

# The 17th and 18th Centuries

The period encompassing the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe has often been called "The Age of Kings." Some of the most powerful rulers in history occupied the thrones of various countries during this time: Frederick the Great of Prussia, Maria Theresa of Austria, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of Russia, and a succession of grand kings named Louis in France, to name but a few. These monarchs governed as virtual dictators, and their influence dominated social and cultural affairs of the time as well as political matters.

This same period could equally be called "The Age of Colonial Settlement." By the early 17th century, the Dutch, the English, and the French had established permanent settlements in North America. (Spain and Portugal had earlier laid claim to much of Central and South America.) The first successful English colony was at Jamestown, in Virginia, where a party led by John Smith arrived in 1607. Thirteen years later the plucky little ship *Mayflower* made landing in what is now Massachusetts. The settlers endured many hardships as they struggled through their first winters in the New World. At Jamestown the colonists went through a period still known as the "starving time." Ironically, the "starving time" in North America coincided exactly with a European style so opulent that its name is now synonymous with extravagance: the Baroque.

## The Baroque Era

Baroque art differs from that of the Renaissance in several important respects. Whereas Renaissance art stressed the calm of reason, Baroque art is full of emotion, energy, and movement. Colors are more vivid in Baroque art than in Renaissance, with greater contrast between colors and between light and dark. In architecture and sculpture, where the Renaissance sought a classic simplicity, the Baroque favored ornamentation, as rich and complex as possible. Baroque art has been called dynamic, sometimes even theatrical. This theatricality is clearly evident in the work of the Baroque's leading interpreter, the artist Gianlorenzo Bernini.

Bernini would have been a fascinating character in any age, but if ever an artist and a style were perfectly suited for each other, this was true of Bernini and the Baroque. Largely for his own pleasure, he was a painter, dramatist, and composer. In architecture and sculpture, however, his gifts

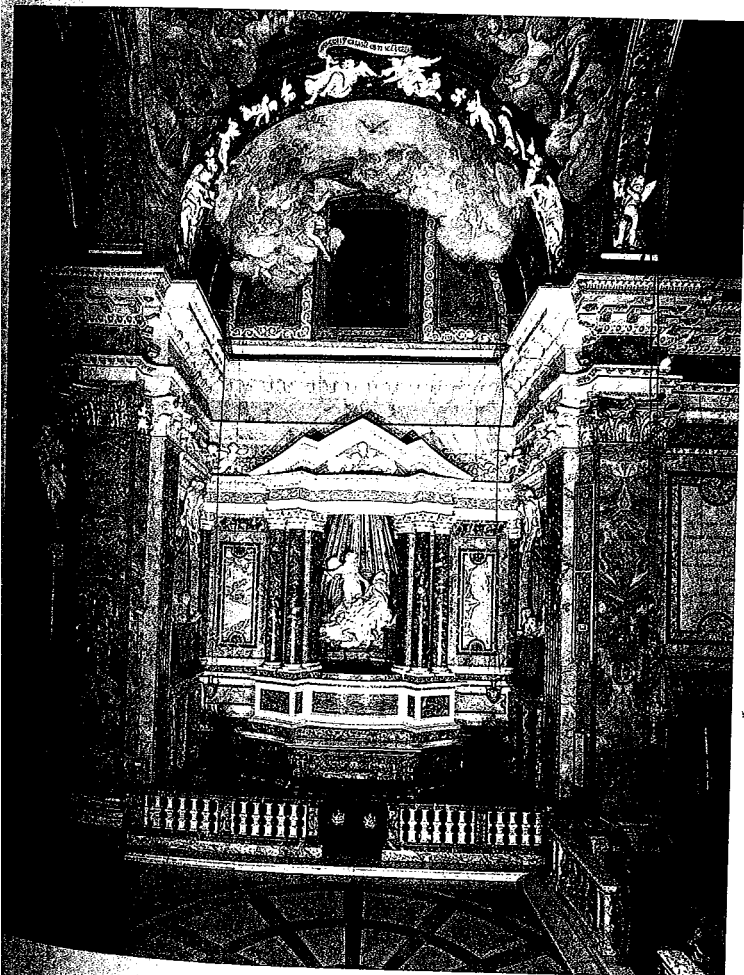
rose to the level of genius. Bernini's talents are on full display in the Cornaro Chapel in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome (17.1). In this small alcove, the funeral chapel of Cardinal Federigo Cornaro, Bernini integrated architecture, painting, sculpture, and lighting into a brilliant ensemble. On the ceiling is painted a vision of heaven, with angels and billowing clouds. At either side of the chapel sit sculptured figures of the Cornaro family, donors of the chapel, in animated conversation, watching the drama before them as though from opera boxes. The whole arrangement is lighted dramatically by sunlight streaming through a yellow-glass window.

The centerpiece of the chapel is Bernini's sculptured group known as *St. Teresa in Ecstasy* (17.2). Teresa was a Spanish mystic, founder of a strict order of nuns, and an important figure in the Counter-Reformation. She claimed to be subject for many years to religious trances, in which she saw visions of Heaven and Hell and was visited by angels. It is in the throes of such a vision that Bernini has portrayed her. Teresa wrote:

Beside me, on the left hand, appeared an angel in bodily form, such as I am not in the habit of seeing except very rarely. . . . He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest rank of angels, who seem to be all on fire. . . . In his hands I saw a great golden spear; and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt that he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease. . . . This is not a physical, but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share.

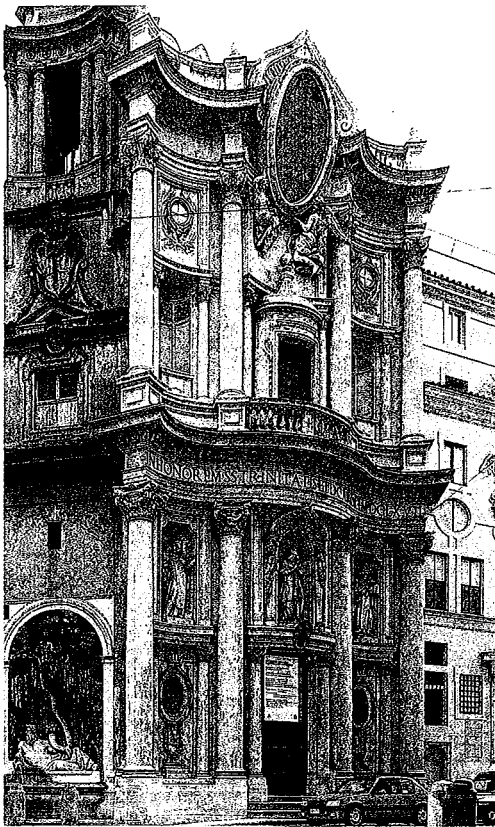
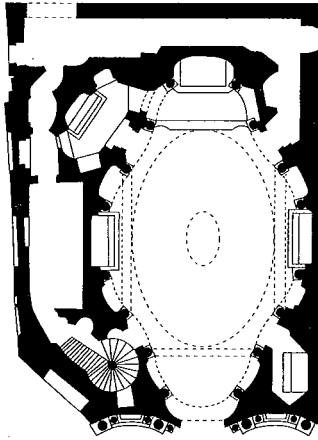
17.1 (left) Gianlorenzo Bernini. Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. 1642–52.

17.2 (right) Gianlorenzo Bernini. *St. Teresa in Ecstasy*, from the Cornaro Chapel. 1645–52. Marble and gilt bronze, life-size.



17.3 (below, top) Plan of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane.

17.4 (below) Francesco Borromini. Facade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome. 1665–67.



Just as Bernini transformed the chapel itself into a sort of theater complete with sculpted spectators, he has set the drama of St. Teresa as if on a stage. We can imagine that the curtains have just parted, revealing Teresa in a swoon, ready for another thrust of the angel's spear. She falls backward, yet is lifted up on a cloud, the extreme turbulence of her garments revealing her emotional frenzy. The angel, wielding his spear, has an expression on his face of tenderness and love; in other contexts he might be mistaken for a Cupid. Master of illusions, Bernini has anchored the massive blocks of marble into the wall with iron bars so that the scene appears to float. The gilt bronze rods depicting heavenly rays of light are themselves lit from above by a hidden window: This little stage set has its own lighting. The deeply cut folds of the swirling garments create abrupt contrasts of light and shadow, dissolving solid forms into flamelike flickerings. As we stand before the chapel, our experience is also theatrical, for we can both watch the ecstasy and watch people watching the ecstasy; we are both caught up in the performance and aware of it as a performance.

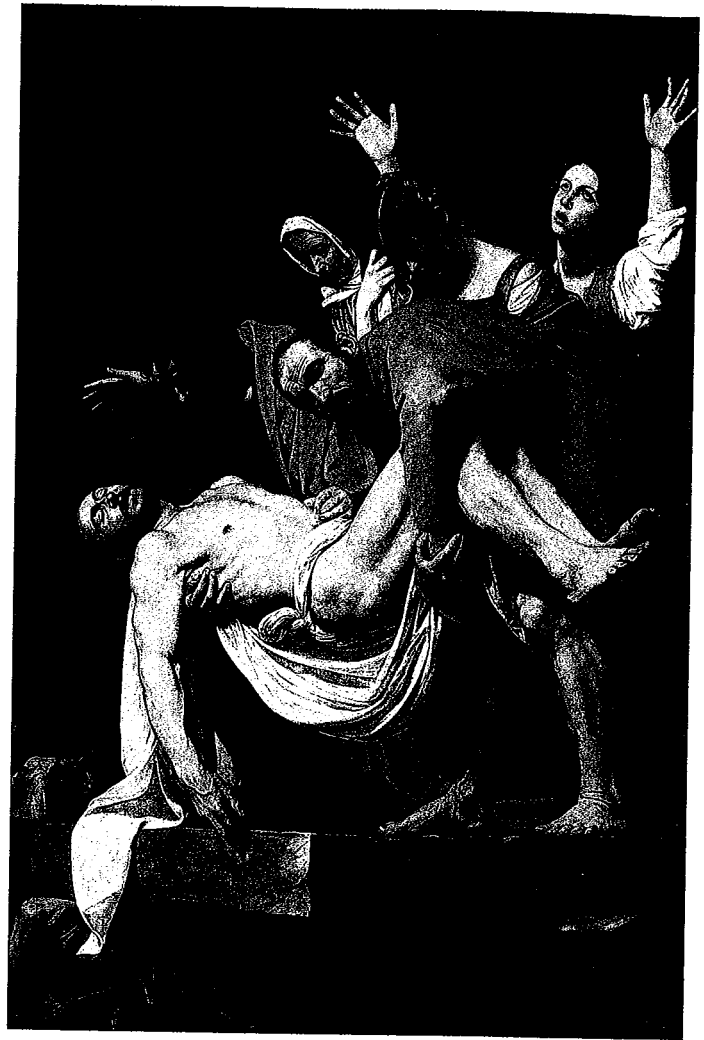
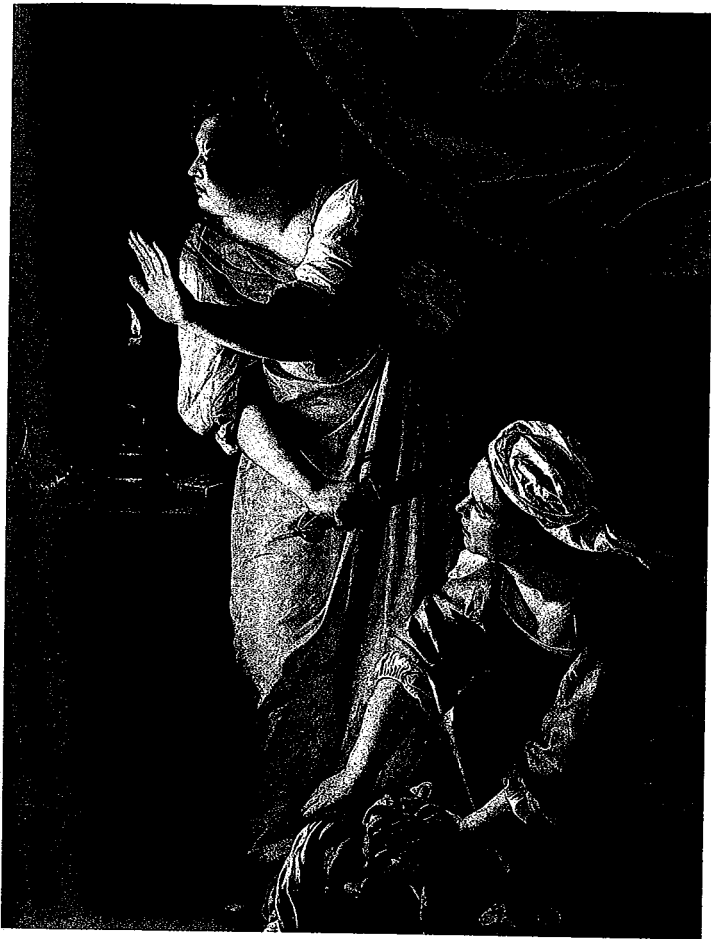
One of the great projects of Baroque Rome was the completion of St. Peter's, which had been designed by Michelangelo (see 16.11, 16.12). During the early 17th century, an architect named Carlo Maderno lengthened the nave and created a new facade. Upon Maderno's death, Bernini continued the redecoration of the interior and designed a spectacular colonnade (row of columns) to enclose the vast square in front of the church. Interestingly, Bernini's architecture was more conservative than his sculpture. To fully appreciate the innovative daring of Italian Baroque architecture, we should turn to his principal rival, Carlo Maderno's nephew Francesco Borromini.

