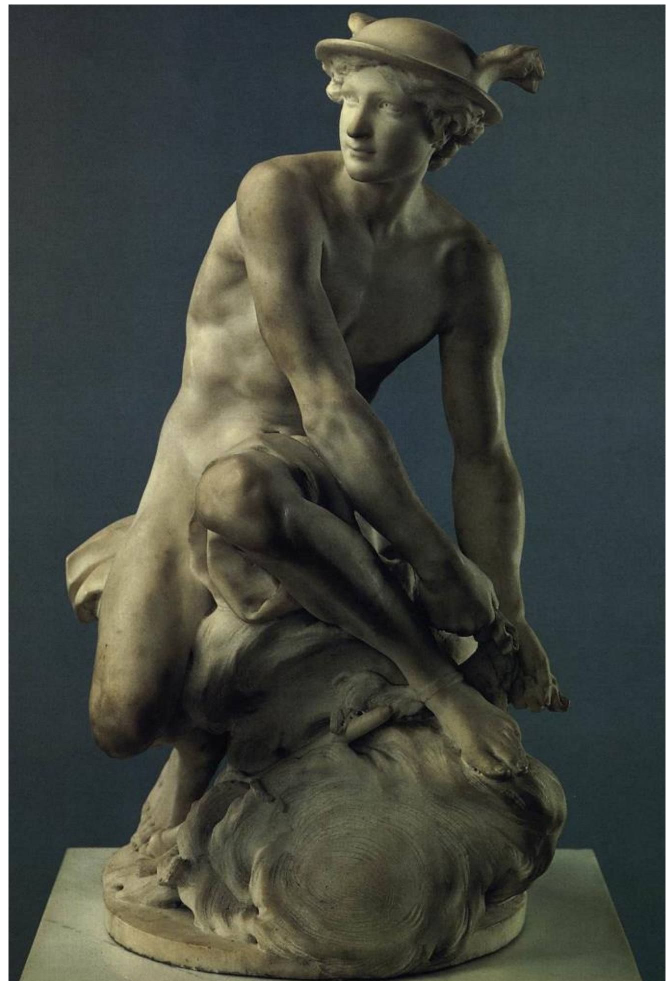
Lorrain actually managed to carve out a career from private patrons. He refused the directorship of French Academy in Rome and didn't solicit commissions from the Academy in Paris (although got some for Versailles and Marly). Lorrain concentrated on small figures, exhibiting groups in terracotta at the Salons of 1725 and 1737. Cardinal de Rohan was an important patron; Lorrain worked for him from 1717-1723 and again in 1735-8. It was for him Lorrain produced *Horses of the Sun*, an exciting surface varying from the low relief of clouds and horses' necks and hooves to the higher relief of heads, especially that of the horse drinking from the beautiful fluted shell held by the fully-modelled attendant. *"They are real horses, restless as the clouds and fiery like the last rays of the sun from the upper corner (Levey)."*

Robert le Lorrain, *Horses of the Sun*, 1736 (Hotel de Rohan, Paris)

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714 – 1785)

Pigalle worked in all three of these categories. The preparatory model made in terracotta in 1742 of Mercury was exhibited at the 1743 Salon and was the most successful sculpture in Salon history. Two years after, the marble version (right) was finished. Mercury is the *"perfect allegory of speed and coiled power, with the potential to take off (Levey)."* In the model, the brim of the hat was rough and uneven and the hair was dishevelled, giving the impression that Mercury had jammed the hat on his head in a great hurry to take flight. That dynamism is lost in the marble version.

Nonetheless on seeing this work in 1744, Louis XV immediately commanded Pigalle to produce large-scale versions in marble. Pigalle had also produced *Venus* as a pendant to *Mercury*. In 1750 Louis presented Frederick the Great with large versions of both (*Mercury* and *Venus* were each 74 inches tall) for Sanssouci, his new summer palace which, like Chateau de Marly, provided an escape from the aristocratic horde. That year, the Vincennes factory started the production of biscuit versions of Mercury and Venus.



Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Mercury Tying his Sandal*, 1744 (23 inches tall)

Vincennes-Sevres after Pigalle, *Venus and Mercury*, 1751

After the Salon, Pigalle was inundated with royal commissions and produced busts of Louis XV and the Marquise de Pompadour, and a life-size statue of the king. However, Pigalle's monuments are regarded as the best pieces of the century. In them he continued the drama and grand style of Bernini's papal tombs [17th century Italy]. In 1752 he was commissioned by Louis XV to produce a tomb for Marshall Saxe. Pigalle worked on this for over twenty years. Before it was unveiled in 1777, Pigalle finished the Monument to the Comte Henri-Claude D'Harcourt in Notre Dame. The details of the design were defined in the contract Pigalle signed in 1771 with Henri-Claude's widow, Countess of Chiverny. The countess approaches the tomb and an angel, holding the torch of marriage, lifts the lid of the tomb. Henri-Claude, warmed by the torch, sees his wife and, sharing her yearning for re-union, attempts to climb out of the coffin. Death intervenes, showing the emptied hour-glass. The angel admits defeat as the torch is extinguished.

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Monument to Lieutenant General Comte Henri-Claude d'Harcourt*, 1776

Pigalle aimed at naturalness – sometimes being ruthlessly honest (as we shall see shortly) – and is unafraid to show the emaciation of death and contrasts it with the youth of the Count's wife and perfection of the angel. This must be unique. Usually in tombs the subject to be commemorated is portrayed in the full flush of health or power. Pigalle insisted in 1774 that the stained-glass window next to the monument should be destroyed and replaced with plain glass, all the better to see the ruined flesh stretched over thin bones.

Pigalle takes a very different approach for the monument of Marshall Maurice de Saxe, brilliant soldier of France, who died prematurely in November 1750. Death with his hour-glass appears again, beckoning Saxe to the tomb, by which Hercules stands weeping. Saxe, looking as invincible as he does in the pastel portrait, imperturbably accepts his inevitable defeat in the final battle, but the crying figure of France tries to prevent his demise. This female figure is appropriate for, while Saxe's death was lamented deeply by the army, his reputation as a lover apparently exceeded his brilliance as a soldier. Society ladies in Paris and elsewhere in his travels must have mirrored France's pose. Marshall Saxe was a Protestant. So, although a funeral ceremony was held in Paris, he could not be buried there. His remains were interred under Pigalle's monument on 20 November 1777.

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Monument to Marshall de Saxe* (detail), 1777 (St Thomas' Church, Strasbourg)

In March 1770, a subscription was started in Paris to pay for a statue of Voltaire by Pigalle to be erected at a public site. In August 1772 the full-sized model was finished and exhibited and proved something of an embarrassment. Literary critic and one of Voltaire's bitterest enemies, Elie Catherine Freron, relished the opportunity to mock, declaring the statue hideous: *"it is not really important that posterity can count M de Voltaire's ribs and know that he had very saggy nipples (October 1773) … it is hard to know where to put this statue because it will always be repugnant … due to the hideous sight of an emaciated corpse, rather than a living being (April 1772)."*

Freron and Voltaire had hurled vicious insults at each other for decades. Freron proved correct: Pigalle finished the marble version in 1776 but it was never shown publicly. Voltaire was given the work and on his death in 1778, his great-nephew inherited it.

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, *Voltaire*, 1776
(Louvre) (58 inches tall)

Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Voltaire*, 1781

Voltaire was one of the famous Frenchman chosen for the *Grands Hommes* project by Comte D'Angiviller soon after the Comte was made Director of the Academy in 1774. Poor old Voltaire! If only someone had depicted him in middle age. As if Pigalle was not enough, Time's ravages were recorded again by Houdon.

Etienne-Maurice Falconet (1716 – 1791)

Etienne-Maurice Falconet came from a poor background in Paris. His early years were spent trying to gain an education and eventually he got an apprenticeship to a carpenter. He spent his spare time looking at sculptures in the city and making clay figures. Somehow these came to the notice of Lemoyne, who took him on as a pupil and drew a fetching portrait of the young man. Falconet discovered Puget's *Milos of Cortona* in the gardens at Versailles, somewhat eroded as it had been there since 1683, and was inspired to produce his own version which was shown at the Salon of 1745. The Academy thought this was too close to the original and refused to admit Falconet. The disappointment was alleviated by a commission from the Marquise de Pompadour for the *Allegory of Music* for her chateau at Bellevue – Falconet's statue is elegant.

Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, *Falconet*, 1741 (Black, red and white chalk)

Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *Allegory of Music*, 1752

Soon after this Falconet submitted another version of *Milos* very different to, and much more balanced than, Puget's (which has Milos standing). Milos of Cortona was a brilliant wrestler, winning event after event in the most important athletic contests in ancient Greece. While he was attempting to tear a tree apart, his hand got trapped in the trunk. A pack of wolves (which in later versions of the legend became a lion) tore him apart. Falconet's *Milos* was exhibited at the 1754 Salon and the Academy made him a member. He caught the public imagination more with the sculptures shown at the 1757 Salon, the *Bather* (only a poor copy) and *Cupid.*

Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *Milos of Cortona*, 1754

Cupid was a commission from La Pompadour and is one of the most famous pieces of 18th century sculpture (Levey). He is drawing an arrow from his quiver while raising his finger to his lips asking for discretion and secrecy. Cupid is charming but at the same time threatening. There are two marble versions of *Cupid* (many copies were later cast in bronze). The one shown is in the Louvre. A larger one (73 inches tall) is in the Rijksmuseum, again described as being commissioned by the Marquise de Pompadour. At some point this version sat on top of a column in Amsterdam. The inscription on the base of the Rijksmuseum *Cupid* is Voltaire's description of love, *"whoever you are, here is your master*." Falconet's image was endlessly reproduced on pieces of porcelain, enamelled boxes and also appears in Fragonard's *The Swing*.

After the 1757 Salon Falconet was busy providing rich bourgeois clients with small models of female figures. As these were eminently suitable for Sevres biscuit, Falconet, with the Marquise de Pompadour's blessing, took over from Boucher as director of the factory.

Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *Seated Cupid*, 1757 (36 inches tall)

Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, 1761 (23 inches tall)

Etienne-Maurice Falconet, *The Oracle*, 1766 (Sevres biscuit, 5.5 inches tall)

Falconet's fame rested on sculpting elegant and charming female figures, so it was a surprise when in 1766 he left his post at Sevres to travel to Russia to accept the commission from Catherine the Great for a bronze statue of Peter the Great. He took his daughter-in-law and pupil Marie-Anne Collot with him to execute the head of Peter. Previously they had both sculpted busts of Diderot and when Falconet saw Marie-Anne's superior rendering he smashed his own. Catherine was worried by the allegorical snake, but its weight was needed to balance the statue.   After leaving Russia in 1778, Falconet was unable to sculpt because of increasing blindness and a paralytic stroke in 1783.

Etienne-Maurice Falconet and Marie-Anne Collot, *The Bronze Horseman*, 1768 – 1778 (unveiled 1782)

Clodion (Claude Michel) (1738 – 1814)

The royal indifference to art under Louis XVI forced artists to seek private patrons. Clodion received full academic training and won all the advantages, but he never bothered to become a full member of the Academy. He was not anxious to execute royal portrait busts, monuments or garden statues. He could handle marble but his name is linked to terracotta. Levey compares *"the chilled white figures of Falconet - an arctic climate of frozen gesture"* to *"the warm-coloured, sun-baked dancing fauns and delirious nymphs whom Clodion sets in recklessly erotic motion."*

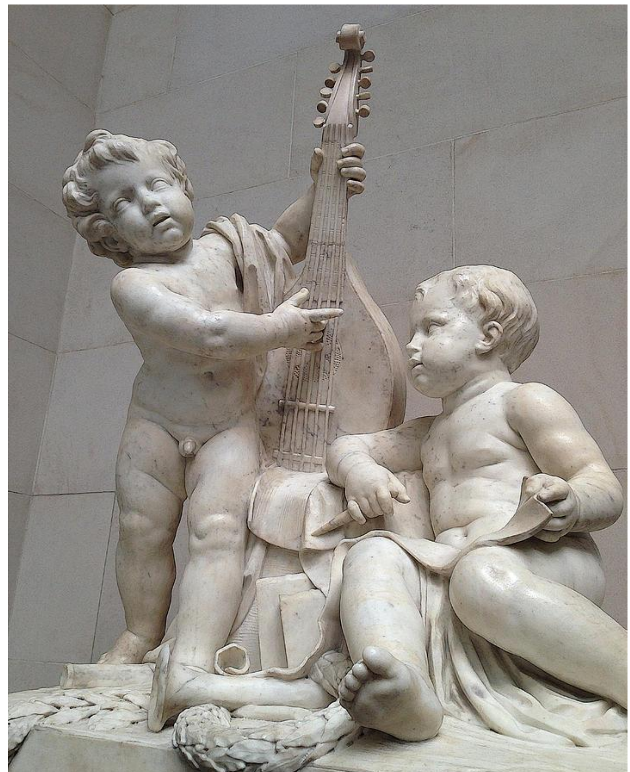
Clodion was born in Nancy, the tenth child to a father who was a humble trader, but whose mother was the sister of the Adam brothers, three renowned French sculptors, two of whom won the Grand Prix. Clodion trained in the Parisian studio of the most talented of his uncles, Lambert-Sigisbert, from 1755. When his uncle died in 1759, Clodion worked in Pigalle's studio. But that same year, Clodion won the Grand Prix for sculpture.   In Italy, Clodion was drawn (like Poussin) to the countryside around the city. While he was there a group of eight antique terracotta figures were discovered near Porta Latina in 1767. Thus, Clodion's art: in the Campagna all that is necessary is music, grapes and a companion to love. Clodion's single figures are charming but it is "*in his small terracotta groups that his energy and delicacy and variety are best displayed, sometimes chasing each other, sometimes embracing, often accompanied – if not positively urged on – by a mischievous child.*" The male sets off the slim, naked nymph not at all put off by her rustic lover. Sometimes Clodion's figures whirl, hair flying, some have a gentle movement.

Clodion, *Satyr carrying a Bacchante playing a Tambourine*, 1798 (23 inches tall)

Clodion, *Bacchus and a Nymph*, 1790s (19 inches tall)

Clodion established himself in Rome, attracting a large circle of international clients. Catherine the Great pestered him to set up a studio in St Petersburg, but he returned to Paris in 1771, already famous and set up a factory to duplicate his work in porcelain and bronze, while he continued with private patrons. Clodion exhibited at Salon in 1773 but never with his terracotta groups. He received a couple of public commissions for marble pieces. The head of the Academy started a project for sculptural groups representing the arts and sciences. Clodion was given the job of *Poetry and Music; Geometry & Architecture, Astronomy & Geography, Painting & Sculpture* went to other artists.

Clodion died on 28 Mar 1814. An inventory of the pieces in his studio reflects his art: pictures by Boucher, drawings by Fragonard and plaster models of Pigalle's *Venus* and *Mercury*. He saw no shame in man's animal passions, and delighted his patrons with his imagination in terracotta.



Clodion, *Poetry and Music*, 1774/1778 (46 inches tall)

Inside the Academy: History Painting

A couple of Salons had been held around the turn of the century, but artists distrusted public taste. The Academy came to share their view after mounting a history painting competition between twelve top artists in 1727. The aim was partly to revive the genre, which was being forgotten amid the fashion for Rococo, but also to establish the new premier painter. The works were displayed to public view in the Louvre for two months. The Academy believed Francois Lemoyne (no relation to the sculptor) should be First Painter and expected him to gain public acclaim. When the public preferred Jean-Francois de Troy (of the *Reading Moliere* above), the embarrassed Academy announced there would be two prizes, only to found out that the public thought the entries of Pierre-Jacques Cazes and Noel-Nicholas Coypel (Chardin's teachers) were better than Lemoyne's. Clearly, the Great Unwashed were philistines.

When finance minister Philibert Orry was appointed head of the arts he decided that Salons should be held annually from 1737 as a public audit on the performance of the Academy and its members. Unsurprisingly, Orry's move sparked wide dissent. Leading Academicians refused to exhibit and senior member Charles Coypel produced a painting showing an art critic at the Salon with a blind man's cane and dog. Artists working outside the Academy were indifferent. Boucher, whose aristocratic and royal clients kept him busy and rich, produced *Painting mocked by Envy, Stupidity and Drunkenness* in 1747, engraved (below) as the illustration of the frontispiece to a pamphlet damning the purpose of the Salon.

