

## 18th century. France and Venice

**Antoine Watteau** (1684 – 1721) was a French painter whose brief career spurred the revival of interest in colour and movement, as seen in the tradition of Correggio and Rubens. He revitalised the waning Baroque style, shifting it to the less severe, more naturalistic, less formally classical, Rococo. Watteau is credited with inventing the genre of *fêtes galantes*, scenes of bucolic and idyllic charm, suffused with a theatrical air. Some of his best known subjects were drawn from the world of Italian comedy and ballet.



***The Love Song*** c1717



***The Embarkation for Cythera*** 1717

The *Embarkation for Cythera* portrays a "fête galante"; an amorous celebration or party enjoyed by the aristocracy of France during the Régence after the death of Louis XIV, which is generally seen as a period of dissipation and pleasure, and peace, after the sombre last years of the previous reign.

The work celebrates love, with many cupids flying around the couples and pushing them closer together, as well as the statue of Venus. There are three pairs of lovers in the foreground. While the couple on the right by the statue are still engaged in their passionate tryst, another couple rises to follow a third pair down the hill, although the woman of the third pair glances back fondly at the goddess's sacred grove. At the foot of the hill, several more happy couples are preparing to board the golden boat at the left. With its light and wispy brushstrokes, the hazy landscape in the background does not give any clues about the season, or whether it is dawn or dusk.

It has often been noted that, despite the title, the people on the island seem to be leaving rather than arriving, especially since they have already paired up. Many art historians have come up with a variety of interpretations of the allegory of the voyage to the island of love. Watteau himself purposely did not give an answer.



***Pierrot - 'Gilles'*** c1718-19

The subject of his hallmark painting, *Pierrot (Gilles)*, is an actor in a white satin costume who stands isolated from his four companions, staring ahead with an enigmatic expression on his face.

**Nicolas Lancret** (1690 – 14 1743), French painter, was born in Paris, and became a brilliant depicter of light comedy which reflected the tastes and manners of French society.

Although he completed several portraits and historical pieces his favourite subjects were balls, fairs, village weddings and so forth. In this respect he was typical of Rococo artists. Some have claimed Lancret's work is significantly inferior to that of Watteau. In drawing and in painting his touch is often considered intelligent but dry; art historian Michael Levey remarked that Lancret was 'no poet but a charming essayist'.

It is generally considered that the artist produced his best work towards the latter end of his life, displaying, in the minds of several art historians, an increasing ability to create a sense of harmony between art and nature.



**Marie-Anne de Camargo** 1730

Marie-Anne de Camargo (1710 – 1770) sometimes known simply as La Camargo, was a French dancer. The first woman to execute the *entrechat quatre*, Camargo was also allegedly responsible for two innovations in ballet as she was one of the first dancers to wear slippers instead of heeled shoes, and, while there is no evidence that she was the first woman to wear the short calf-length ballet skirt and the now standardized ballet tights, she did help to popularize these.



**Le Déjeuner de Jambon** 1735



**A Lady in a Garden Taking coffee  
with some Children**

Lancret's last painting, **Family in a Garden**, The National Gallery, is considered by Levey to be his 'masterpiece'. The scene, which depicts a family taking coffee, has an intimacy and hint of humour that are considered captivating. The work's flowing lines, Rococoesque harmony of pastel colours, painterly style and charming subject matter (of a wide eyed young girl, surrounded by her happy family and natural, yet un-threatening setting, trying her first taste of coffee) are seen to display a delicate sense of vitality and freshness that anticipate the works of both Thomas Gainsborough and Jean-Honoré Fragonard.

**Louis-François Roubiliac** (1702 – 1762) was a French sculptor who worked in England, one of the four most prominent sculptors in London working in the rococo style, He was described by Margaret Whinney as "probably the most accomplished sculptor ever to work in England"



**Handel** 1738

In 1738 he had a great success with a seated figure of Handel, commissioned by Jonathan Tyers, owner of the Vauxhall Gardens. The statue blends realism and allegory: Handel is shown in modern dress, but plays an Ancient Greek lyre, and has a putto sitting at his feet. It is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Its prominent placement in the fashionable pleasure grounds "fixed Roubiliac's fame" as Walpole put it, and he was able to open the studio in St Martin's Lane that he maintained until his death. Roubiliac was a founding member of the St Martin's Lane Academy, a professional association and fraternity of rococo artists that was a forerunner to the Royal Academy. His studio in St Martin's Lane became its meeting room; its members came together again for his funeral.