Like the architects of the Renaissance, Borromini worked his designs out logically so that every least detail reflected a guiding idea. But instead of basing his work in the square and the circle, he favored more subtle and dynamic forms such as the oval. Borromini's most influential building is a small church called San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane ("Saint Charles at the Four Fountains"). The domed interior, designed first, takes the form of an oval gently indented to suggest a cross (17.3). The resulting walls alternate between convex and concave curves, creating a softly undulating motion and an organic, almost pulsating space. The church became instantly famous, and requests for the plans flooded in from all over Catholic Europe.

The facade (17.4), designed twenty-five years later and completed after Borromini's death, carries the logic through to the exterior. Alternating convex and concave elements dominate, their curves describing sections of ovals. The interplay of surfaces is complex. Notice, for example, how the central portion of the facade is convex at the street level but becomes a concave setting for convex elements above, culminating in a framed oval held aloft by two angels that seem to hover in front of the building. The protrusion of the facade forward into the viewer's space is typical of Baroque architecture, as is the buildup of interest in the central portion and the overall sense of plasticity—the sense that a building can be modeled and sculpted almost like clay.

Unlike architecture or sculpture, a painting cannot literally project its figures into the viewer's space. Baroque artists, however, learned to create a similar effect by lighting their figures dramatically and plunging the backgrounds into shadow. Artemisia Gentileschi used this technique effectively in *Judith and Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* (17.5). The artist took her subject from the biblical story of Judith.<sup>1</sup> According to the scripture, Judith, a pious and beautiful Israelite widow, volunteered to rescue her people from the invading armies of the Assyrian general Holofernes. Judith charmed the general, accepted his invitation to a banquet, waited until he drank himself into a stupor, then calmly beheaded him, wrapped up his head in a sack, and escaped.

Other of Gentileschi's paintings show the decapitation in progress. Here, she focuses on the moments after the gory deed is done. She poses Judith



tensely, caught in the wavering light from a single candle, one hand still clutching the bloody sword, the other poised in a gesture of silence. These Baroque devices heighten the sense of danger, the urgency of deeds committed in the dark of night.

Gentileschi's dramatic way with light and dark was the influential invention of a painter named Caravaggio. His magnificent *Entombment of Christ* (17.6) is an example of the kind of painting that inspired Gentileschi and many other artists. The *Entombment* depicts the crucified Christ being lowered into an open grave. The body is held by two of Christ's followers—his disciple St. John and the Jewish ruler Nicodemus, to whom Christ had counseled that a man must be “born again” to enter Heaven. The group also includes the three Marys—Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, at left; Mary Magdalene, center; and Mary Cleophas, at right—who look on in despair. Caravaggio's structure is a strong diagonal leading from the upraised hand at top right down through the cluster of figures to Christ's face. The light source seems to be coming from somewhere outside the top left edge of the picture. Light falls on the participants in different ways, but always enhances the sense of drama. Mary Magdalene's face, for example, is almost totally in shadow, but a bright light illuminates her shoulder to create a contrast with the bowed head. Light also catches the pathetic outstretched hand of the Virgin. Christ's body is the only figure lit in its entirety; the others stand in partial darkness.

The perspective of the painting places the viewer's eye level at the slab the grouping stands on. Set on a diagonal, the slab seems to project forward

**17.5** (left) Artemisia Gentileschi. *Judith and Maid-servant with the Head of Holofernes*, c. 1625. Oil on canvas, 6½" × 4'7¾".  
Detroit Institute of Arts.

**17.6** (right) Caravaggio. *Entombment of Christ*. 1604. Oil on canvas, 9'9⅞" × 6'7¾".  
Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca, Rome.



How is Gentileschi able to achieve success as a woman? Compared with Michelangelo, how does Gentileschi depict the human figure in her works? In the small amount of her work we have access to, what subject matter does she tend to portray?

“I will show Your Most Illustrious Lordship what a woman can do,” Artemisia Gentileschi wrote to a patron.<sup>2</sup> She knew full well the prejudices that were arrayed against her. She also knew her own worth: “I have seen myself honored by all the kings and rulers of Europe to whom I have sent my works, not only with great gifts, but also with the most favored letters . . .”<sup>3</sup> It was the simple truth. By dint of talent and ceaseless work, she had become successful, admired, and sought after, and this at a time when women artists were so unusual as to be curiosities.

Artemisia Gentileschi was born in Rome in 1593. Her father, Orazio, was a well-known painter. He was also in all likelihood her teacher. Orazio probably began teaching his daughter to paint subjects considered suitable for women, such as portraits and still life. But at some point he must have recognized the extent of her talent, for the earliest painting we have from her

hand depicts a biblical story, *Suzanna and the Elders*, and features a large female nude. Mastery of the human form and an elevated literary subject signaled that Artemisia would stake her claim as a history painter, a true rarity for a woman. She was only seventeen years old.

The following year, Artemisia was raped by a friend of her father’s, the painter Agostino Tassi. Afterward, Tassi promised to marry her, and because of this she consented to regular relations with him. When after a time he refused to fulfill his promise, Orazio dragged him to court. A transcript of the trial testimony survives, and it makes for disturbing reading. Artemisia recounts her version of events in detail and without flinching. Tassi denies all and hurls ugly accusations. In the end, he was found guilty. Artemisia quickly married a Florentine painter, Pietro Stiattesi. Her father found her a patron in Florence, proudly boasting in a letter that his daughter was so skilled that she was without peer. And so it was in Florence that Artemisia began her career.

Our knowledge of Artemisia’s trajectory is spotty. She remained in Florence for six years. We find her next back in Rome, having separated from her husband and taken their daughter with her. Then Genoa and Venice, followed by a stretch of time in Naples. She was briefly summoned to London by the English court, then returned again to Naples for the rest of her days. She had two daughters, both of whom she trained as painters. She employed her younger brothers as couriers to deliver her paintings across Europe. Her brother Francesco also served as her business manager.

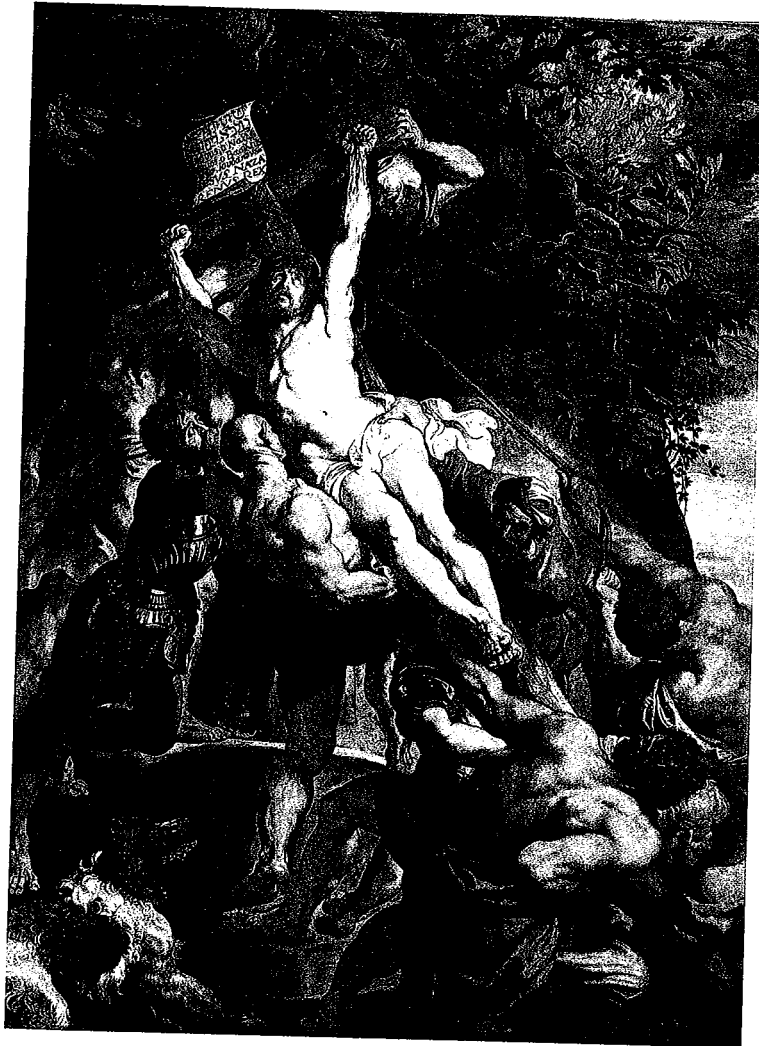
Our understanding of Artemisia Gentileschi’s art is likewise incomplete, for only a fraction of her works have survived. Contemporary writers praised her skill at portraiture and still life, yet only one example of each has come down to us. The story of her rape has focused attention on her images of strong, assertive women, especially the several paintings of Judith slaying Holofernes, which have been seen as her psychological revenge on Tassi. Yet we have no entry into her thoughts, and such images form only a small part of her known output. We must finally fall back on Artemisia’s own words to a patron: “The works will speak for themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