Fear of public opinion by artists was well-founded. In the *Comedie-Francaise* the fate of plays depended on the audience of the *parterre*, the open space in front of the stage to which admission was cheap. The *parterre* cheered good lines, hooted unpopular ones and forced plays they disliked to stop. Voltaire packed the *parterre* with his fans and Diderot also helped his friends in this way. The *parterre* directly affected attendance and had a long-term effect on patronage. Members of the Academy, who remembered the debacle of 1727, were aware of the power of the mob in the *parterre* and, as Crow puts it, *"shuddered at the idea of its equivalent at the Salon."*

By the 1750s criticism of the Salons was mounting: leading painters ignored them and there were too many portraits, and too few history paintings. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences (1750)* said a painting should draw a moral lesson from an historical deed. Etienne La Font de Saint-Yenne, who had criticised the state of French painting in his *Reflections (1747)*, wrote in 1754 that subjects from Roman history were key to the revival of French history painting, citing human their virtues; *"indifferent to riches, untiring in their labours, sober … contemptuous of sloth and idleness."* These views convinced Marigny that history painting had to be revived. His problem was that the government had no money to commission Academicians to produce history paintings because of the expense of the Seven Years' War. Into the breach was pushed Jean-Baptiste Greuze.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725 – 1805)

Jean-Baptiste Greuze was born in Tournus in eastern France. His father, a roofer and dealer in masonry, wanted Greuze to become an architect but on seeing his son's painting sent him to Lyon to study. Always confident of his talent and "childishly arrogant" Greuze realised his master in Lyon was mediocre and set off for Paris in 1750. His success three years afterwards must have inflated his ego even more. His *Father Reading the Bible* was bought by the financier Ange Laurent Lalive de Jully, who put the painting on display at his house for his friends. As de Jully had just joined Academy as an honorary amateur, his mates included senior Academicians who promptly arranged for the painting to be shown at the 1755 Salon. Although not a history painting, the subject was noble and Greuze's work was acclaimed.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Father Reading the Bible*, 1753

The Academy grasped Greuze as a solution – surely a provincial painter would accept only small fees for works of this nature? - and packed him off to Rome to gain polish. Greuze was privately funded by Marigny to produce *Village Bride* for the 1761 Salon. *Village Bride* was immensely popular; droves of spectators crowded round the painting on every day of the Salon. The responses of the family members are displayed; loss, regret, envy, anger (of the older unmarried sister standing behind the father), concern, longing, desire, fear. This tableau of emotional reactions, most of them slightly exaggerated, was familiar. 1761 was the year that Rousseau's great novel *Le Nouvelle Heloise* was published and took Paris by storm (and would remain the most widely-read literary work in France until the end of the century). The novels of Richardson had by 1760 revolutionised Paris theatre by prompting productions of bourgeois drama. Greuze's characters – Father, Mother, Elder Daughter, Younger Daughter, Son – were familiar already with the public from Rousseau and Richardson and from the stage. Jane Austen's Marianne is from the same cast.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Village Bride*, 1761

The Journal of Paris labelled Greuze "*the painter of the heart*." *Village Bride*, regarded as a serious moral image, prompted Marigny to fund another work for the 1763 Salon; *Filial Piety*. Virtually the same family appears with the same drama (this time the nuances of grief), but there is less variety and the diagonals of the composition (mirroring the dying man) were not as appealing as the arc of his previous tableaux. Greuze may have been cheap for the 1761 Salon but he was worldly enough to raise his price, and got 7,000 livres for *Filial Piety* at a time when the maximum price for a history painting was 6,000 livres.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Filial Piety*, 1763

The end of the war in 1763 meant official patronage was resumed. Senior painters got commissions and Greuze was ignored. His attempt at history painting was rejected by the Academy. That didn't hurt. Income was high from private patrons, sales of engravings and carefully cultivated press publicity. Greuze painted *The Father's Curse (1777)* and *The Punished Son (1777)*, but got greater success with pictures of young girls lamenting the death of a bird or a broken vessel, fondling a pet or flush-faced wearing a flower. Such paintings were supposed to capture the transition between childhood and womanhood. But, his repeated portrayals of young girls having had their first taste of sex seem rather disturbing. The bared breast and prominent nipple appear in other paintings of this type introduce a misplaced licentiousness. The influential *salonniere* Madame Roland remarked that one doubted if the girl in *The Broken Pitcher* looked sufficiently disturbed not to be tempted to repeat her mistake. However, the paintings were popular with European aristocracy.

Greuze's career brought him a considerable fortune, which disappeared through his extravagance and his wife's embezzlement. Greuze might have had a laugh as the history paintings resulting from official commissions and exhibited at the 1765 Salon were lambasted. The style of the works was heavily criticised and Louis XV refused to house them.

Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *The Broken Pitcher*, 1771

Only ***Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714 – 89)*** seemed to be a success. He had been commissioned in 1753 to produce paintings of French ports as Marigny sought serious works. These scenes were appreciated, but Vernet's Claude-like vistas proved much more popular, outshining the history paintings at the Salons in the mid-to-late 1760s. Variants of these sold across Europe, as did versions of his shipwreck-in-storm paintings.

Claude-Joseph Vernet, *A Calm at a Mediterranean Port*, 1770

Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Seaport by Moonlight*, 1771

Comte D'Angiviller's Programme

The 1771 Salon was poor and that of 1773 worse, prompting strong criticism of the Academy for its standards and for pandering to the corrupt and decadent taste of the Paris elite. Comte D'Angiviller was made head of the arts in 1774, and was determined to revive the arts. He commissioned the *Grand Hommes* series of sculptures (above) and in June 1775 stipulated subjects from French history for future Salons, choosing to commission younger Academicians. At the time, D'Angiviller's friend Turgot was made Comptroller-General and his policies sent bread prices rocketing. Looting and rioting followed in Paris, quelled only by troops and public executions. D'Angiviller was shaken by the violence, but noted Turgot's bravery: *"when in 1775 at the time of the bread riots in Paris, in my presence, his door was besieged by the people, he ordered it opened."* There is no doubt that two of the subjects chosen by D'Angiviller for Salon history paintings paid tribute to Turgot: President Mole showing courage when he was physically threatened by a mob during the Fronde and Admiral Coligny, a Huguenot, boldly facing his Catholic League killers.

Joseph-Benoit Suvee, *Admiral Coligny confronting his Assassins,* 1787

Francois-Andre Vincent (1746 – 1816), who won the Prix de Rome in 1768, painted *President Mole* for the 1779 Salon. Vincent first exhibited paintings at the 1777 Salon and the *Mercure*, noting that he was aiming at grand effects said, *"Vincent will go far."* His *President Mole* was audacious. The unarmed Mole is fearless and confident even though he is hemmed in by the threatening men and the narrow streets. The painting is regarded as one of the best products of D'Angiviller's national programme.

Francois-Andre Vincent, *President Mole Manhandled by Insurgents*, 1779

D'Angiviller's youth movement continued at the next Salon in 1781 where Francois-Guillaume Menageot's *Death of Leonardo de Vinci* was the unanimous choice - for the message rather than the style. The legend, begun by Vasari, of Leonardo dying in the arms of Francis I, king of France from 1515 to 1547, is depicted. The message in 1781 - Art is comforted and protected by the French monarchy – was rather undermined by the indifference of Louis XVI and his wife.

Francois-Guillaume Menageot, *Death of Leonardo de Vinci* (detail), 1781

D'Angiviller hoped that scenes from French history would reanimate patriotic sentiment, eroded by the debacle of the Seven Years War which had prompted open hostility between the Paris *parlement* and the crown, ruined French trade and cost France her possessions in India. However, he realised that national history might produce controversial scenes, the public depicted as villains, for example, so he changed his programme for history painting, stipulating themes from antiquity. This suited the young Academy artists just returning from Rome. Two subjects dominated: Belisarius and Socrates.

Francois-Andre Vincent, *Belisarius*, 1779

Vincent seized on them first. This Belisarius is not the ruthless commander of Justinian's armies but the perfect Enlightenment philosopher of Jean-Francois Marmontel's historical novel *Belisaire (1767)*. Belisarius remains loyal to his sovereign despite having been charged falsely with treason, unjustly dispossessed and blinded. Vincent shows the old man, reduced to begging in the street, being recognised by one of his army officers. In the novel, Belisarius denounces official religious intolerance, a parasitical nobility, the reign of luxury and the domination of favouritism over merit. Marmontel's novel was banned on publication. The importance of the subject is that Belisarius' condemnations reflected contemporary French intellectual and middle-class thinking: art is now in step with the growing dissatisfaction with the French administration. From this point, history painting would gel with Revolutionary motives.