**Giovanni Antonio Canal** (1697 – 1768), better known as **Canaletto**, was an Italian painter of city views of Venice. He also painted imaginary views (referred to as capricci), although the demarcation in his works between the real and the imaginary is never quite clearcut. He was further an important printmaker using the etching technique. In the period from 1746 to 1756 he worked in England where he created many sights of London. He was highly successful in England, thanks to the British merchant and connoisseur Joseph Smith, whose large collection of Canaletto's works was sold to King George III in 1762.

Much of Canaletto's early artwork was painted "from nature", differing from the then customary practice of completing paintings in the studio. Some of his later works do revert to this custom, as suggested by the tendency for distant figures to be painted as blobs of colour – an effect produced by using a camera obscura, which blurs farther-away objects - although research by art historians working for the Royal Collection in the United Kingdom has shown Canaletto almost never used a camera obscura.

However, his paintings are always notable for their accuracy: he recorded the seasonal submerging of Venice in water and ice.



***The Stonemason's Yard*** c1725



***Arrival of the French Ambassador  
at the Doge's Palace***

*The Stonemason's Yard* is an early oil painting by Canaletto. Painted in the mid to late 1720s, it is considered one of Canaletto's finest works.

In addition to the architectural details, *The Stonemason's Yard* shows scenes of daily life in Venice, probably in the early morning: a cock crows on a windowsill to the lower left, and sunlight streams in from the left behind the viewer's (east). The mainly domestic buildings are generally in poor repair, with typical Venetian flared chimney-pots. Laundry hangs from many of the windows, and pot plants stand on several balconies. One woman is using a distaff and drop spindle to spin thread on a balcony to the right; another draws water from a well in the campo beside a wooden shed, from a well-head shaped like the capital of a column. Two children are playing in the foreground to the left: one is falling over and urinating involuntarily in surprise, as a woman lunges forward to catch him; another woman looks down from a balcony above. A gondola with canopied cabin passes on the canal, with others moored on either bank.

Later Canaletto painted grand scenes of the canals of Venice and the Doge's Palace. His large-scale landscapes portrayed the city's pageantry and waning traditions, making innovative use of atmospheric effects and strong local colors. For these qualities, his works may be said to have anticipated Impressionism.



***Kings College Chapel, Cambridge***



***Warwick Castle*** 1748

**Giovanni Battista Tiepolo** (1696 – 1770), was an Italian painter and printmaker from the Republic of Venice. He was prolific, and worked not only in Italy, but also in Germany and Spain. Successful from the beginning of his career, he has been described by Michael Levey as "the greatest decorative painter of eighteenth-century Europe, as well as its most able craftsman."



His *Allegory of the Planets and Continents* depicts Apollo embarking on his daily course; deities around him symbolize the planets; allegorical figures (on the cornice) represent the four continents. He included several portraits in the Europe section of this fresco, including a self-portrait; one of his son Giandomenico; one of the prince-bishop von Greiffenklau; one of the painter Antonio Bossi; and one of the architect, Balthasar Neumann

**Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin** (1699 – 1779) was an 18th-century French painter. He is considered a master of still life, and is also noted for his genre paintings which depict kitchen maids, children, and domestic activities. Carefully balanced composition, soft diffusion of light, and granular impasto characterise his work.

Largely self-taught, Chardin was greatly influenced by the realism and subject matter of the 17th-century Low Country masters.

He worked very slowly and painted only slightly more than 200 pictures (about four a year) total.



*Boy With a Top* c1735



*Le Château de Cartes* 1735-37

Chardin's work had little in common with the Rococo painting that dominated French art in the 18th century. At a time when history painting was considered the supreme classification for public art, Chardin's subjects of choice were viewed as minor categories. He favoured simple yet beautifully textured still lives, and sensitively handled domestic interiors and genre paintings. Simple, even stark, paintings of common household items (*Still Life with a Smoker's Box*) and an uncanny ability to portray children's innocence in an unsentimental manner (*Boy with a Top*) nevertheless found an appreciative audience in his time, and account for his timeless appeal.

A child playing was a favourite subject of Chardin. He depicted an adolescent building a house of cards on at least four occasions. The version at Waddesdon Manor is the most elaborate. Scenes such as these derived from 17th-century Netherlandish vanitas works, which bore messages about the transitory nature of human life and the worthlessness of material ambitions, but Chardin's also display a delight in the ephemeral phases of childhood for their own sake.