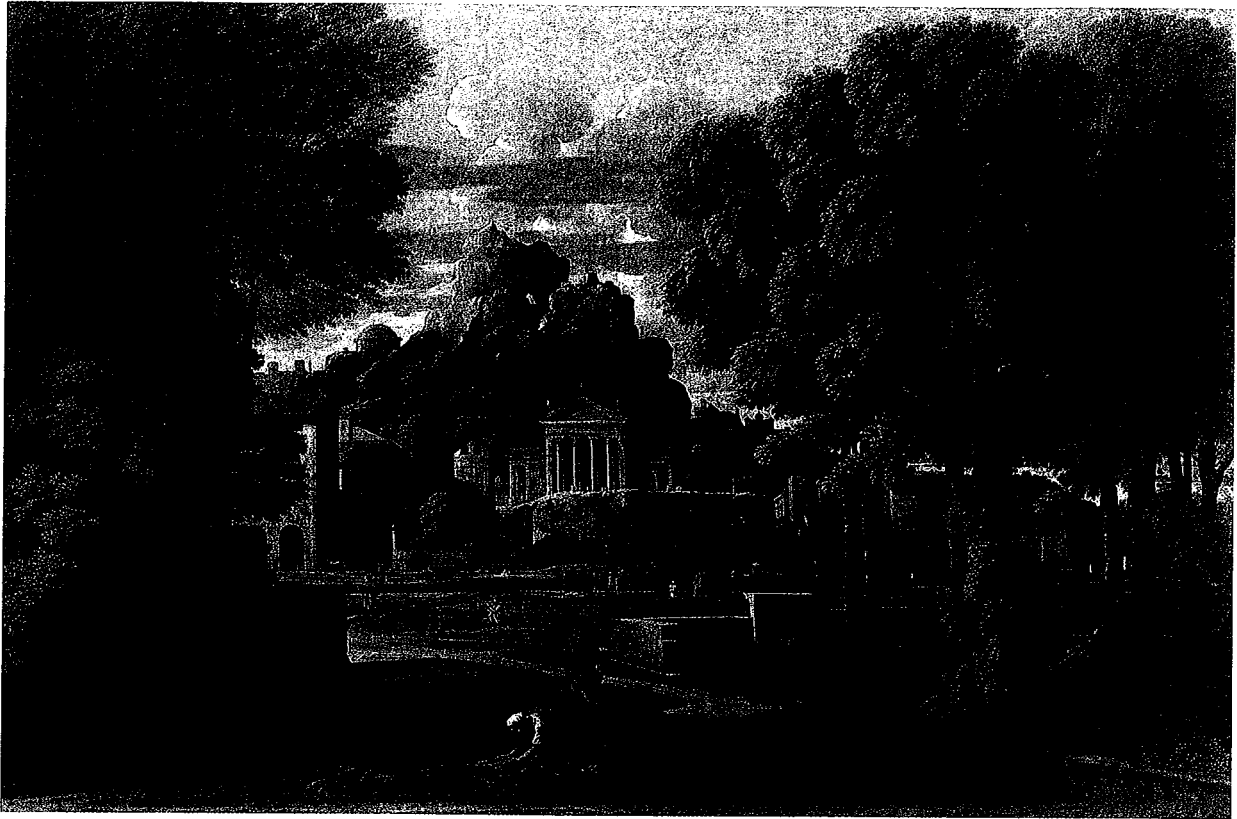
Artemisia Gentileschi. *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*. 1630. Oil on canvas, 38 × 29".  
The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, Windsor, England.

from the picture plane and into our space, involving us in the action. We may imagine ourselves standing in the grave that is about to receive Christ: Perhaps that is why Nicodemus looks at us. Caravaggio painted this work to hang over an altar, and the head of a priest standing at the altar would have been at the ideal viewing level, the level of the slab. During the most solemn moment of the mass, the priest holds the communion bread aloft and repeats the words Christ spoke at the Last Supper, "This is my body." The raised bread would have been visibly juxtaposed with the body in the painting, restoring to the words an intense emotional impact.

We might compare Caravaggio's *Entombment* with a work painted just a few years later, *The Raising of the Cross* (17.7) by the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens. Although he spent most of his life in Antwerp (in modern Belgium), Rubens had traveled to Italy and studied the works of Italian masters, including Caravaggio. There are similarities between these two paintings—in the sharply diagonal composition and dramatic lighting—but we also find several differences in the two masters' styles. Caravaggio's figures seem almost frozen in a moment of anguish, but Rubens' painting teems with movement and energy, each of the participants balanced precariously and straining at his task. Although the Caravaggio group projects from the picture plane, its action is contained on four sides within the frame of the canvas. But Rubens' figures burst outside the picture in several directions, suggesting that the action continues beyond the painting. Rubens' heroic treatment of musculature recalls Michelangelo's paintings on the Sistine Chapel ceiling (see 16.10), but the writhing S-curve of Christ's body is typically Baroque.

17.7 Peter Paul Rubens. *The Raising of the Cross*. 1609–10. Oil on canvas, 15'2" × 11'2".  
Antwerp Cathedral.





**17.8** Nicolas Poussin. *The Ashes of Phokion*. 1648. Oil on canvas, 3'9 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  $\times$  5'9 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool.

Although Baroque artistic principles were taken up across Europe, each country developed them in its own way. France, for example, favored a more restrained, "classical" version of Baroque style in which the order and balance of the Renaissance were retained, though infused with a new theatricality and grandeur.

Foremost among French painters of the 17th century was Nicolas Poussin, who actually spent most of his career in Rome. Steeped in the philosophy and history of the Classical past, he came to believe that art's highest purpose was to represent noble and serious human actions. An example is his painting *The Ashes of Phokion* (17.8). Phokion was a famous Athenian general of the 4th century B.C.E. In his old age, he was unjustly accused of treason, tried, and sentenced to death. The cremation or burial of his remains was outlawed. His friends and supporters dared not defy the court to accord him an honorable funeral. Only his widow did not desert him, arranging for cremation and performing the rites herself. She is shown here gathering up her husband's ashes outside the city walls. Her virtuous act was much admired by the ancient Roman Stoic philosophers, who taught that virtue was the only good, vice the only evil, and that the triumphs and sufferings of life were to be accepted calmly and without passion.

Poussin's visual response to this story and its Stoic setting inspired a composition that is far removed from the emotionalism of Caravaggio or the energy of Rubens. In place of their active diagonals, calm verticals and horizontals dominate. Only the manipulation of light marks the painting as Baroque. Zones of light and shadow alternate across the canvas, and the white of the widow's clothing is lit as if with a spotlight, drawing our attention to the principal actor on this vast stage. In the foreground, wind-tossed trees watch over Phokion's widow and her anxious servant. The trees are linked by visual rhymes to the mountain and clouds in the distance, emphasizing that her courageous act answers to a higher law than that of the city: the natural law of instinct.

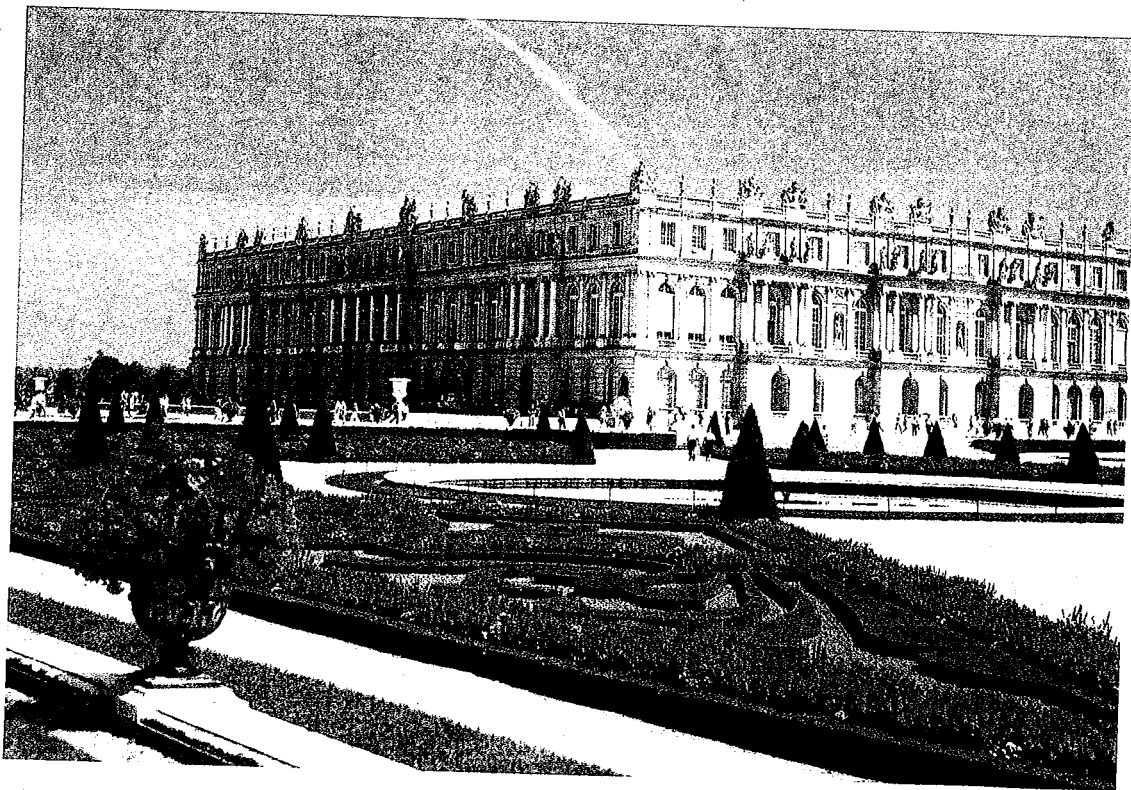
To grasp fully the flavor of the Baroque in France, we should look at a king who for all time exemplifies the term "absolute monarch"—Louis XIV. Louis ascended the throne of France in 1643, at the age of four. He assumed total control of the government in 1661 and reigned, in all, for seventy-two years. During that time, he made France the artistic and literary center of Europe, as well as a political force to be reckoned with. Showing the unerring instincts of a master actor, he created an aura around his own person that bolstered the impression of divinity. Each day, for example, two ceremonies took place. In the morning, half the court would file into Louis' chambers, in full pageantry, to participate in the king's *lever*—the king's "getting up." At night, the same cast of characters arrived to play ritual roles in the king's *coucher*—his "going to bed."

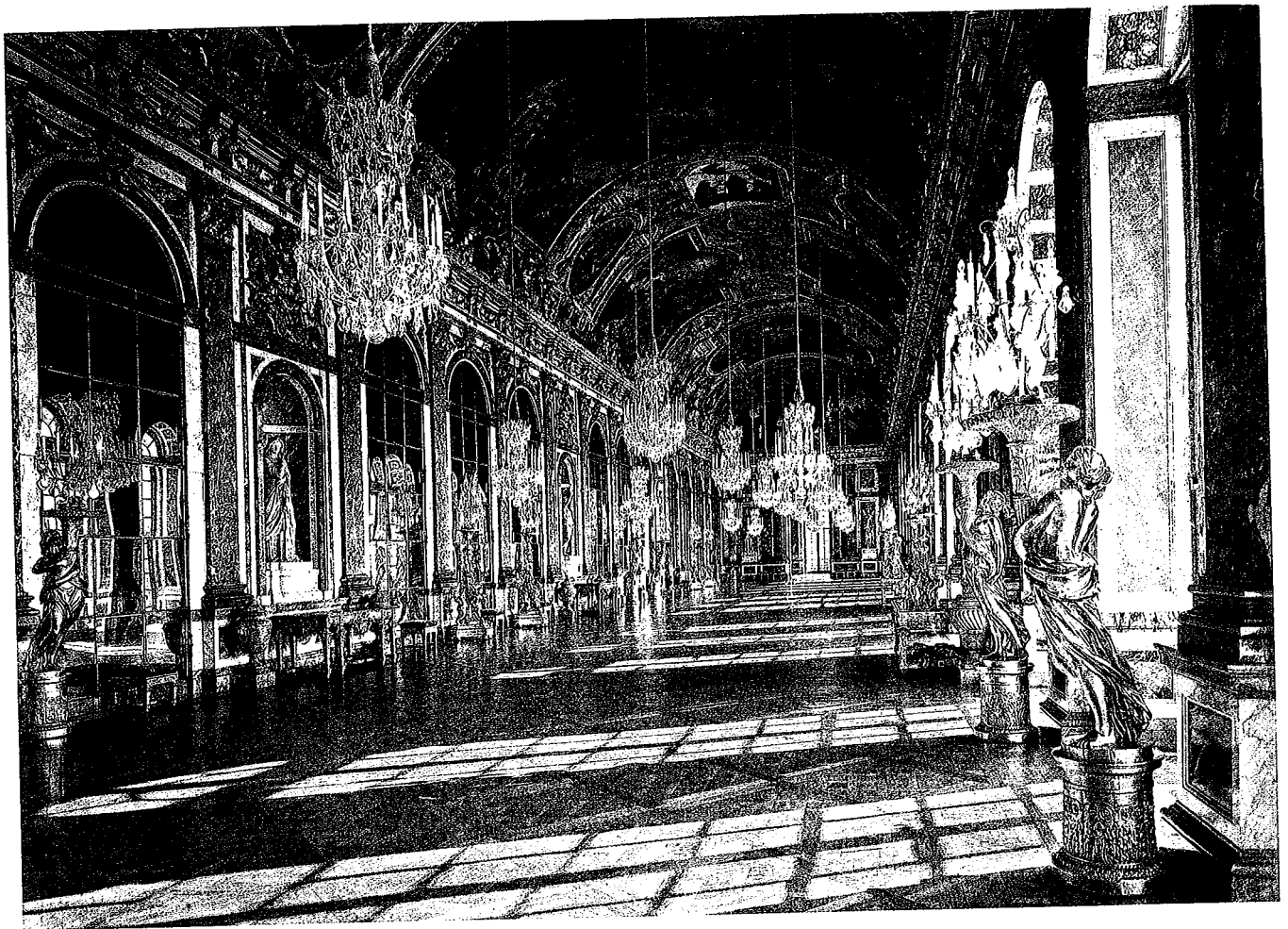
A life in which the simple act of climbing in and out of bed required elaborate ceremony surely also needed an appropriate setting, and Louis did not neglect this matter. He summoned Bernini from Rome to Paris to work on completion of the Louvre palace (although the final design of the building was the work of others). But Louis' real love was the Palace of Versailles, in a suburb of the capital, which he substantially rebuilt and to which he moved his court in 1682. It was from this remarkable structure that the power of kingship flowed forth.

