

18th Century:
**ROCOCO AND NEO-
CLASSICISM**

LAUNCHPAD OF THE 19TH CENTURY

**THE 18TH CENTURY
WAS ONE OF THE
MOST AESTHETICALLY
CONFUSED CENTURIES
OF EUROPEAN ART**

**A
ROLLING
ROCOCO
GATHERERS
NO
SUITORS**



ROCOCO

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

**ROCOCO WAS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY AN ART OF
THE ARISTOCRACY.**

SO WHY DO WE CARE?

WHAT DID IT DO?

ROCOCO

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Classical symbolism/libertine morality
 - Psyche and Eros
 - Playing with the ideas of the Enlightenment;
 - More permissive sexuality, shrouding both in tradition sanctioned by the history of art
- Taste, Pleasantness, and the Beautiful
 - Primarily a decorative art.
 - Individual cultivation and visual pleasure as a growing part of the culture of art
- The undulation of form, the overabundance of natural motif:
 - expressed the self-satisfaction of the aristocracy, and the decadence of their moral and political power.

18TH C: ROCOCO

WATTEAU,
Pierro (formerly known as Gilles)
1718-19



18TH C: ROCOCO



Boucher,
The Gracious Shepherd,
c. 1738

18TH C: ROCOCO



Boucher,
The Nest,
c. 1740



18TH C: ROCOCO

Jean Honoré FRAGONARD,
The Fascinated Croquette,
mid 18th C



18TH C: ROCOCO

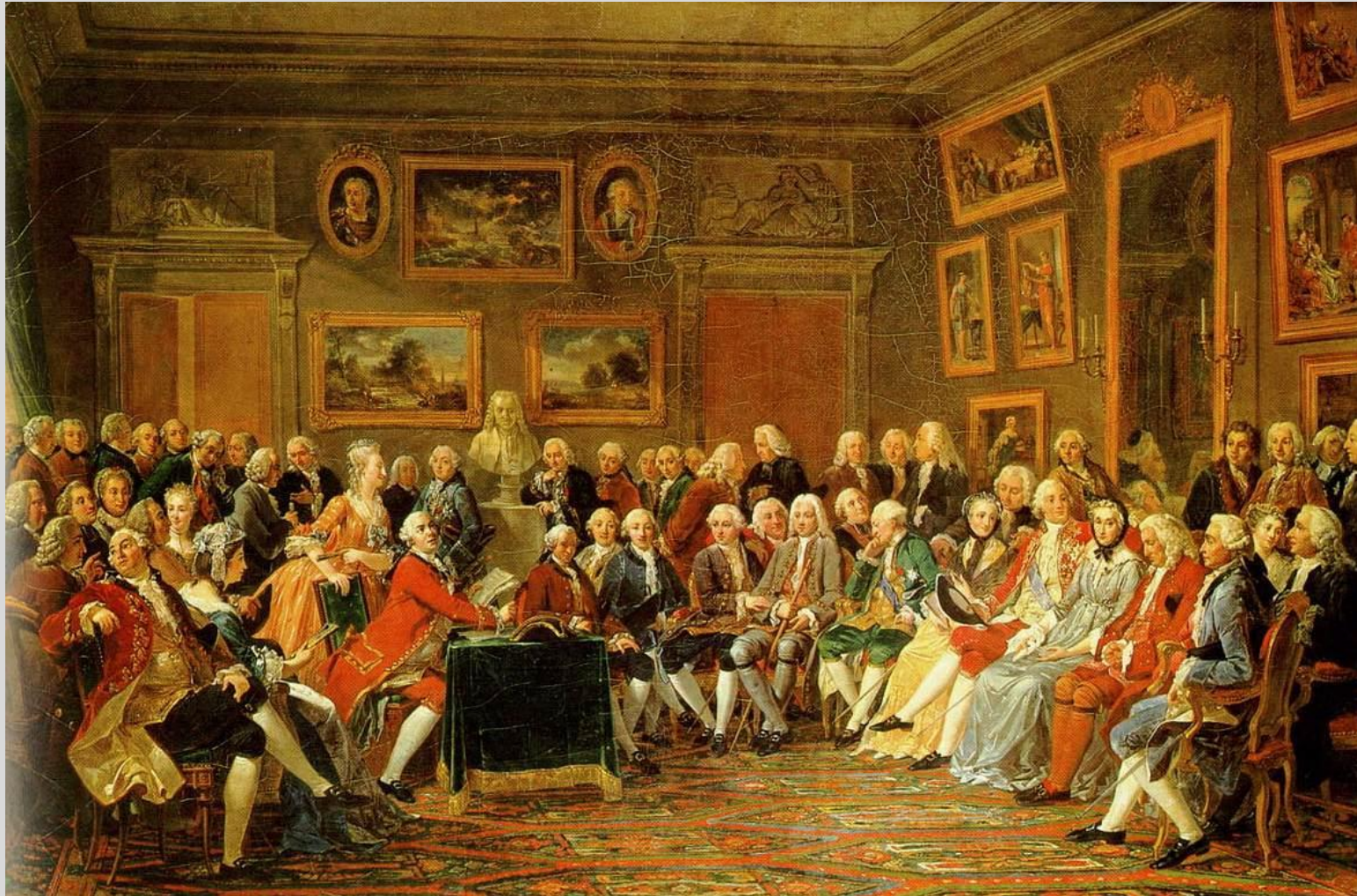
Jean Honoré FRAGONARD,
*The Secret Meeting, from The Progress
of Love*
1771-73