The choice of Socrates for history paintings also originated in recent French literature. Socrates was jailed and condemned to death in prison for being an atheist and for corrupting the minds of Athenian youth. Both charges were unjust and Socrates became a symbol of the persecutions suffered by philosophers. That became a common public view in France after the Paris police stopped the play *The Death of Socrates* after the first performance in 1762 and censored the script viciously before allowing it to continue the following year. Almost any scene from Socrates' life would be appreciated as corrupt government forces silencing a virtuous man. Vincent chose to paint Socrates teaching Alcibiades, the prominent Athenian statesman and general. As a young man Alcibiades was vain and dissolute, fond of pleasures, particularly of the flesh. Socrates took him on as a pupil to turn him away from unruly behaviour, and the two became close friends.

Francois-Andre Vincent, *Alcibiades receiving Instruction from Socrates*, 1776

Jean-Francois Pierre Peyron, *The Outcast Belisarius receiving hospitality from a peasant*, 1779 (1781 Salon)

Vincent's choices were picked up by ***Jean-Francois Pierre Peyron (1744 – 1814)***, whose Belisarius scene is again drawn from the novel of Marmotel. Belisarius was regarded as a liberator by peasants because he protected them from the Huns. When he was discovered blind and homeless in the street, *"one mother after another presented her son and placed the child on his knees (Marmontel)."* The style and composition echo Nicolas Poussin. Peyron continues this in *The Funeral of Miltiades.*

Jean-Francois Pierre Peyron, *The Funeral of Miltiades*, 1782 (1783 Salon)

Miltiades had led the Greeks to victory over the Persians at Marathon. During the failed campaign to re-capture Palos from the Persians, he suffered a grievous leg wound. When he returned, politicians accused him of treason and he was thrown in prison and left to die of gangrene in his leg. To bury the body properly, the son Cimon volunteers to take his father's place in prison. Peyon's painting shows the moment when the body of Miltiades is carried from the dungeon while the jailor chains the faithful son to the broken pillar. The story was seen in Paris as a parallel to that of Thomas Arthur, Comte Lally-Tollendal who led the disastrous French expeditionary force to India during the Seven Years' War. Beset by disloyalty from his officers, inadequate supplies and little support from the navy, Lally-Tollendal failed to take Madras, lost to the British at Wandiwash and was forced to surrender the last French holding in India at Pondicherry. He was taken as prisoner-of-war to London. When he arrived back in France, he was made the official scapegoat and after a trial, on charges far beyond his responsibility, was executed in May 1766. His son campaigned for exoneration, and in 1778 extracted from Louis XVI a public exoneration for his father. The unjust treatment of Belisarius in Marmontel was also seen as a mirror of Lally-Tollendal's fate.

Poussin is recalled in the composition and in the careful way arms and legs are placed across the canvas (typical of *The Death of Germanicus*, *The Judgement of Solomon* to name only two). Here the arms of the servants and the jailer, and most notably in the mirroring of the bodies of father and son. D'Angivillers had commissioned this work from Peyron in February 1780 and wrote that the artist, *"was one of those on whom I am counting to elevate our painting."* However, these two works were only of cabinet scale (*Funeral* was 3ft by 5ft, *Belisarius* 2ft by 3ft) rather than the size the Academy demanded of history paintings (*President Mole* was over 10ft in each dimension, *Admiral Coligny* 11ft by 9ft). Peyron also suffered at the 1781 Salon when his crowded *Belisarius* was over-shadowed by Jacques-Louis David's much simpler version (below). To rub salt into Peyron's wound, David's work was the proper size for a history painting (over 10ft by 9.5ft). David's success - his painting was hailed as the second-best work after Menageot's *Death of Leonardo de Vinci* - thrust him into the limelight.

Jacques-Louis David, *Belisarius Begging for Alms,* 1781 (1781 Salon).

David believed the limelight should have been his from the start. Three times he was defeated in the Grand Prix. He was rejected in 1771, ruined the surface of his 1772 entry by re-working wet paint at the eleventh hour and in 1773 his *Death of Seneca* was passed over in favour of Peyron's version. David was *"almost suicidally bitter over his rejection (Crow)."*

Jacques-Louis David (1748 – 1825) – Part I

David came from a fairly prosperous and well-connected family. His father was a metal merchant wealthy enough to purchase a lucrative minor public office, and his mother was related to prominent architects. In 1757, when David was nine, his father was killed in a duel and he was brought up by his uncle, Pierre Desmaisons, fellow of the Royal Academy of Architecture and a royal official. Uncle Pierre decided to groom his charge for law, medicine or architecture and arranged a fine education at the College des Quatre Nations. While there, David attended the free life class at the Academy of St Luke, and found his passion. The family hesitated but an aunt arranged in 1765 for David to show his early work to Boucher, a distant cousin. Boucher saw the promise and advised David to go to Joseph-Marie Vien, then a professor at the Academy; *"a good painter and a good teacher; he is a bit cold, but come to see me from time to time and when you bring me your work I will correct Vien's coldness and teach you my warmth"* (Miette de Villars, *Memoirs of David (1850)*, cited in Brookner). Desmaisons arranged for David to join the Academy as a student in 1769. David lived with the playwright Michel Sedaine, who was Secretary to the Academy of Architecture and had an apartment in the Louvre. David was welcomed into the Sedaine's circle of nobility and wealthy bourgeoisie. All this fuelled David's superiority complex. His fellow students slept on the floors of their master's studios and the teachers at the Academy had a *"fatal scent of the artisan class."* From the start David looked down on the Academy, an attitude which would only harden in the years ahead, culminating in outright attack.

Finally in 1774, David prevailed at the Grand Prix with *Antiochus and Stratonice*, depicting a story from Plutarch's *Lives.* Antiochus falls ill and listless but with no apparent disease. His father, King Seleucus I (in shadow at the bottom of the bed), summons the great physician Erasistratus. Diagnosing the case as lovesickness, Erasistratus (in red) orders the women of the court to present themselves individually while he monitors Antiochus' pulse. When Antiochus' step-mother Stratonice (in white) arrives, his pulse quickens. David fainted dead away on hearing the news of his win and when revived professed to breathe easily for the first time in four years.

Jacques-Louis David, *Antiochus and Stratonice*, 1774

David and Peyron went to the French Academy in Rome together in 1775 – Peyron's departure for his scholarship had been delayed for a year. David knew that the Academy continued to favour Peyron. D'Angiviller was not impressed with David's reactions to defeat and hoped Peyron would over-shadow the hot-head. David realised he could not count on any support from the Academy, a feeling which was deepened when both returned to Paris: Peyron got choice commissions from D'Angiviller; David slim pickings from the provinces. Having gained the limelight with *Belisarius*, David plotted to keep the spotlight permanently from Peyron and his admirers at the Academy with his entry for the 1785 Salon, *The Oath of the Horatii*.

Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of the Horatii*, 1784 & 85 (1785 Salon)

The subject chosen by the Academy for the 1785 Salon was drawn from Livy's account of the battle between the neighbouring city-states of Rome and Alba. Both sides realised that fighting a full-scale war would weaken them and threaten an invasion from their common enemy, the Etruscans. Instead, the issue would be decided by a fight between two sets of three brothers; the Horatii for Rome and the Curiatii for Alba. The former won, with Publius Horatius the sole survivor. The exception to the acclamation for him when he returned home was his sister Camilla. She had been engaged to one of the Curiatti whom Publius had killed. She cursed him for the loss of her husband, broke down and wept. Publius drew his sword and killed her*; "Take your girl's love," he shouted, "and give it to your lover in hell. What is Rome to such as you, or your brothers, living or dead? So perish all Roman women who mourn for an enemy!' (Livy)*. Publius was condemned to death. His father, while beset with grief for the death of his daughter Camilla, appealed for clemency to the public assembly in Rome. He pointed out the importance of the victory over Alba, and succeeded in getting the sentence commuted. The Academy stipulated that history paintings for the 1785 Salon should depict the murder of Camilla.

David had other ideas. After his success in the early 1780s, he had received (independently of the Academy) a commission from Louis XVI to depict Publius' father pleading before the Roman assembly. This was considered by the King as an example of patriotic zeal which the French people would do well to emulate. David chose to prepare for the 1785 Salon not in Paris but in Rome. David discarded the scene the King wanted, judging that it was too passive. Instead, he chose the drama of the swearing of the three brothers to their father to defend Rome to the death. Camilla is in white next to Sabina (in blue dress and yellow cloak) who, in a further twist, was sister to the Curiatii and wife to one of the Horatii brothers. Each woman realises they are certain to lose someone they love. Country is placed above family. As Honour and Fleming note, David contrasted (through pose and clothing) masculine courage and resolve with feminine tenderness.