***Le Goblet d'argent*** 1760-68



***La Fillette au volant*** 1741

Though his popularity rested initially on paintings of animals and fruit, by the 1730s he introduced kitchen utensils into his work (*The Copper Cistern*, ca.1735, Louvre). Soon figures populated his scenes as well, supposedly in response to a portrait painter who challenged him to take up the genre. *Woman Sealing a Letter* (ca. 1733), which may have been his first attempt, was followed by half-length compositions of children saying grace, as in *Le Bénédicité*, and kitchen maids in moments of reflection. These humble scenes deal with simple, everyday activities, yet they also have functioned as a source of documentary information about a level of French society not hitherto considered a worthy subject for painting. The pictures are noteworthy for their formal structure and pictorial harmony. Chardin has said about painting, "Who said one paints with colours? One employs colours, but one paints with feeling."



***Self Portraits*** 1771 & 1775

**Pietro Longhi** (1702 – 1785) was a Venetian painter of contemporary genre scenes of life. In the late 1730s, he began to specialise in the small-scale genre works that would lead him to be viewed in the future as the Venetian William Hogarth, painting subjects and events of everyday life in Venice.



***Clara the Rhinoceros*** 1751



***The Ridotto in Venice*** c1750

Many of his paintings show Venetians at play, such as the depiction of the crowd of genteel citizens awkwardly gawking at a freakish Indian rhinoceros. This painting, on display at the National Gallery in London, chronicles Clara the rhinoceros brought to Europe in 1741 and exhibited in Venice in 1751. Ultimately, there may be a punning joke to the painting, since the young man on the left holds aloft the sawed off horn (metaphor for cuckoldry) of the animal. Perhaps this explains the difference between the unchaperoned women.

Other paintings chronicle the daily activities such as the gambling parlours (Ridotti) that proliferated in the 18th century. Nearly half of the figures in his genre paintings are faceless, hidden behind Venetian Carnival masks. In some, the insecure or naive posture and circumstance, the puppet-like delicacy of the persons, seem to suggest a satirical perspective of the artist toward his subjects. That this puppet-like quality was an intentional conceit on Longhi's part is attested by the skilful rendering of figures in his earlier history paintings and in his drawings.

In *The Ridotto in Venice* Longhi depicts one of the main gambling halls in Venice. The scene is crowded with masked and unmasked figures. The focal point in this work depicts a now familiar scene of a shy woman and an aggressive man who lifts her dress. Repeating the figures of the flirtatious couple, Longhi displays the *Ridotto* as a place where the social elite — who would not exhibit such behaviour in public nor unmasked—would abandon all inhibitions and pursue their actual desires.

**Francesco Zuccarelli (1702 – 1788) RA**, was an Italian artist of the late Baroque or Rococo period. He is considered to be the most important landscape painter to have emerged from his adopted city of Venice during the mid-eighteenth century, and his Arcadian views became popular throughout Europe and especially in England where he resided for two extended periods.



***Italian Landscape with a Country Festival***



***A View of the River Thames from Richmond Hill Looking towards Twickenham*** c1766

**Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704 – 1788)** was a French Rococo portraitist who worked primarily with pastels. Among his most famous subjects were Voltaire, Rousseau, Louis XV

and Madame de Pompadour.



**Self Portrait** c1751      Comparison of portrait styles  
**Parmigianino; Antea (Portrait of a Young Woman)** 1524-27  
**Baldung; Portrait of a Lady** 1530

**François Boucher** (1703 – 1770) was a French painter, draughtsman and etcher, who worked in the Rococo style. Boucher is known for his idyllic and voluptuous paintings on classical themes, decorative allegories, and pastoral scenes. He was perhaps the most celebrated painter and decorative artist of the 18th century. He also painted several portraits of his patroness, Madame de Pompadour.

His name, along with that of his patron Madame de Pompadour, had become synonymous with the French Rococo style, leading the Goncourt brothers to write: "Boucher is one of those men who represent the taste of a century, who express, personify and embody it." Boucher is famous for saying that nature is "trop verte et mal éclairée" (too green and badly lit.)



**Madam Pompadour** Sketch 1750, Portrait 1756



**Portrait of Marie-Louise O'Murphy**  
c1752

Marquise de Pompadour (mistress of King Louis XV), whose name became synonymous with Rococo art, was a great admirer of his work. She is often referred to as the "godmother of Rococo."