In all, Versailles occupies an area of about 200 acres, including the extensive formal gardens and several grand châteaux. The palace itself, redesigned and enlarged during Louis' reign, is an immense structure, more than a quarter of a mile wide (17.9). The illustration here shows the central portion of the west facade, which overlooks the gardens and houses the royal apartments. Baroque style is evident in the way the facade occasionally breaks forward and in the way interest gathers toward its center, but these effects are realized in a very understated way.

If the exterior of the palace reflects the continuing classical tendencies of France, the interior revels in full Baroque splendor. As in Bernini's Cornaro Chapel, though on a much grander scale, architecture, sculpture, and painting are united, creating a series of lavish settings for the pageantry of

**17.9** Louis Le Vau and Jules Hardouin Mansart. Central portion of the garden (west) facade, Palace of Versailles. 1669–85.





**17.10** Jules Hardouin Mansart and Charles Le Brun. Hall of Mirrors, Palace of Versailles. c. 1680.

Louis XIV and his court. Of the countless rooms inside, the most famous is the Hall of Mirrors (17.10), 240 feet long and lined with large reflective glasses. In Louis' time the Hall of Mirrors was used for the most elaborate state occasions, and even in the 20th century it served as the backdrop for momentous events. The treaty ending World War I was signed in the Hall of Mirrors.

The French court clearly was a model of pomp and pageantry, and the Spanish court to the south was eager to emulate that model. King Philip IV of Spain reigned for a shorter time than his French counterpart and could not begin to match Louis in either power or ability. Philip had one asset, however, that Louis never quite managed to acquire—a court painter of the first rank. That painter was one of the geniuses of Spanish art—Diego Velázquez.

In his capacity as court painter, Velázquez created his masterpiece, *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) (17.11). At left, we see the artist, working on a very large canvas, but we can only guess at the subject he is painting. Perhaps it is the young princess, the *infanta*, who stands regally at center surrounded by her attendants (*meninas*), one of whom is a dwarf. Or perhaps Velázquez is actually painting the king and queen, whom we see reflected in a mirror on the far wall. Their participation is clear, but where are they standing? Possibly they are outside the picture, standing next to us, the observers. This ambiguity is part of the picture's fascination, as is the dual nature of the scene. Although it shows a formal occasion, the painting of an official portrait, Velázquez has given the scene a warm, "everyday" quality.

Like Caravaggio, Velázquez uses light to create drama and emphasis, but light also serves here to organize and unify a complex space. The major

#### RELATED WORKS



7.18  
Le Brun,  
*Battle of the  
Granicus*

light source comes from outside the top right corner of the painting, falling most brilliantly on the *infanta*, leaving the others in various degrees of shadow. Another light source illuminates the mysterious figure in the open doorway at back. Velázquez may have put him there to direct attention to the reflected images of the king and queen. Light also strikes the artist's face and the mirror reflection. What could have been a very disorderly scene has been pulled together by the device of spotlighting, much as a designer of stage lighting would control what the audience sees. The theatricality of the Baroque is more subtle in Velázquez than in Bernini, but it is no less skillful.

To end this discussion of 17th-century art, we move north, to the Netherlands. The Dutch Baroque, sometimes called the "bourgeois Baroque," is quite different from Baroque movements in France, Spain, and Italy. In the North, Protestantism was the dominant religion, and the outward symbols of faith—imagery, ornate churches, and clerical pageantry—were far less important. Dutch society, and particularly the wealthy merchant class, centered not on the church but, instead, on the home and family, business and social organizations, the community. We see this focus in the work of two Dutch artists with very different styles—Rembrandt and Judith Leyster.

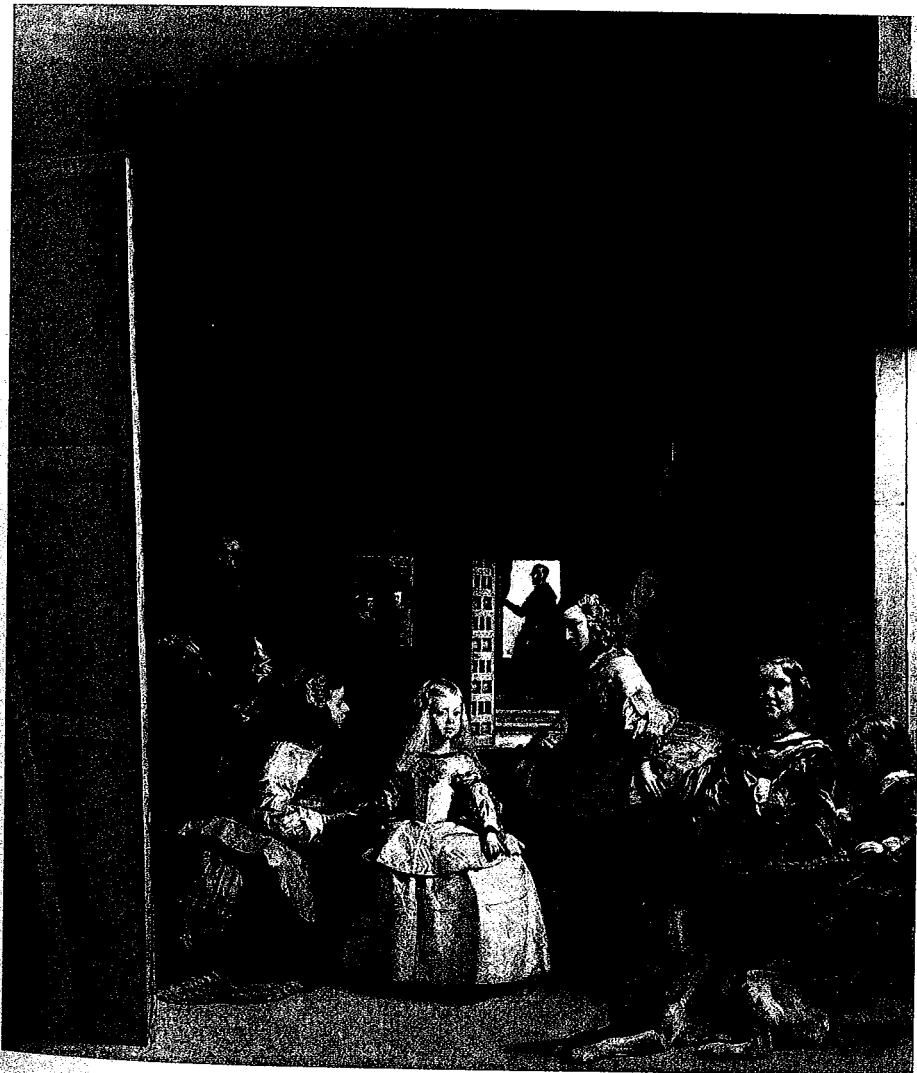
Rembrandt's principal teacher, a painter named Lastman, had traveled in his youth to Italy, where he had come under the influence of Caravaggio. Returning to the Netherlands to establish his career, he brought with him the new kind of dramatic lighting that Caravaggio had invented. We can see

#### RELATED WORKS



1.14 Valdés,  
*Vanitas*

17.11 Diego Velázquez. *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*). 1656. Oil on canvas, 10'5¼" × 9'¾". Museo del Prado, Madrid.



## RELATED WORKS



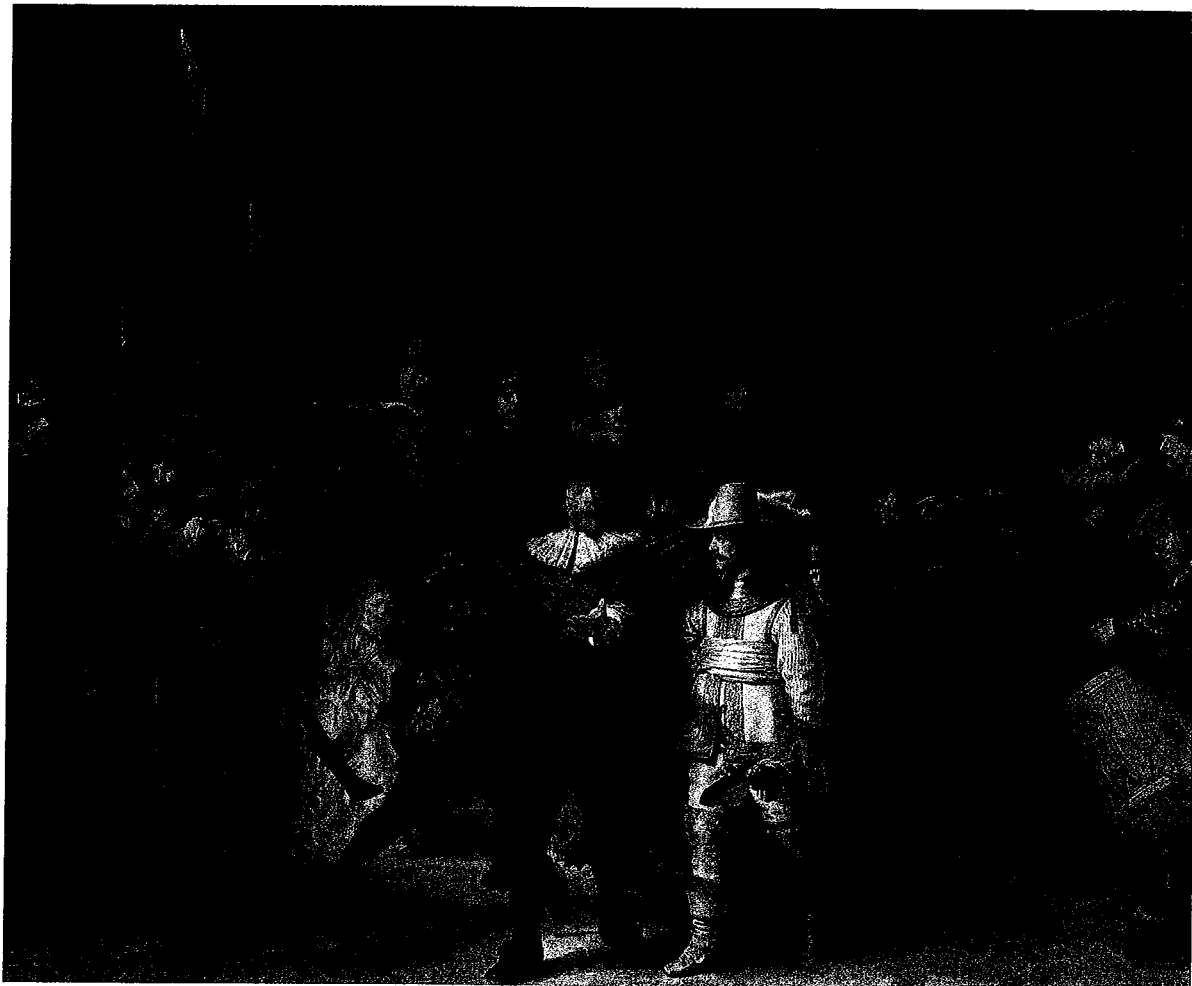
8.11  
Rembrandt,  
*Christ  
Preaching*

**17.12** Rembrandt. *Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq's Company of the Civic Guard (The Night Watch)*. 1642. Oil on canvas, 12'2" × 17'7".  
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

how Rembrandt incorporated this lighting into his own personal style in the famous group portrait *Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq's Company of the Civic Guard* (17.12).