To make sure his painting really stood out at the Salon, David also ignored the square format of 10 feet prescribed by the Academy, lengthening one dimension to 14 feet. Then David orchestrated a vast public appreciation of *The Oath of the Horatii* before the 1785 Salon opened. David took a lesson in publicity from Greuze. In Rome David exhibited *The Oath* to his fellow artists and their friends. Their fervent praise prompted the Pope to demand a viewing, and soon everyone of importance in Rome was beating a path to David's studio. Naturally, as David intended, news of this approval reached Paris well in advance of the Salon. Paris could hardly wait, but David made them, delaying the delivery of the painting until a couple of days after the Salon opened. All Paris fell at his feet: the public and the pamphlet-writers had eyes for nothing else.

Jean-Francois Pierre Peyron, *The Death of Seneca*, 1773 (engraving)

The Academy was dismayed with David's public success, and whispered about the departures from academic practice of *The Oath*. They were drowned out. However, David had learned lessons. The buildings in *Antiochus and Stratonice* (above) of 1774 are badly orientated, and five years afterwards he had not improved. An Academy report of April 1779 said*; "his perspective is unsatisfactory and he is recommended to choose subjects which take place on simple terrain so that he can deal adequately with his groups."*

The Oath uses a tiled floor to help David with his perspective and is also set on a shallow stage. For the latter, ironically, David drew on arches in Peyron's *Death of Seneca*. Despite the enmity between them David is reported to have said at Peyron's funeral in 1814, "*he opened my eyes (Miette de Villars).*"

Neo-Classicism

The Oath, one of the great masterpieces of Neo-Classicism, was produced after David's eyes had been opened by Rome. Neo-classicism is a later art-historical term for the 'True-style' or 'Revival' (*risorgimento*) of art as it was called in Rome. Every artist of importance spent some years there studying antiquities and the city was the mecca for Europe's aristocracy and intellectuals. The search for the true-style originated in the excavation of the Greek city Heraklion (Herculaneum) from 1738 with finds being displayed at a museum close to the site. The excavation of Pompeii, originally a Greek city, began in 1763. As a result, Naples became the first place visited by Grand Tourists enroute to Rome. In between those times, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, one of the founders of scientific archaeology, published in 1755 his famous *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*. Winckelmann argued that great art was found with the Greeks and that by imitating the Greeks, the 'true imitation of nature' would be reached. He condemned Rubens simply by remarking that the painter never approached Greek proportions. Irwin notes that Goethe's portrait by Tischbein enshrines "*the world where nature and antiquity harmonise.*"

Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe in the Roman Campagna*, 1786-7

Goethe is not a young English aristo clamouring over a ruined temple or an elderly lord leaning nonchalantly against a column. He has the calm of the ancients, despite being a modern man, and is clearly an intelligent force. Goethe is shown in a classical pose on blocks of granite from a fallen Egyptian obelisk. Beside him in a frieze is Iphigenia, the subject of one of his plays, meeting her brother. Winckelmann did not mean simply copying the Greeks but adopting their ideals. This meant that true-style art was not just a reflection of its time but would always have value. Hugh Honour's description captures the change:

> *"In place of the Rococo Olympus of amorous gods and goddesses … we now find … sobering lessons in the more homely virtues, stoic exemplars of unspoilt and uncorrupted simplicity, of abstinence and continence, of noble self-sacrifice and heroic patriotism. The stark death-bed and virtuous widow replace the chaise longue and the pampered coquette. And an equally severe and chastened style was required for the expression of these noble and edifying themes: an honest straightforward anti-illusionistic style capable of blunt uncompromising statements – of sober clarity and archaic purity. And so the flickering highlights and impulsive nervous modelling which gave Rococo painting its subtlety and sparkle … was sacrificed in favour of firm and unequivocal contours and bold flat areas of paint. In composition, the diagonal gave way to the rigorously frontal view, the sinuous oblique complexities of Rococo space to the elementary clarity of a simple perspective box.*

Clarity and simplicity could be achieved by abandoning colour and modelling, as in the crisp line drawings on Greek vases excavated at Herculaneum and Pompeii. John Flaxman was the leading artist in this vein. From 1775 he was employed by Josiah Wedgwood to produce designs for Jasperware. Sir William Hamilton, living in Naples from 1764 to 1800 as English ambassador, assembled a large collection of Greek antiquities and published four volumes of engravings of them from 1766-1776. Flaxman adapted *The Apotheosis of Homer* from Hamilton's collection for Wedgwood's *Pegasus Vase*, presented to the British Museum. Flaxman modelled the figures in Homer. Later, as the true-style emerged, his illustrations for *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* were drawn in the simple archaic style.

Neo-classicism only lasted for the last two decades of the 18th century, before descending into mere decoration (Honour) in the 19th. The true-style influenced architects but the great masterpieces are the paintings of David and the sculpture of Antonio Canova. Although Italian, Canova will be covered here. When David went to Italy in 1755 he felt he had little to learn but in Naples met Quatremere de Quincy, a disciple of Winckelmann, who had the effect (as David described it) of a cataract operation. David was then able to understand the art of antiquity. *Belisarius* is the immediate result; *The Oath* the mature culmination. David's other Neo-classical paintings will be covered when we return to the Salons.

Pegasus Vase: The Apotheosis of Homer, 1778

John Flaxman, *Achilles mourning Patrocles*, 1793 (1795 engraving)

Antonio Canova (1757 – 1822)

Antonio Canova was born in a small town in north-east Italy. His father died in the same year that David's was killed. Canova was four. He was raised by his father's father who was a stonemason, owning his own quarry, who sculpted in a Baroque style. Canova learned from him and by the age of ten was carving marble. Apprenticed to a master at the age of 13, Canova went on to win many prizes at the Academy in Venice.

Initially, he maintained his grandfather's style: *Orpheus and Eurydice (1777), right,* have the expression and movement common to Baroque sculpture and the flourishes of Rococo in the rendering of different materials and hand emerging from the flames to pull Eurydice back into the underworld.

Then Canova moved to Rome and had the same eye-opening experience as David. He became friends with Gavin Hamilton, the Scottish history painter rated highly by Winckelmann but whose talent was for archaeology and who became the arbiter of Neo-classical taste. When Canova received in 1781 the commission from the Venetian ambassador for a sculpture of *Theseus and the Minotaur* he intended to show the pair in combat, allowing great scope for Baroque movement. However, Hamilton suggested instead the moment of calm after victory. Canova took the advice, and this work marks the turn away from his family heritage towards Neo-classicism. Canova renders Theseus as the ideal hero. Anatomy, hair and drapery are finished in the classical Greek manner.

Canova produced a series of small models (*bozzetti*) for his major works. The *bozzetti* are not identical and in themselves are precious. His great Neo-classical masterpiece, *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* has two final versions: the first in the Louvre and the second in the Hermitage, for which the Met has a full-size *bozzetto.*

Antonio Canova, *Theseus and the Dead Minotaur*, 1782

Psyche and Cupid was commissioned (along with other pieces) from Canova by John Campbell, the 1st Baron Cawdor, during his Grand Tour of 1787. Canova did not finish the work until 1793. By then Campbell had been forced by the Napoleonic Wars to leave Italy. The sculpture was confiscated by Napoleon's General Murat and moved to the Louvre on his death in 1800. The piece is beautifully balanced - the result of a large number of *bozzetti* - which enhances its standing as the idyllic representation of the young love of innocence and purity (Honour). Canova, like Giambologna [see Sixteenth Century in Italy], designed his works to be seen all-round, producing a variety of poised perspectives. He included a handle in the base (usual in his pieces), so the sculpture could be rotated.

Antonio Canova, *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss,* 1793 (Louvre)

The second version was commissioned in 1796 by Prince Nicolai Yusupov, a keen patron of the arts and friend of Voltaire, after had seen the original in Canova's studio in Rome; a venue included in the itinerary of virtually every Grand Tourist. Yusupov was appointed Director of the Hermitage in 1797 (presumably as a result of his fine taste!).

Unlike the finish of Antique Greek statues, Canova rendered the naked body with subtlety and sensuousness. In the late 18th century, viewing sculptures by candlelight was popular. Canova saw this trend and became intrigued by the effect of candles on the translucent marble surface. He spent weeks softening the transition between various part of the statue with special tools and pumice stone, finally applying a patina to lighten the skin tone.