Contemporary and modern historiography concur in identifying Marie-Louise O'Murphy as the very young model who posed for the *la Jeune Fille allongée* (the Lying Girl), of François Boucher, a famous painting for his undisguised eroticism, dating from 1752. Two versions of this painting have survived, both conserved in Germany. Boucher, at the height of his fame, had made a specialty of these deliberately licentious nudes, represented in lascivious poses outside a mythological context. *La Jeune Fille allongée*, also known as *l'Odalisque blonde* (the Blonde Odalisque), echoes the also erotic *Odalisque brune* (Brown Odalisque), painted around 1745.

*The Blonde Odalisque* was a portrait that illustrated the extramarital relationships of the King. Boucher gained lasting notoriety through such private commissions for wealthy

collectors and, after Diderot expressed his disapproval, his reputation came under increasing critical attack during the last years of his career.



***Vulcan Presenting Venus with Arms for Aeneas*** 1757

Boucher took inspiration from artists such as Peter Paul Rubens and Antoine Watteau. Boucher's early works celebrate the idyllic and tranquil portrayal of nature and landscape with great elan. However, his art typically forgoes traditional rural innocence to portray scenes with a definitive style of eroticism as his mythological scenes are passionate and intimately amorous rather than traditionally epic.

**Jean-Honoré Fragonard** (1732 – 1806) was a French painter and printmaker whose late Rococo manner was distinguished by remarkable facility, exuberance, and hedonism. One of the most prolific artists active in the last decades of the Ancien Régime, Fragonard produced more than 550 paintings (not counting drawings and etchings), of which only five are dated. Among his most popular works are genre paintings conveying an atmosphere of intimacy and veiled eroticism.

For half a century or more he was so completely ignored that Wilhelm Lübke's 1873 art history volume omits the very mention of his name. Subsequent reevaluation has confirmed his position among the all-time masters of French painting. The influence of Fragonard's handling of local colour and expressive, confident brushstroke on the Impressionists (particularly his grand niece, Berthe Morisot, and Renoir) cannot be overestimated. Fragonard's paintings, alongside those of François Boucher, seem to sum up an era.



***The Swing*** 1767

*The Swing*, also known as *The Happy Accidents of the Swing* (its original title), in the Wallace Collection in London, is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the rococo era, and is Fragonard's best known work.

The painting depicts an elegant young woman on a swing. A smiling young man, hiding in the bushes on the left, watches her from a vantage point that allows him to see up into her billowing dress, where his arm is pointed with hat in hand. A smiling older man, who is nearly hidden in the shadows on the right, propels the swing with a pair of ropes. The older man appears to be unaware of the young man. As the young lady swings high, she throws her

right leg up, allowing her dainty shoe to fly through the air. The lady is wearing a bergère hat (shepherdess hat). Cupid watches the affair at the side of the painting, while putting his finger to his lips. There are also two cherubs below the swing. One of them look away in disapproval while the other look at them in dread.

**Francesco Lazzaro Guardi** (1712 – 1793) is considered to be among the last practitioners, along with his brothers, of the classic Venetian school of painting.

A veduta (Italian for "view"; plural vedute) is a highly detailed, usually large-scale painting or, more often print, of a cityscape or some other vista. The painters of vedute are referred to as vedutisti.



*View on the Grand Canal* 1760-65



*Fire in the Oil Depot in San Marcuola* 1789

Guardi's painterly style is known as *pittura di tocco* (of touch) for its small dotting and spirited brush-strokes. This looser style of painting differs from the more linear and architecturally accurate style of Canaletto's painting. This style, a century later, would make Guardi's works highly prized by the French Impressionists.

Canaletto, as a vedutista, concentrated on glamorous urban architecture erected by the imperial republic; on the other hand, in Guardi, the buildings often appear to be melting and sinking into a murky lagoon. Canaletto's canvases often have intricate linear and brilliant details, and depict Venice in sunny daylight. Guardi paints clouded skies above a city at dusk. These contrasts, however, simplify the facts, since Canaletto often painted the drab communal life and neighbourhoods (creating in them some epic artistic qualities), while Guardi did not avoid sometimes painting the ceremonies of Ducal Venice.

Ultimately, Guardi's paintings evoke the onset of the dissipation. The citizenry has shrunk to an impotent lilliputian crowd of "rubber-neckers", unable to rescue the crumbling Republic, as for example in the *Fire in the Oil Depot in San Marcuola*. It was fitting depiction of the rapidly declining empire, which had declined, in Napoleon's assessment, into a "drawing room of Europe" peopled with casinos, carnivals, and courtesans for hire.