The painting portrays a kind of private elite militia. Such groups had played a prominent role in defending the city during the recent wars against Spanish domination, and although by Rembrandt's time their function was largely ceremonial, they were still widely respected, and all the most important men of the town belonged to one. Dutch civic organizations often commissioned group portraits, and painters usually responded by portraying the members seated around a table or lined up for the 17th-century equivalent of a class photograph. Rembrandt's innovation was to paint individual portraits within the context of a larger activity, a call to arms. He groups the figures naturally, in deep space, with Captain Cocq, resplendent in a red sash, at the center. The composition builds on a series of broad V-shapes, pointing upward and outward. The nested V-shapes make the picture seem to burst out from its core—and may have made its subjects feel they were charging off heroically in all directions, into battle. Lest this geometric structure seem rigid, Rembrandt has "sculpted" it into greater naturalness through his dramatic lighting of the scene. Light picks out certain individuals: Captain Cocq himself; the drummer at far right; the lieutenant at Cocq's side, awaiting orders; and especially the little girl in a golden dress, whose identity and role in the picture remain a mystery.

For many years Rembrandt's painting was known as *The Night Watch*, and it is still informally called by that name. The reason has nothing to do with the artist's intent. A heavy layer of varnish on top of the oil paint combined with smoke from a nearby fireplace had gradually darkened the picture's surface until it seemed to portray a nighttime scene. No one alive could



## ARTISTS Rembrandt (1606–1669)



What do the numerous self-portraits tell us about the artist? What functions do light and darkness have in his art? How is Rembrandt's work accessible to us?

Of the few artists classified as "greatest of the great," Rembrandt seems the most accessible to us. His life encompassed happiness, success, heartbreak, and failure—all on a scale larger than most of us are likely to know. Through his many self-portraits and his portraits of those he loved, we can witness it all.

Born in the Dutch city of Leiden, Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn was the son of a miller. At fourteen, he began art lessons in Leiden and later studied with a master in Amsterdam. By the age of twenty-two, he had pupils of his own. About 1631 he settled permanently in Amsterdam, having by then attracted considerable fame as a portrait painter. Thus began for Rembrandt a decade of professional success and personal happiness—a high point that would never come again in his life.

In 1634 Rembrandt married Saskia van Uijlenburgh, an heiress of good family, thus improving his own social status. The pair must have been rather a dashing couple-about-Amsterdam. The artist's portraits were in demand, his style was fashionable, and he had money enough to indulge himself in material possessions, especially to collect art. One blight on this happy period was the arrival of four children, none of whom survived. But in 1641 Rembrandt's beloved son Titus was born.

Rembrandt's range as an artist was enormous. He was master not only of painting but also of drawing and of the demanding technique of etching for prints. (It is said that Rembrandt went out sketching with an etcher's needle as other artists might carry a pencil.) Besides the many portraits, the artist displayed unparalleled genius in other themes, including landscapes and religious scenes.

In 1642 Rembrandt's fortunes again changed, but this time for the worse. Saskia died not long after giving birth to Titus. The artist's financial affairs were in great disarray, no doubt partly because of his self-indulgence in buying art and precious objects. Although he continued to work and to earn money, Rembrandt showed little talent for money management. Ultimately he was forced into bankruptcy and had to sell not only his art collection but even Saskia's burial plot. About 1649 Hendrickje Stoffels came to live with Rembrandt, and she is thought of as his second wife, although they did not marry legally. She joined forces with Titus to form an art dealership in an attempt to protect the artist from his creditors. Capping the long series of tragedies that marked Rembrandt's later life, Hendrickje died in 1663 and Titus in 1668, a year before his father.

Rembrandt's legacy is almost totally a visual one. He does not seem to have written much. Ironically, one of the few recorded comments comes in a letter to a patron, begging for payment—payment for paintings that are now considered priceless and hang in one of the world's great museums. "I pray you my kind lord that my warrant might now be prepared at once so that I may now at last receive my well-earned 1244 guilders and I shall always seek to recompense your lordship for this with reverential service and proof of friendship."<sup>5</sup>

Rembrandt. *Self-Portrait with Saskia in the Parable of the Prodigal Son*. c. 1635–39.

Oil on canvas, 5'3½" × 4'3½".

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.

RELATED WORKS



3.18 Vermeer,  
*Woman Holding a Balance*

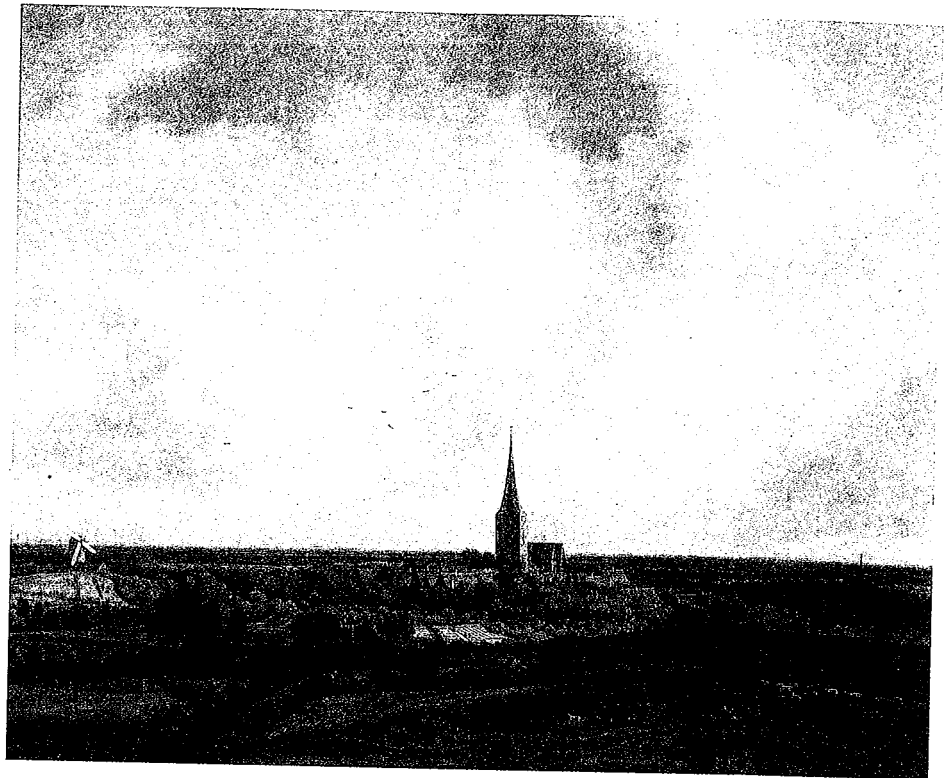
**17.13** Judith Leyster. *Carousing Couple*. 1630. Oil on panel, 26¾ × 22¾".  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

remember it any differently. It was only when the work was cleaned in the mid-20th century that the light-filled painting we know today reemerged. Even now, though, some members of the group can be seen more clearly than others, and viewers have often wondered how that could have been acceptable to the militia. Documents have revealed that each member contributed to the commission according to how prominently he would appear in the finished painting, and history records no complaints about the results.

The 17th century was the great age of Dutch **genre** painting—painting that focused on scenes of everyday life—and during her lifetime, Judith Leyster was highly regarded as a genre painter. After her death, however, she was virtually forgotten. Paintings from her hand made their way into important collections, but many seem to have been attributed to another (in our time, far better known) Dutch painter, Frans Hals. Leyster had studied with Hals; thus, the confusion is not altogether surprising. Still, her disappearance from art history prevailed for some two centuries. Then, in 1893, a Dutch art historian who had just sold a “Hals” to the Louvre museum in Paris discovered Leyster’s distinctive monogram on the canvas. Since then, other works by “Hals” have been reattributed to Leyster.

*Carousing Couple* (17.13) is Leyster’s version of a standard genre subject, the “merry company” scene. Looking more than a little tipsy, a man grins blurrily at us as he plays a viol—probably none too steadily. His companion holds up a glass and lifts a tankard of wine, suggesting just one more. Merry company scenes look like great good fun, and they can leave us with the idea that 17th-century Holland was a rollicking place. But the scene would have carried a warning for its original audience. The young man is being led astray, and we are supposed to fear that he may give himself over to a life of pleasure instead of pursuing a life of good, productive work. It is difficult to say how seriously artists and their audience took such stern





moralizing, however. The woman here whose wiles are presumably to be condemned is in all likelihood a self-portrait of the artist!

The 17th century was also a great period for landscape painting in the Netherlands. Typical of Dutch landscape painting was the work of Jacob van Ruisdael. Van Ruisdael's *Extensive Landscape with a View of the Town of Ootmarsum* (17.14) shows not only the famed flatness of the Dutch landscape but also the artist's reaction to that flatness as an expression of the immense, limitless grandeur of nature. The artist makes a contrast between the land—where human order has been established in the form of buildings and cultivation—and the sky, with its billowing clouds, yielding to the wind, which mere people can never tame. The horizon line is set quite low, and, significantly, only the church steeple rises up in silhouette against the sky, perhaps symbolizing that humankind's one connection with the majesty of nature is through the church.