His touch is evident in *Psyche and Cupid*, and in *The Three Graces* commissioned by the Empress Josephine in 1812. The daughters of Zeus are (from left to right), Thalia (youth and beauty), Euphrosyne (mirth) and Aglaea (elegance). Josephine died in 1814 before the work was completed. Her collection was later acquired by Tsar Alexander I, and the piece is now in the Hermitage. John Russell, Duke of Bedford saw the sculpture in Canova's studio and commissioned a version for Woburn Abbey, which is now owned jointly by the V&A and the Scottish National Gallery.

Although he spent ages finishing the human flesh in his statues, Canova was seeking in this perfection to create the ideal. Honour notes that, *"a flatterer once told Canova that he had been deceived into thinking one of Canova's statues was alive. Canova acidly replied that he was sorry – he had not intended to produce wax-works." The Three Graces* convey the Greek ideal of form and we easily accept the girls as the goddesses they are: eternally youthful (as the Greeks intended) and matchless in their beauty.

Which shifts the focus from Napoleon's wife as connoisseur to his sister as model: Pauline thought herself matchless too.

Antonio Canova, *The Three Graces*, 1813-1815 (Hermitage)

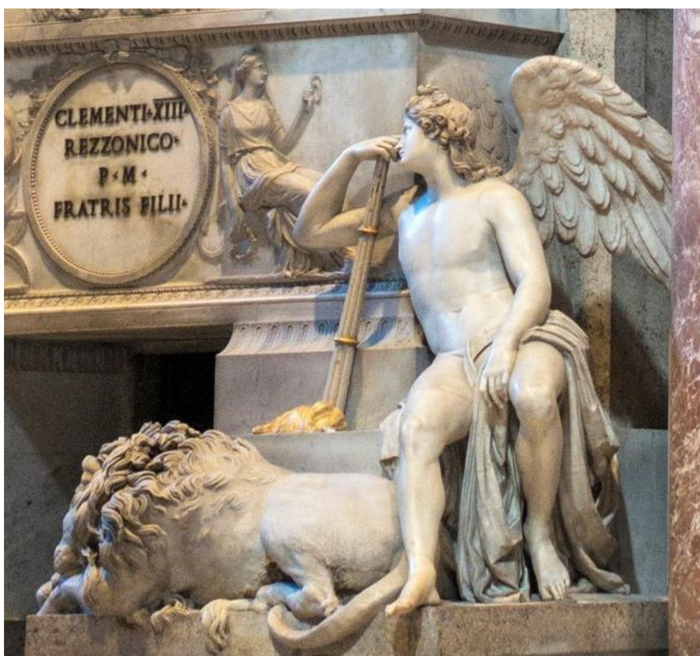
Antonio Canova, *Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victorious*, 1805-8

Nude portraits were unusual. Apparently, Canova was planning to depict Pauline fully clothed as the chaste goddess Diana, but Pauline laughed, saying nobody would believe she was a virgin. Her racy reputation had long been established in France and Italy. She holds Paris' apple – a reminder that Aphrodite won that contest. The body is classical with the head turned: Pauline was proud of her profile. Canova used the same pose for *Venus Italica* but portrayed her convincingly as a vulnerable woman.

A year after *Theseus and the Dead Minotaur*, Canova was commissioned for monuments to Clement XIV and Clement XIII in St Peter's. For a young artist new to Rome this was a daunting task amid Bernini's papal tombs. *Clement XIV* repeats the form of Bernini's Baroque masterpieces, but Canova did away with billowing draperies, multi-coloured marble and rich ornaments. Humility and Temperance are united in grief. The Neo-classical art historian Francesco Milizia declared, *"the three statues appear to have been carved in the best period of Greek art."* Honour notes the similarities with David's *The Oath of the Horatii*; figures either in profile or full face, the overall simplicity.

Antonio Canova, Monument to Clement XIV, 1783-87

Death was handled differently in Neo-classical art. The ancients did not believe in heaven or Christianity. Winckelmann had described an antique gravestone carved with the figures of Death and his brother Sleep as two beautiful youths with reversed torches. Goethe was *"delighted by the beauty of the thought that the Ancients acknowledge death as the brother of sleep and formed both of them alike to the point of confusing them."* Johann Gottfried Herder, who inspired Goethe as a young man, was also charmed by the idea of Sleep: *"our last friend is no horrifying spectre, but an ender of life, the lovely youth who puts out the torch and imposes calm on the billowing sea."*



Antonio Canova, *Tomb of Clement XIII* (detail), 1783-92 (St Peter's)

For Clement XIII's monument, Canova reflected this thinking, replacing skeletal Death with a depiction of Sleep, a languorous youth holding a down-turned torch, expressing *"a longing for the perfect peace of eternity (Honour)."*

Another Neo-classical opinion of death which discarded the idea of heaven was Cicero's view, *"The life of the dead is placed on the memories of the living. The love you gave in life keeps people alive beyond their time."* Mourners keep the life eternal. Canova's funeral monument to Maria Christina of Austria shows the ancient ceremony of mourners following the ashes into the tomb. Above the door a figure of happiness holds a portrait of Maria framed by a snake eating its tail (archaic emblem of immortality). The youthful Mourning rests against lion of Fortitude. On the left, a child, a young woman and an old man, represent the three ages of man paying homage to the dead.

Antonio Canova, *Monument to Maria Christina*, 1803-1805 (Vienna)

Canova sculpted small monuments for his close personal friends at his own expense. The form of these was inspired by the stele commemorating the dead which lined the roads leading out of Greek cities. That for Giovanni Volpato, who engraved plates of archaeological finds for Gavin Hamilton, simply has a mourning woman and the bust of Giovanni, with a brief inscription on plinth. Reflecting Cicero, the grief of the survivor is emphasised, the most eloquent of all tributes to the dead.

The mistress of the poet Vittorio Alfieri, founder of Italian tragedy, was inspired by this form of monument but when she saw a model of the intended relief, decided to pay for a larger monument. Again, a single mourner, this time *Italia* (her crown of crenelated walls and the cornucopia are her attributes) representing a united Italy and *"making her first appearance in art (Irwin)."*

Antonio Canova, *Giovanni Volpato Monument*, 1804

Antonio Canova, *Vittorio Alfieri Monument*, 1806-10

Canova was very generous with his wealth, spending a large part of his fortune on supporting students and paying for commissions to struggling sculptors. His death sparked a memorial service in Venice which was thought to have rivalled that held in Florence for Michelangelo. His body was laid to rest in a temple he designed along classical lines in Possagno, a commune 60km northwest of Venice. A mark of his standing was the use of body parts almost as religious relics. Canova's right hand was amputated to be preserved in a vase at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice. His heart was removed and interred in the famous church of the Frari in a monument similar to that of Maria Christina.

Neo-classicism became drained of all high-minded ideas after Napoleon's accession in 1799 to become simply decorative. The demise echoed that of the Jacobins who had adopted the style. David's studio played a decisive part: his pupils were among the first of the Romantics who would be led by Delacroix and his realism of modern history. More of that later, but now back to David and the Salons.

Jacques-Louis David – Part II

The Academy's attempts to undermine *The Oath* were dismissed by Antoine-Joseph Gorsas as irrelevant; the truth and virtue of the scene had been captured. His defence of David alarmed the Academy. Gorsas led a small group of intellectuals including Brissot, Marat, Jean-Louis Carra (all to be Revolutionary leaders) with great influence. Their pamphlets could sabotage government initiatives and put angry crowds on the streets. Pamphlets denounced Marie-Antoinette in the Diamond Necklace affair, which irreparably sullied her reputation and, on the eve of the 1787 Salon, incited riots against the exile of the Paris *Parlement*. David exploited this support to finish off Peyron. Having won at large history paintings, David decided to demonstrate his superiority in the smaller cabinet pieces. In 1786 Peyron was commissioned by D'Angivillers to produce *The Death of Socrates* for Louis XVI. Hearing about this David arranged a commission from a friendly member of the Paris *Parlement* on the same subject. Just before the salon David announced he intended to exhibit the painting, but once again delayed delivery until after the Salon had been opened. There was no contest. Peyron's version was criticised for being confused and unstructured, with an unclear hysterical gesture from Socrates.

Jean-Francois Pierre Peyron, *The Death of Socrates*, 1786-7

In David's version, Socrates is clearly the focus and the strong horizontal and vertical of his arms stabilise the scene. Two right arms draw attention to the cup of hemlock which Socrates has yet to take. Fear and regret are expressed with restraint among the pupils: only Socrates and Plato are calm, both clothed in light-coloured robes. The official *Journal* as well as *Memoire secrets* marked Peyron's version as inferior in every particular.

Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787

David then turned to portraiture. Marie-Anne Lavoisier, an ex-pupil of David, commissioned a piece of her and her husband, Antoine Laurent. The pair worked together as equals. Marie-Anne made notes during their chemistry experiments (as one of her drawings shows) and she seems to be dictating to her husband as he writes a paper. The work was banned by the Academy for the 1789 Salon. At the time Antoine Laurent was not famous as a chemist or manufacturer of gunpowder but as a tax farmer-general, a class hated since Richelieu's time. His portrait might incite the Paris mob: the Salon opened only a month after the Storming of the Bastille.

Jacques-Louis David, *The Lavoisiers*, 1788

For the 1789 Salon David again ignored the subject prescribed by the Academy, Coriolanus sparing Rome. Coriolanus had been banished by popular will from Rome when he refused to take measures to alleviate a famine. He fled, joined the city's enemies and raised an army to attack Rome. His family prevailed upon him not to attack the city. Instead of this subject, David chose a man whose devotion to Rome was unrelenting, Brutus. Brutus had led the rebellion against the corrupt Tarquin monarchy after Sextus had raped Lucretia, so setting up the republic. David shows a later part of the story. Brutus' sons plotted to overthrow the new republic and restore the monarchy. Their conspiracy was exposed and Brutus, now consul of Rome, ordered their execution. David depicts the aftermath. Brutus, with agonised face and tense twisted feet, sits in shadow beneath a statue and pedestal depicting Rome, as his headless sons are brought in.

Jacques-Louis David, *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, 1787-9

The work is another instance of country before family, but before David started work on the painting, Brutus had acquired a new political significance. In January 1786 there had been a revival of Voltaire's tragedy about Brutus, but performances were stopped despite the critical success of opening night. Brutus' leadership of the revolution against the hated monarchy was not a theme the court wanted aired. Indeed, the Academy wanted to prevent David's *Brutus* being exhibited in the 1789 Salon, but David had publicised his theme in advance and the Paris public insisted the work was shown.

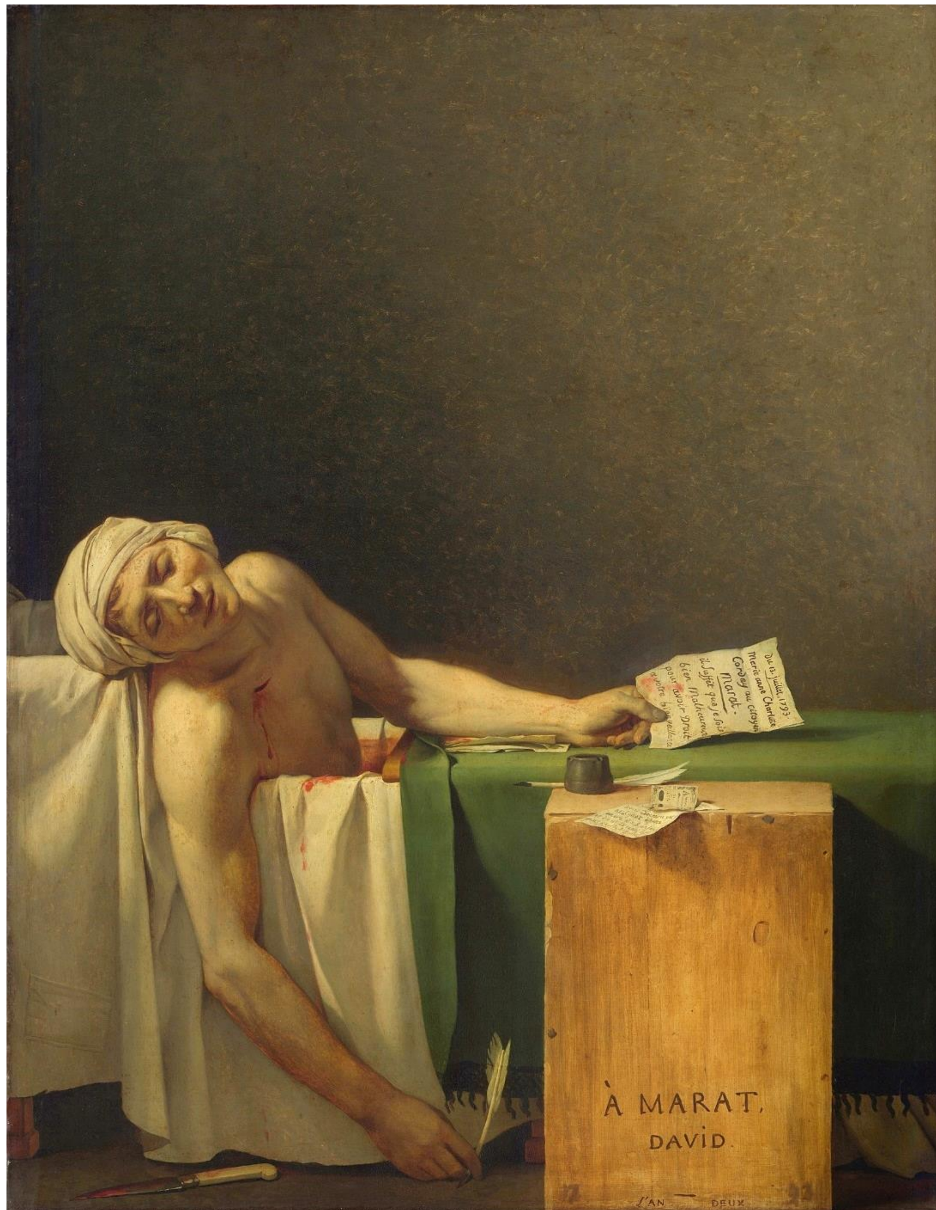
By this time the revolution was underway. The Third Estate, finding their meeting room at Versailles locked and guarded by soldiers, adjourned to the King's Tennis Court, declared themselves the National Assembly and took an oath not to leave until a constitution had been written. Some months later, David convinced the Jacobin Club, the leading group of revolutionaries with whom he was friends, to support a depiction of the scene: "*to immortalize our thoughts we have chosen the painter of Brutus and the Horatii, the French patriot whose genius anticipated the Revolution (Dubois-Crance).*"

Jacques-Louis David, *The Tennis Court Oath* drawing, 1791

The picture which was going to be gigantic - the foreground figures were to be life-sized – and paid for by 3000 subscribers. David intended to show every deputy (including the only one to refuse the oath, Joseph Martin-Bauch, seated on the right) and set up his studio to paint portraits. However, the work did not get much beyond his initial drawing. David was too busy to wield the paintbrush. He was in charge of celebrating the Revolution: he designed and organised the huge elaborate day-long festivals which took over Paris with thousands attending from the provinces. The first was held on the 14th July 1790 to celebrate Bastille Day and nine more followed (one in 1791 for Voltaire's funeral, three in 1792 and five in 1793). Thompson labelled David, *"the pageant-master of the Revolution."*

In between these festivals, David intensified his campaign against the Academy. They had withheld the prize for the Grand Prix of 1786 because David's pupils, Girodet and Francois-Xavier Fabre, were the leading contenders (*"a new despotism on the part of the professors"*, commented *Memoires secrets*), refused to allow the exhibition of works by Drouais, another of David's pupils after his premature death to smallpox in 1788, and the First Painter Pierre insulted David's *Brutus*, *"You have in your Horatii given us three personages set in the same plane, something never seen before! Here you put the principal actor in shadow!"* David attacked the Academy, calling for a democratic constitution with elected officials. The senior members and professors dreaded this and their fear grew as first the Jacobin Club, then the Paris Commune and finally the National Assembly supported the proposal.

This campaign did not go unnoticed. In August 1792 David's name was put forward by the electors of the Louvre section and on the 17th of September he was elected a deputy to the National Convention. He sat with Marat, Danton and Robespierre. His allegiance is reflected in his funerary portraits. He sketched a portrait of Marie-Antoinette as she was taken to the guillotine; a horrible figure without her wig, her teeth and her corset, but he smoothed over the ugly face of his friend Deputy Louis-Michel le Peletier and the violent nature of Jean-Paul Marat in his most famous funerary portrait. Marat suffered from a skin affliction which meant long periods in a warm bath, sheets draped over the sides so that the sores on his body could not touch the copper lining of the wooden tub. A turban soaked with vinegar deadened the pain from head-sores. This disease may well have sharpened Marat's temper. All this explains the portrait's setting. Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday, 25, an aristocrat by birth but brought up in a simple life in the country. She was avenging the death of Louis XVI and hoped to rescue France from the Jacobins.

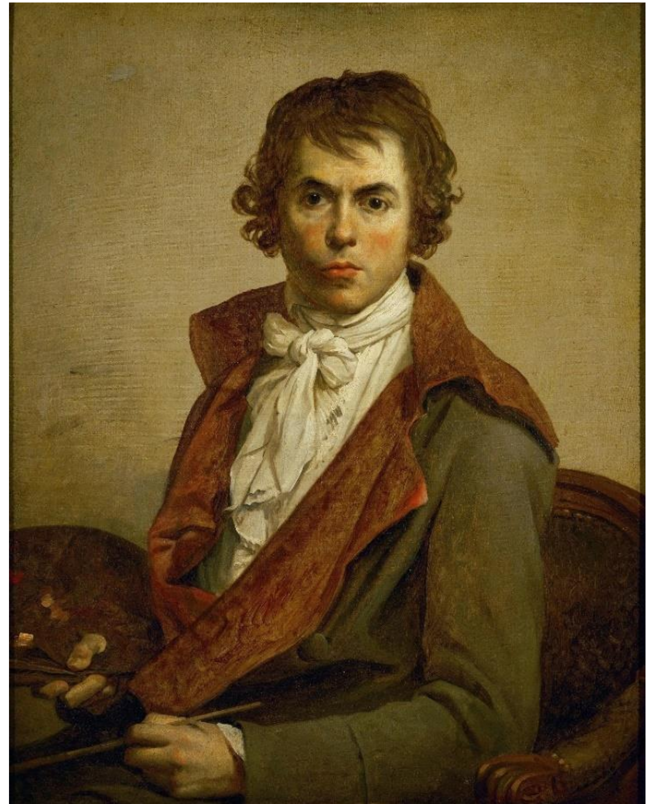


Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793

Charlotte probably deprived Marat only of a few months of life: the Jacobins were soon to feel the edge of the guillotine themselves. Robespierre was executed in July 1794 and all his followers came under suspicion. David was anxious to deny any sort of friendship with Robespierre. The day before Robespierre was attacked at the Convention, David had embraced him at the Jacobin Club saying, *"my friend, if you drink the hemlock, I will drink it with you."* The enemies of the Jacobins knew of this incident, and David was arrested and interrogated about it. His case was debated for four months from August 1794, during which David watched a succession of Robespierre's colleagues being sent to the guillotine.

David painted a self-portrait while his case was being considered. The picture seems to be of a young man but David was 46. His captivity was not very onerous; a room at Hotel des Fermes. In mid-September 1794 he was transferred to the Luxembourg Palace, where he was under much more rigorous surveillance and not allowed to receive visitors. On December 28th his case was dismissed but he remained in prison. Early in 1795 his portraits of le Peletier and Marat were removed from the Convention where they had been displayed.

1795 saw another uprising in the spring which brought former Jacobins under suspicion again. David was re-arrested on the 29th May. He became so ill he was allowed to go home on the 3rd of August. By then the Directory had been established, with the bourgeoisie in the ascendency in the republic. The period was one of elegance and relaxation for the middle class, which David captured in his charming portraits of the Seriziats. They appeared in the 1795 Salon which opened in October and received warm reviews. Finally on October 28th all revolutionary detainees were amnestied and David was free.



Jacques-Louis David, *Self-Portrait*, 1794

Jacques-Louis David, *Pierre Seriziat*, 1795

Jacques-Louis David, *Emilie Seriziat*, 1795

The mood of the Directory and the hope that factional strife was over was captured by David in his *Intervention of Sabine Women*. The painting marks a return to history and to Poussin, and away from contemporary subjects which could come back to haunt. David was by now very sensitive to criticism and avoided any hint of controversy. *Sabine Women* focusses on the peacemaker, Hersilia. After the rape of their women by the Romans, it took the Sabines three years to mount a counter-offensive. By then their former sisters, daughters and lovers had become Roman wives and mothers. Hersilia points this out to the warring Romulus and Tatius. By the clever act of carrying their babies into the conflict, the women effectively ended it. *Sabine Women* was a plea for peace and reconciliation, reflecting the revulsion from The Terror which had marked Robespierre's regime.

Jacques-Louis David, *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, 1796-99

David used all manner of folk as models: his children's nurse for the old woman tearing her garments. Two Bellegarde girls (Aurora and Adele), both well known in the Paris art world, and their high-society friend Theresa Tallien went to his studio. David chose Aurora as Hersilia, but was so taken with Adele's flowing locks that he used her as the model for the dark-haired woman with her breasts bared. Apparently, Adele was so pleased she wore the same coiffure to the theatre so everyone should know of her role. That was possible because instead of exhibiting the work at a Salon, David kept it in his studio at the Louvre and showed it for 6 hours a day every day from 1788 to 1804, at a charge of 1fr.80 per person. With the proceeds he bought a property in the Seine-et-Marne region. Gericault was to repeat David's trick with *Raft of the Medusa* at Bullock's Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly in 1820.

While he was finishing *Sabine Women*, Napoleon entered David's life. The Directory brought calm for the middle class but the Assembly alternated between Left and Right and used soldiers to put down riots by working men and women. Napoleon had ended one demonstration in Paris with his artillery, and repeated the success in the provinces. He went on to win victories in Italy and defeated the Austrians – beginning the period in which he virtually decided the republic's foreign policy.

Gros, one of David's pupils, served as Napoleon's art expert, and in 1797 explained to the general that David needed work. The two met for dinner in Paris in late 1797, and Napoleon agreed to pose for a portrait. David intended showing the general holding the Treaty of Campo Formio, which followed the defeat of Austria. Napoleon posed in David's studio but was in his usual hurry and left after a short time, despite David's protests. The head was done and Napoleon liked it, but the portrait remained unfinished.

The Directory believed that they could control Napoleon and simply use him to police the republic. Napoleon had different ideas. He was ambitious and keenly aware of the adulation in which the French public held him. Even reverses in Egypt did not affect his popularity.

His victories at the turn of the century in Italy simply added to his standing, even if they were close-run. *"The Marengo campaign [of June 1800] has been so overlaid with legends that the historian is almost afraid to credit Napoleon with his most fortunate victory (Thompson)".*

Jacques-Louis David, *Unfinished Portrait of Napoleon*, Winter 1797/8

A portrait of Napoleon after the Marengo campaign was commissioned by King Charles IV of Spain (of Goya fame) to hang in the Royal Palace at Madrid as a token of the friendship between Spain and France after Napoleon's victories in Italy. Charles asked for Napoleon to be portrayed standing in uniform as First Consul, but David was keen on an equestrian portrait. The Spanish ambassador asked Napoleon how he would like to be shown. At first Napoleon said reviewing troops, but then changed his mind to a scene of him crossing the Alps and asked that David paint him *"calm but on a fiery steed."* There are five versions of this painting. Napoleon ordered David to paint three more versions after the two he produced for Charles. This well-known image is the most famous portrait of Napoleon. It is, however, a fiction:

> *It is not true that he led his troops on a prancing steed, as David portrayed him over the St Bernard: his mule was several days behind the advance-guard of Berthier's army." He set off on horse as far as St Pierre "and then mounted a mule, led by the young guide named Dorsaz whose narrative has added some lively details to a half legendary journey … what he had for dinner with the prior of St Bernard, how he turned over a copy of Livy in the monastic library looking for an account of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, and how, exasperated at the zigzag descent, he sat down and slid sur le derriere, and took to a horse again at the bottom of the pass (Thompson)."*

Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps,* 1802, Versailles (now – was originally in library of Les Invalides), copy of 1801 version for Chateau de Saint-Cloude

The work is pure propaganda, as Napoleon intended. In the painting, David returns to the theme of the fatherland demanding blood, just as *Horatii* and *Brutus*. This time the message is not the sacrifice of family, but the sacrifice of one's own life in fighting for the nation against its enemies: "into battle!" commands the pose of Napoleon's outstretched arm and finger. The Directory had created a new executive body – a consulate of three. After his triumphant return to Paris in 1802 and his success in ending the nine-year war with England, Napoleon orchestrated a plebiscite that conferred on him the title of First Consul for life. He presided over a Senate which he filled with men of his choice. The Senate was given the power to revise the constitution at will. These steps were the first moves in restoring an absolute ruler. Napoleon deserved his propaganda. His ambition is made clear by the inclusion of the name of Charlemagne at the bottom of David's painting.

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