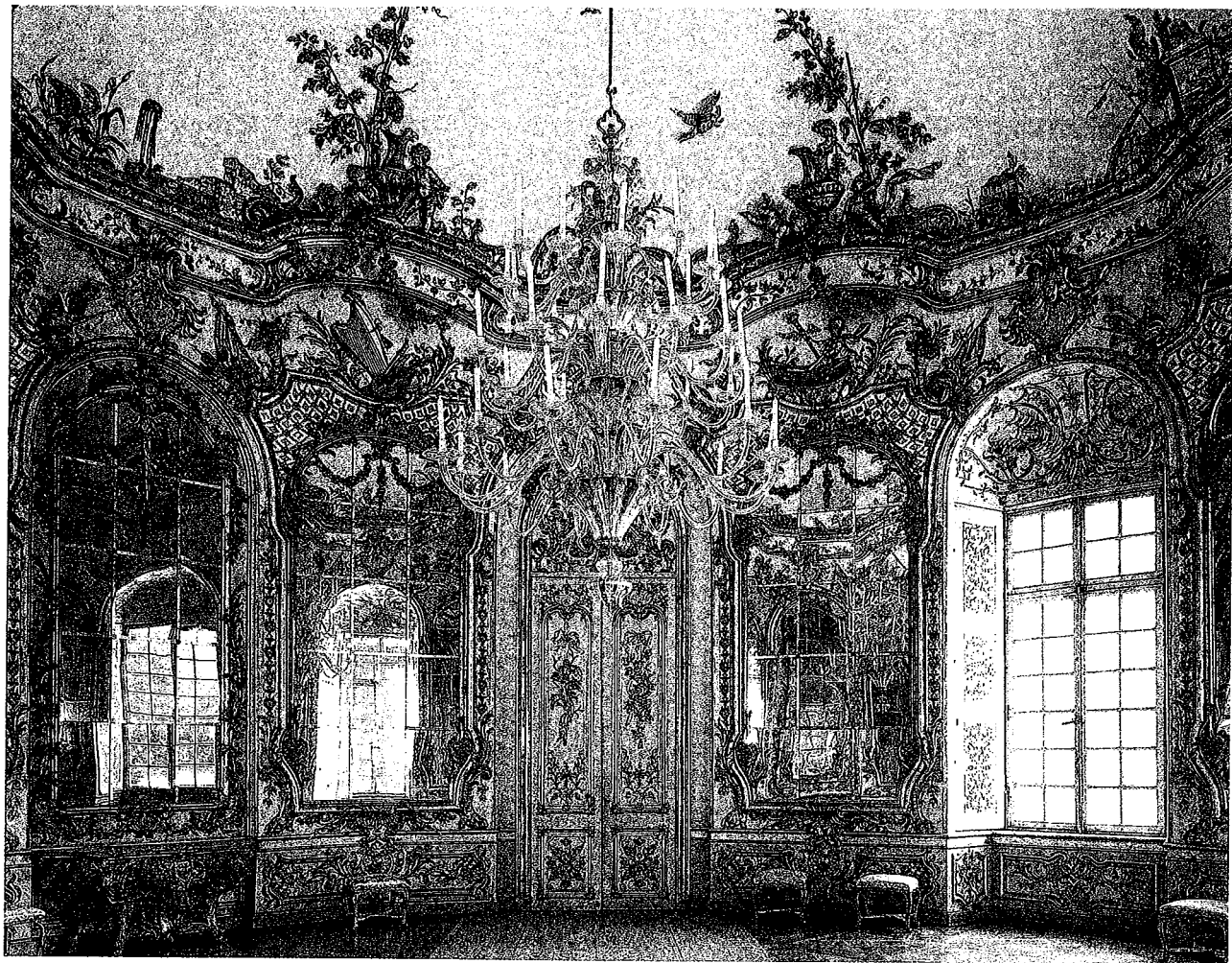
Despite this emphasis on the church building, Van Ruisdael's art is essentially secular, as is that of Leyster and Rembrandt. Although religious subjects continued to appear in art—and do so even now—never again would religious art dominate as it did in the Renaissance and Italian Baroque periods. No doubt, this is largely because of the change in sponsorship; popes and cardinals became less important as patrons, while kings, wealthy merchants, and the bourgeoisie became more so. We can follow this increasing secularization of art as we move out of the 17th century into the 18th.

## The 18th Century

The first half to three-quarters of the 18th century is often thought of as the age of **Rococo**—a development and extension of the Baroque style. The term "rococo" was a play on the word "baroque," but it also refers to the French words for "rocks" and "shells," forms that appeared as decorative motifs in architecture, in furniture, and occasionally in painting. Like the Baroque, Rococo is an extravagant, ornate style, but there are several points of contrast. Baroque, especially in the South, was an art of cathedrals and palaces;

17.14 Jacob van Ruisdael. *View of Ootmarsum*. c. 1660-65. Oil on canvas, 23¼ × 28⅞".

Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



**17.15** François Cuvilliés the Elder.  
Mirror Room, Amalienburg. 1734–39.  
Nymphenburg Park, Munich.

Rococo is more intimate, suitable for the aristocratic home and the drawing room. Baroque colors are intense; Rococo leans more toward the gentle pastels. Baroque is large in scale, massive, dramatic; Rococo has a smaller scale and a lighthearted, playful quality.

The Rococo style of architecture originated in France but was soon exported. We find some of the most developed examples in Germany, especially in Bavaria. The Mirror Room of the Amalienburg, a little house in Nymphenburg Park near Munich (17.15), demonstrates amply why the word “rococo” has come to mean “elaborate and profuse.” Designed by a Frenchman, François Cuvilliés the Elder, the Mirror Room is a perfect riot of sinuous, twisting, almost visibly *growing* decorative forms. The line between walls and ceiling has been obscured deliberately to create the illusion of “sky” above the room. Large arched mirrors multiply the effect of playful design everywhere the eye might focus. Rococo was above all a sophisticated style, and the Amalienburg shows us the height of that sophistication.

Sophistication was paramount in painting as well. In Chapter 4, we looked at *Embarkation for Cythera* by Jean-Antoine Watteau (see 4.10). Painted in 1718, it stands at the very beginning of the Rococo style. The dreamlike world Watteau invented must have appealed to French aristocrats weary of the formal grandeur of Versailles and the ceremonial character of daily life there. Even the new king, Louis XV, seems to have found his role exhausting, for he created within the palace a modest apartment that he could escape to and live, if only for a few hours, like a simple (if rather well off) gentleman.

Just over half a century later, the aging king’s mistress, the Countess du Barry, commissioned one of the last masterpieces of Rococo art, a set of four large paintings by Jean-Honoré Fragonard called *The Progress of Love*, of which we illustrate *The Pursuit* (17.16). Through a lushly overgrown garden

#### RELATED WORKS



4.10 Watteau, *Embarkation For Cythera*

on the grounds of some imaginary estate, an ardent youth chases after the girl who has captured his heart. He holds out to her a single flower, plucked from the abundance that surrounds them. She, surprised while sitting with her friends, flees, but so prettily that we know it is all a game. She will surely not run *too* fast. Above, a statue of two cupids seems to participate, watching over this latest demonstration of their powers to see how it will all turn out.

Madame du Barry had commissioned the paintings to decorate a new pavilion she had just had built on her estate. Although Fragonard never painted a lovelier set of works, his patron rejected them. She considered them too old-fashioned and sentimental. Rococo taste had run its course. Seriousness was now in vogue, together with an artistic style called Neoclassicism ("new classicism"). Since 1748, excavations at the Roman sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum in Italy had been uncovering wonders such as the wall paintings we looked at in Chapter 14 (see 14.31). Patrons and artists across Europe were newly fascinated by the Classical past, and their interest was encouraged by rulers and social thinkers hoping to foster civic virtues such as patriotism, stoicism, self-sacrifice, and frugality—virtues they associated with the Roman Republic.

**17.16** Jean-Honoré Fragonard.  
*The Pursuit*, from *The Progress of Love*.  
1771–73, 1790–91. Oil on canvas,  
height approx. 10'5".  
The Frick Collection, New York.

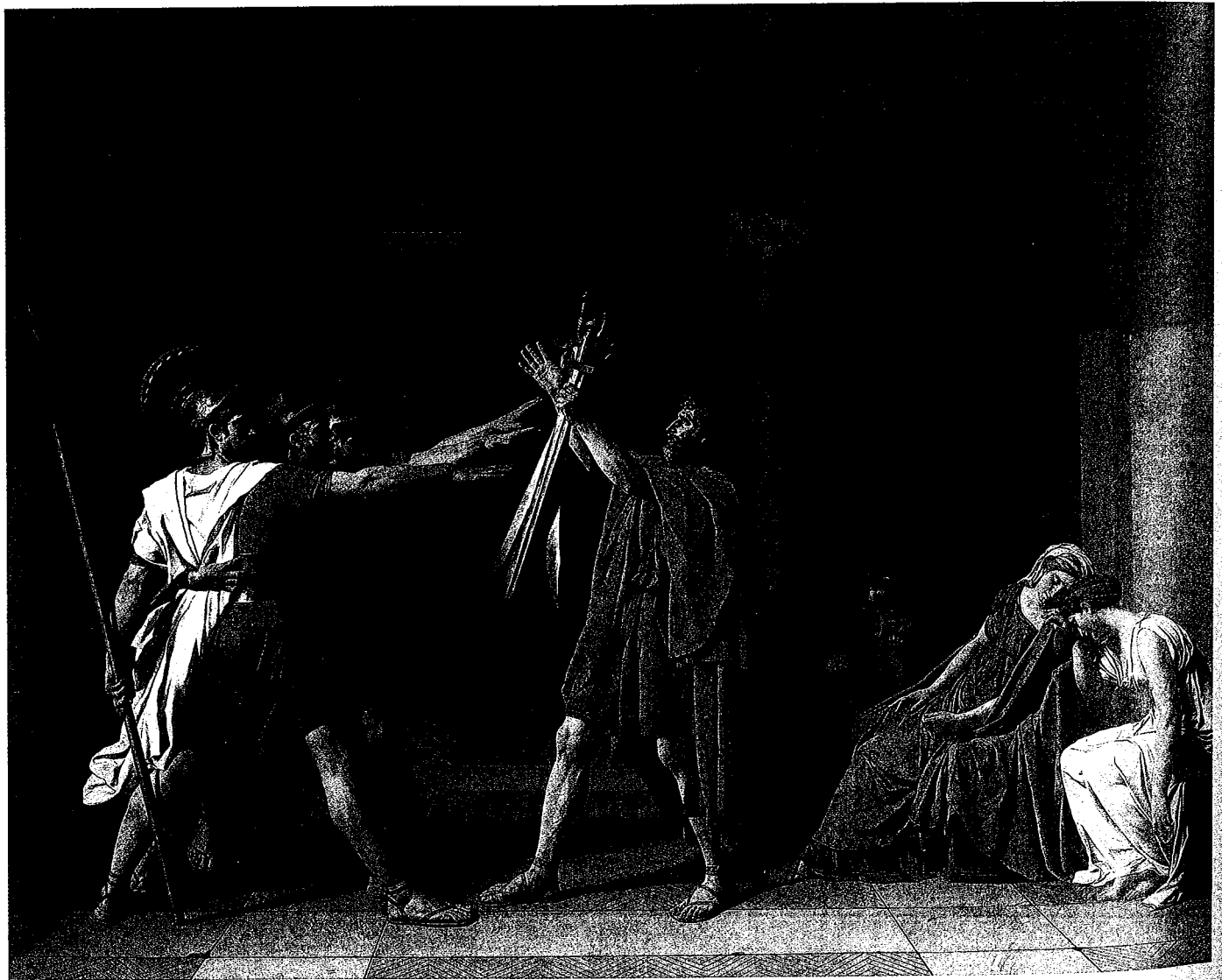


Among the many young artists who flocked to Italy to absorb the influence at first hand was a young painter named Jacques-Louis David. Upon his return to France, David quickly established himself as an artist of great potential, and it was none other than the new king, Louis XVI, who commissioned his first resounding critical success, *The Oath of the Horatii* (17.17).

The painting depicts the stirring moment when three Roman brothers, the Horatii of the painting's title, swear before their father to fight to the death three brothers from the enemy camp, the Curiatii, thus sacrificing themselves to spare their fellow citizens an all-out war. The subject combines great patriotism with great pathos, for as David's audience would have known, one of the Horatii was married to a sister of the Curiatii, and one of the Curiatii was engaged to a sister of the Horatii. David paints these two women at the right. They are overcome with emotion, knowing that tragedy is the only possible outcome. In fact, of the six brothers, only one, one of the Horatii, will survive the bloody combat. Arriving home, he finds his sister in mourning for her slain fiancé. Outraged at her sorrow, he kills her.

Gone are the lush gardens and pastel colors of the Rococo. In their place, David has conceived an austere architectural setting beyond which there is merely darkness. Spread across the shallow foreground space, the dramatically lit figures are portrayed in profile as though carved in relief. The creamy

**17.17** Jacques-Louis David. *The Oath of the Horatii*. 1784–85. Oil on canvas, approx. 11 × 14'.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.



## THINKING ABOUT ART Academies



Why would artists want to be accepted by academies? What are some of the accomplishments that academies encouraged? Are there limitations and labels which academies create that would hinder artistic expression?

The painting depicted here is a still life by the 18th-century French artist Jean-Siméon Chardin. Chardin's career followed a typical path for his time and place. After completing his artistic training, he presented a group of his works for consideration by the Royal Academy of Painters and Sculptors, a powerful organization sponsored by the king. A committee judged his paintings worthy, and he was accepted into the Academy as a "painter of animals and fruits." As a member of the Academy, Chardin was entitled to show his paintings in a biennial exhibition called the Salon, thus gaining attention and attracting commissions. He became an officer of the Academy, and then its treasurer. Eventually, the king granted him a small yearly stipend along with a place to live in the Louvre Palace. Later in life he was even placed in charge of hanging the Salon show, a delicate task that required the skills of a diplomat.

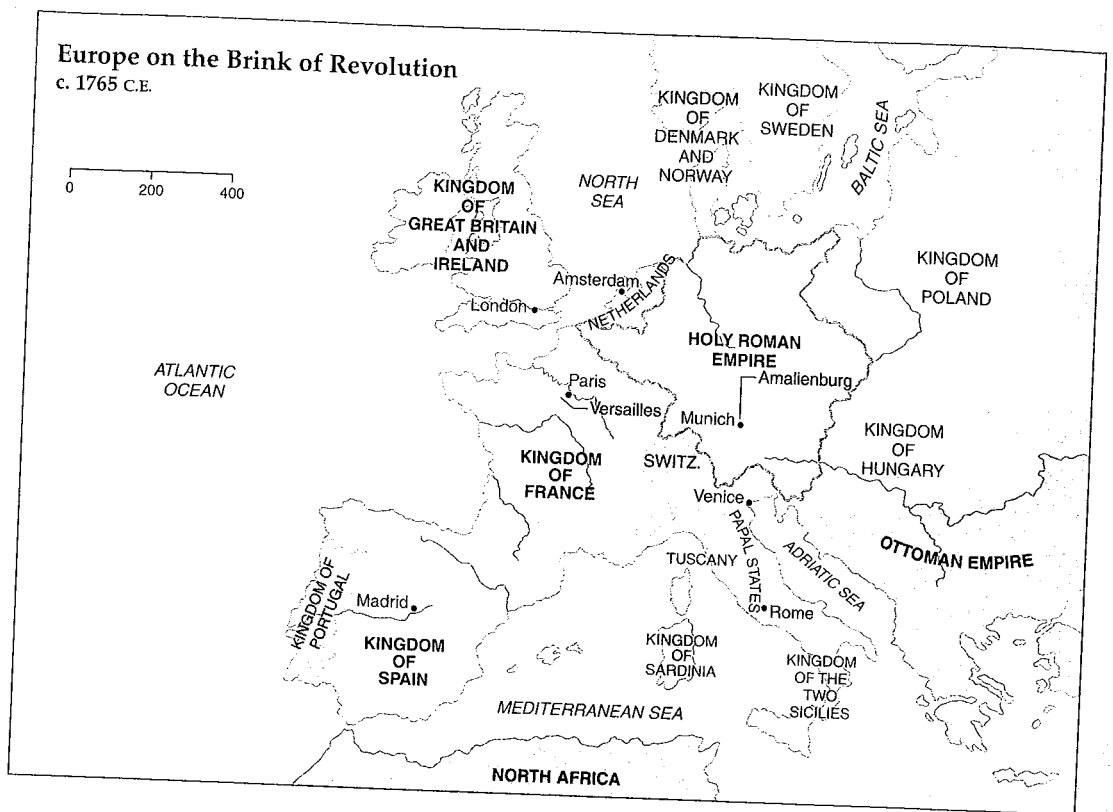
Academies were one of the many ways in which Renaissance humanists had attempted to revive Classical culture. Their model was the celebrated Academy of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, which earned its name from the park in Athens where the brilliant

thinker met with his students, the Akademeia. Early Renaissance academies were private, informal gatherings that brought small groups of scholars and artists together to discuss ideas. In 1561, however, the artist Giorgio Vasari persuaded Cosimo de' Medici, a wealthy art patron, to sponsor a formal academy devoted to art, the Academy of Design, in Florence. By founding the first public academy, Vasari sought to underscore the prestige of art as an intellectual endeavor and to solidify the social status that artists had achieved during the Renaissance. Over the course of the next two centuries, art academies were founded across Europe. By the close of the 18th century, they were at the center of artistic life.

Academies were inherently conservative. Their aim was to maintain official standards of skill and taste by perpetuating models of greatness from the past, especially the Classical past. Although women artists could often be accepted as members, only men could enroll as students, for academic training revolved around mastering the human figure, and it was deemed improper for young girls to gaze upon naked models. Students began by copying drawings, then advanced to drawing fragments of Classical statues— isolated heads, feet, torsos. They learned to draw gestures, poses, and facial expressions that expressed all variety of dramatic situations and emotions. They studied anatomy. Eventually they progressed to drawing from live models. They came to know the human form so thoroughly that they could draw it from memory, creating complex compositions without recourse to models at all.

This emphasis on mastering the human form was linked to the belief that the greatest subject for art was history, including biblical and mythological scenes, historical events, and episodes from famous literary works. After history, portraiture had the most prestige. Then, in descending order, came genre, still life, and landscape. These beliefs had direct consequences for painters: Upon his retirement, Chardin asked for a pension, pointing to his twenty years of service as treasurer. He was turned down. The new director of the Academy was an ambitious history painter who thought that Chardin had been far too amply rewarded already. After all, he was only a painter of animals and fruits.

Jean-Siméon Chardin. *A Basket of Wild Strawberries*. c. 1760. Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Private collection.

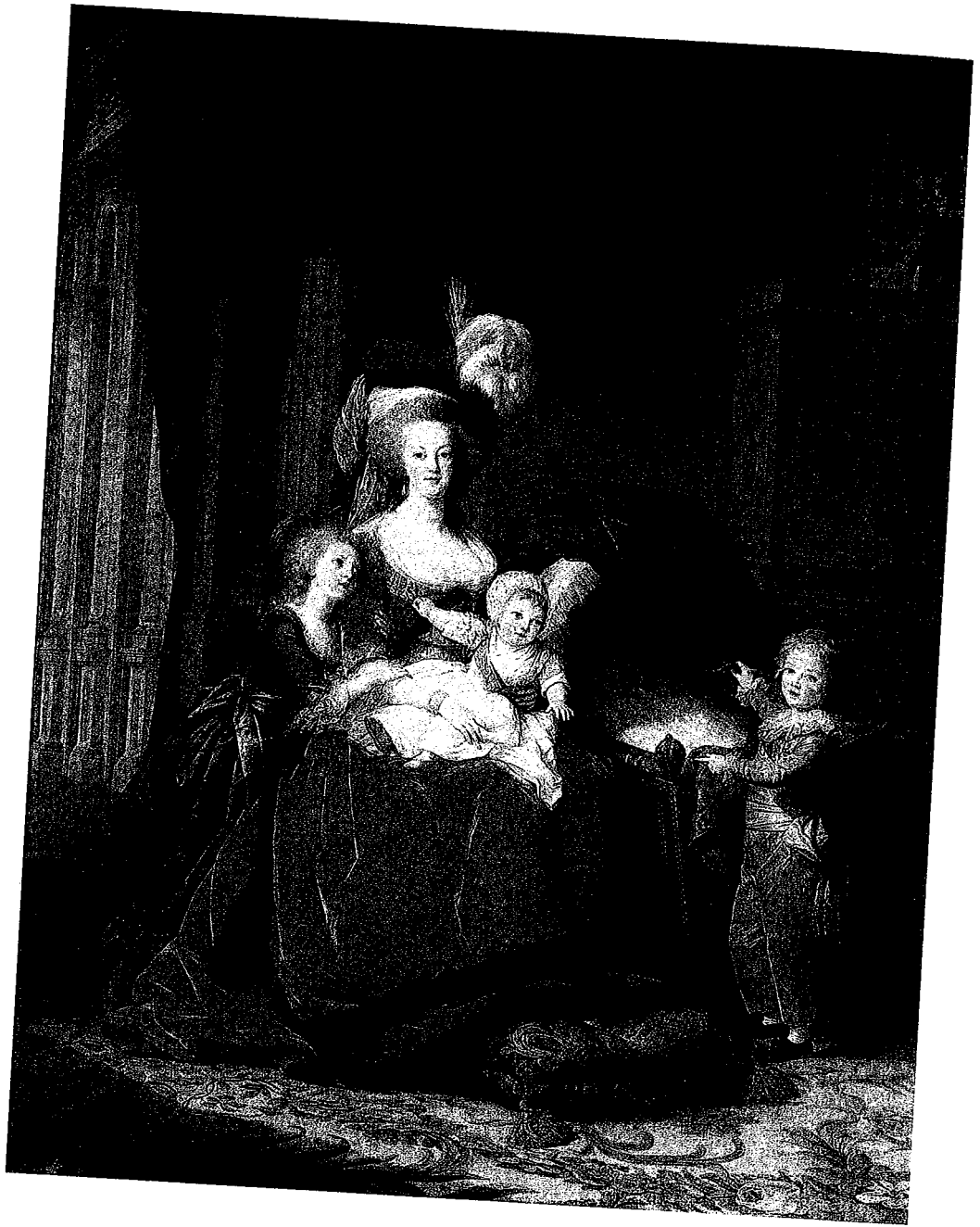


brush strokes and hazy atmosphere of Fragonard have given way to a smooth finish and a cool, clear light. Colors are muted except for the father's tunic, which flows like a river of blood next to the three gleaming swords.

Along with the stern "Roman family values" promoted by Neoclassicism, the late 18th century was under the spell of a new taste for simplicity and naturalness. One of the people most taken by the new informality was Louis XVI's queen, Marie-Antoinette. Another advocate of all that was unaffected was the queen's favorite portrait painter, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Inspired in part by the sparseness of classical costume (note the women in David's painting) and in part by an ideal of the "innocent country girl," Vigée-Lebrun coaxed her highborn models into posing in airy white muslin dresses, their hair falling loosely about their shoulders, a straw bonnet tied with a satin ribbon on their head, and a flower or two in their hands.

The image confirmed the public's worst suspicions: Their queen was frivolous and flirtatious. In an attempt to repair the queen's reputation, Vigée-Lebrun was asked to paint a different sort of portrait, *Marie-Antoinette and Her Children* (17.18). Here, Marie-Antoinette is portrayed as a devoted and beloved mother. She is a woman who knows that her place is in the home, not meddling in politics or advertising her charms. In a gesture meant to tug at viewers' heartstrings, her elder son, the heir to the throne, draws our attention to an empty cradle; his youngest sibling had recently died in infancy. The queen's formal velvet gown and the glimpse of the fabled Hall of Mirrors in the background are meant to convey that she is aware of the seriousness of her position and fully capable of the quiet dignity needed to fulfill it.

It was too late. Far too much damage had already been done for a single painting to repair. The nation was teetering on the brink of financial disaster. Popular opinion blamed the deficit on the queen's extravagant ways and suspected her as well of shocking personal vices. Vigée-Lebrun herself tells us that when the frame for the large canvas was carried into the Salon, where the painting was to be shown to the public for the first time, voices were heard saying, "There is the deficit."



Although Vigée-Lebrun later made several copies of her own portraits of the queen, she never again painted Marie-Antoinette from life. Within two years, revolution had swept the country, ultimately destroying the monarchy and the aristocracy. The artist fled and took refuge outside France. The queen died by the guillotine.

**17.18** Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.  
*Marie-Antoinette and Her Children.*  
1787. Oil on canvas, 8'8" × 6'10".  
Palace of Versailles, France.

## Revolution

The leaders of the French Revolution continued to evoke the example of Rome and to admire Roman civic virtues. Neoclassicism became the official style of the Revolution and Jacques-Louis David its official artist. David served the Revolution as propaganda minister and director of festivals. As a deputy to the Convention of 1792, he was among those who voted to send his former patron Louis XVI to the guillotine. One of the events orchestrated

## ARTISTS Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842)



How does the artist display her steadfast and calm personality in her self-portrait? In her other works? What about her style attracts the attention of patrons and aristocratic clients?

From her self-portrait she gazes directly at us, her viewers—calm, self-possessed, sure of her talent, sure of her place in the world. Her chalk is poised over the canvas; we have momentarily interrupted her work on a portrait. She will not be interrupted for long. Throughout her remarkable life, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun knew where she was going and remained steadfast on that path.

Born in Paris, the daughter of a portrait painter, Elisabeth Vigée was convent-educated and encouraged from an early age to draw and paint. At eleven she began serious art studies. After her father's untimely death, Elisabeth resolved to work as a painter, and by age fifteen she was her family's chief financial support. Patrons flocked to her studio, eager to have their portraits done by the young artist, and her fees multiplied.

One dark spot was her mother's remarriage, to a man who seems mainly to have coveted his stepdaughter's income. Because of this unpleasant circumstance, Elisabeth made the one real mistake of her life. Although she "felt no manner of inclination

for matrimony," she succumbed to her mother's urgings and accepted the proposal of Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Lebrun, hoping "to escape from the torture of living with my stepfather." Alas for the twenty-year-old artist, she had merely "exchanged present troubles for others." Lebrun was "quite an agreeable person," but, his wife soon discovered, "his furious passion for gambling was at the bottom of the ruin of his fortune and my own." The happiest result of the union was Vigée-Lebrun's only child, her daughter Julie.

Neither marriage nor motherhood interfered with the artist's burgeoning career and social life. By all evidence she was lovely, witty, charming, and perfectly at home in any company. Quite independent of her husband, she entertained a growing circle of aristocratic friends, many of whom commissioned portraits. In 1779 a summons came from the Palace of Versailles. Marie-Antoinette sought her services, and Vigée-Lebrun made the first of some twenty portraits of the queen. The two women became friends—a splendid advantage for the artist initially, but a dangerous liability as resentment of the monarchy grew. When revolution came in 1789, Vigée-Lebrun fled the country, taking Julie with her. Lebrun was left behind forever.

Then commenced Vigée-Lebrun's twelve years of "exile" from France. And what an exile it was! She traveled first to Rome and Vienna, then to St. Petersburg and Moscow, spending six years altogether in czarist Russia. Wherever she went she was treated like visiting royalty, entertained lavishly, invited to join the local painters' Academy. Wherever she went she was overwhelmed with portrait commissions. Kings and queens, princesses, counts, duchesses—she painted them all, in between the elaborate dinners and balls to which they invited her. In her memoirs she tells us she missed painting Catherine the Great because the empress died just before the first scheduled sitting.

In 1801 the furies of the revolution having abated, Vigée-Lebrun returned to Paris. She had not, however, quite satisfied her urge to travel. Only after a three-year stay in London and two visits to Switzerland did she finally settle down to write her memoirs and paint the survivors of the French nobility. She died in her eighty-seventh year, having painted more than 660 portraits. Her memoirs conclude with these words: "I hope to end peacefully a wandering and even a laborious but honest life."<sup>6</sup> And she did.

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. *Self-Portrait*. 1800. Oil on canvas, 31 × 26¾". State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

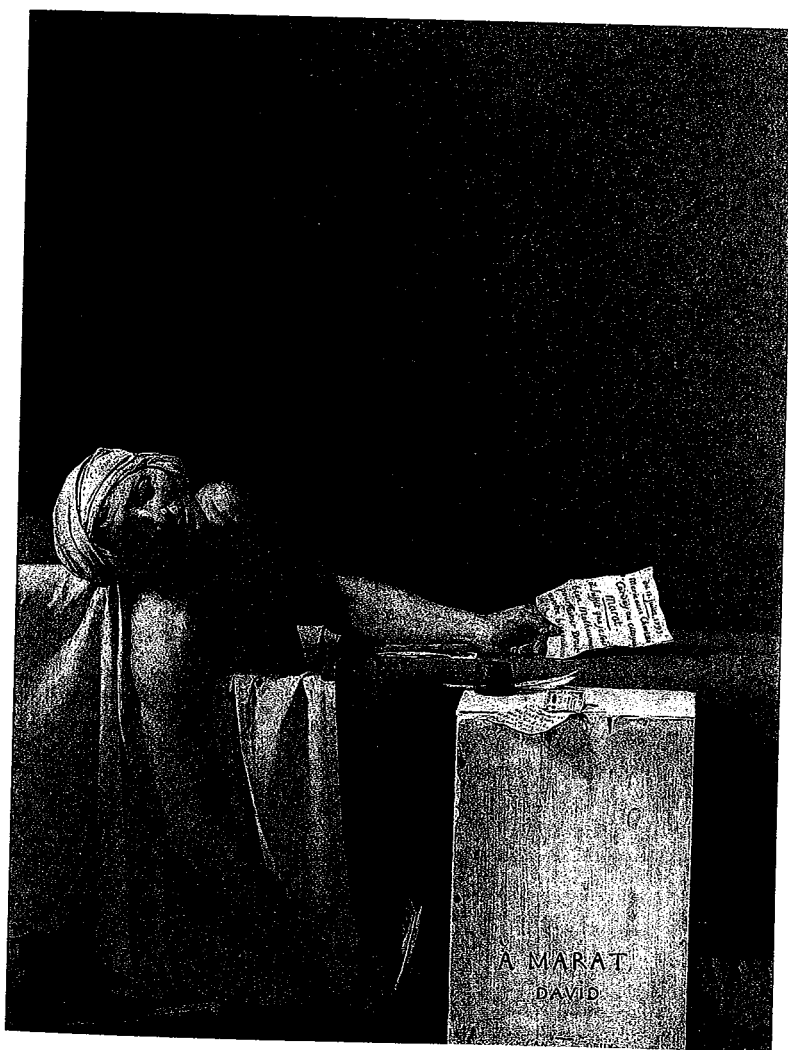
by David was the funeral of the revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat. David staged the exhibition of Marat's embalmed cadaver to the public, and he memorialized the leader's death in what has become his most famous painting, *The Death of Marat* (17.19).

A major figure in the Revolution, Jean-Paul Marat pursued the goal of wiping out France's greedy and corrupt aristocracy. He was responsible for the execution by guillotine of hundreds of people. Because of a painful skin ailment, Marat spent his days in the bathtub, which was fitted out with a writing desk so he could work, and there he received callers. A woman named Charlotte Corday, incensed by Marat's excesses with the guillotine, gained entry to his apartment and stabbed him to death.

In lesser hands Marat's demise could have been laughable—a naked man murdered in his tub by a furious woman caller. But David has invested the event with all the pathos and dignity of Christ being lowered into his tomb. (Compare Caravaggio's *Entombment*, 17.6.) Marat is shown, in effect, as a kind of secular Christ martyred for the Revolution. All the forms are concentrated in the lower half of the composition, and light bathes the fallen leader in an unearthly glow, both of these devices contributing to the sense of tragedy. Marat's face and body could be those of a fallen Greek warrior, sculpted in marble by an ancient master. David's purpose in this work was to transform a man whom many considered Satan himself into a sainted hero. He projected the image the leaders of the Revolution wished to have of themselves, just as Vigée-Lebrun's art had projected the image desired by the French monarchs.

Two other revolutions occurred at more or less the same time as that in France. One was the American Revolution, preceding the French by thirteen years. During the relatively brief period covered by this chapter, the

17.19 Jacques-Louis David.  
*The Death of Marat*. 1793. Oil on  
canvas, 5'5" × 4'2½".  
Musée d'Art Ancien, Musées Royaux des  
Beaux-Arts, Brussels.





**17.20** John Singleton Copley.  
*Paul Revere*. 1768–70. Oil on canvas,  
35 × 28½".  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

American colonists had progressed from the “starving time” of Jamestown to a nation of people capable of independence and self-government. During that time also, the area that was to become the United States had developed its own artistic styles. And by the eve of the Revolution, the colonies had their own master artist, born on home soil—John Singleton Copley.

Born in Boston, Copley would paint many people who later became heroes of the Revolution, including *Paul Revere* (17.20). Legend and poetry have preserved the image of Paul Revere taking his “midnight ride” on horseback, from Boston to Concord, to warn his fellow colonists that “the British are coming!” In his day, however, Revere was better known as a silversmith. The artist poses him with a silver teapot in one hand, the tools of his trade scattered elegantly on the table.

Copley’s portrait is in much the same Neoclassical style as David’s tribute to Marat. The subject sits quietly behind his table, gazing straight toward us. We as viewers might be seated just opposite him. Although he is dressed informally, Revere shows great dignity and an obvious pride in his work. Copley has rendered his subject’s features, the garments, and the polished tabletop with wonderful fidelity. We sense fullness, a three-dimensional volume, in the body and especially in the hand clasping the teapot.

The third revolution of this time was not a political uprising but an economic and social upheaval. Many would argue that the Industrial Revolution, which began slowly in the last half of the 18th century, is still going on.

It is difficult to overestimate the impact—social, economic, and ultimately political—of the change from labor done by hand to labor done by machine. Within the space of a few decades, the machine drastically altered a way of life that had prevailed for millennia. People who had formerly worked in their homes or on farms suddenly were herded together in factories, creating a new social class—the industrial worker. Fortunes were made virtually overnight by members of another new class—the manufacturers. Naturally, all this upheaval was reflected in art. At the beginning of the 19th century, then, Western civilization faced a totally new world.

# Arts of Islam and of Africa

The ancient civilizations discussed in Chapter 14 culminated with the growth of the Roman Empire, which by 100 c.e. encompassed the entire Mediterranean region. Chapter 15 saw the empire divided into eastern and western halves after the death of the emperor Constantine. The eastern portion continued for a time as Byzantium. The western portion, after an unstable period, emerged as Europe, which we left in the last chapter on the brink of our own modern age. But what of the Roman lands along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, the lands of North Africa, Egypt, the Near East, and Mesopotamia? The answer is the religious culture of Islam, and thus it is with Islam that our brief exploration of artistic traditions beyond the West begins. (The story of Western art resumes with Chapter 21.)

## Arts of Islam

Islam arose during the early 7th century c.e. on the Arabian Peninsula. There, according to Islamic belief, God—who had spoken through such prophets as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—spoke directly to humanity for the last time. Through the angel Gabriel, He revealed His word to the Prophet Muhammad. Stunned by the revelations, Muhammad began to preach. At the heart of his message was *islam*, Arabic for “submission,” meaning submission to God. Those who accepted Muhammad’s teachings were called Muslims, “those who submit.” Collected and set in order after his death, the revelations Muhammad recited make up the Qur’an (“recitation”), the holy book of Islam.

In 622 Muhammad emigrated from the city of Mecca northward to the city of Medina. Known as the *hijra*, this move marks the year 1 in the Islamic calendar, the beginning of a new era. Muhammad became a political leader in Medina as well as a spiritual one, and much of the Arabian Peninsula was brought into the Islamic community. After Muhammad’s death in 632, his successors led Arab armies to victory after victory, and by the middle of the 8th century, Islamic rule extended from Spain and Morocco in the west to the borders of India in the east.

Islam transformed the Arab peoples from a collection of warring tribes with a largely oral culture to a people united by faith, anchored by the written word, and sovereign over vast territories. These new conditions nurtured the growth of a new artistic culture. The need for places to worship and palaces for rulers inspired works of monumental architecture; the establishment