THE SALON/THE ACADEMY

TRANSITIONS IN 18TH C FRANCE

- The **SALON** used as a breeding ground for many of the ideas of the Enlightenment in France.
 - They were the bars and coffee shops of the 18th C France
- One of the main way in which women (in positions of aristocratic wealth) could influence culture, as selectors of décor, etiquette, good taste, people, and ideas.
 - Foreshadowing, in a sense, the figure of the curator.
- To have a profound effect on the output of visual and musical artists in the 18th century out of which the 'classical' music and to a lesser extent the 'neo-classical' art is born.
- The salon represented a kind of half-way space between the private and the public, through which new ideas could be exchanged in the relative security of like-minded company, without fear of real persecution.
- Later the salons became synonymous with exhibitions (so named because the original salons were rooms in the royal palaces, just as the parties were)

18TH C: SALON



Boucher,
The Nest,
c. 1740

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salon_de_Madame_Geoffrin.jpg

18TH C: SALON



LEMONNIER,
*Reading of Voltaire's L'Orphelin de la
Chine in the salon of Madame Geoffrin*
(c. 1755),
1812

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Salon_de_Madame_Geoffrin.jpg

THE SALON/THE ACADEMY

TRANSITIONS IN 18TH C FRANCE

- The **ACADEMY** was a state sponsored institution
 - produced as much as a way for the state to maintain control over the norms of culture (with the loosening of these, increasingly moving outside the ambit of religion and themes from antiquity) as it was an institution of aesthetic learning.
- It provided a means to certify, valorize, and codify artists
 - Their style, the themes of their paintings, and to legitimate and transform the field of visual meaning in art.
- It promoted history painting and the neo-classical style above all
- The French Academy's exhibitions (held in the Louvre) were the forerunners of the modern gallery and museum, and provided the first public forum in France for ordinary people to experience painting in a non-religious context
 - Provided the conditions for the fields of art criticism and curation to emerge

FREE MARKET/BOURGEOIS ART TRANSITIONS IN 18TH C FRANCE

- Along side the extravagances of Rococo were a group of artists, working in a more placid and stayed style, depicting the poeticized sexual fantasies of the aristocracy, but scene of daily life of the emerging bourgeoisie.
- These were concerned less with pleasure and more with the depiction of the virtue and woe of the bourgeois family
 - the bourgeois family (or what we might call the nuclear family) involved marriages chosen between two supposedly free individuals, chosen out of mutual love and respect, rather than for reasons of rank, social standing, financial gain, diplomacy or family arrangement (as with the aristocracy).

FREE MARKET/BOURGEOIS ART TRANSITIONS IN 18TH C FRANCE

- They also depicted still lives, usually of simple arrangements of things you might find in the bourgeois kitchen.
- These artists, like Chardin and Greuze in France, worked without commission, making paintings before any financial transaction was made.
 - Then they would solicit sales by inviting patrons to their studios.
 - This is the model that more or less holds for artists today, making their living by selling works to collectors.

HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSICISM

- **History painting, painting that depicted supposedly historical events, although begun already in the 17th century became associated with the need for a morally virtuous new art that would rectify the decadence of 18th C French culture**
- **This in turn dovetailed with ideas coming from many critics of the arts in different parts of Europe, advocating the return to the study of Greco-Roman art, as a means of moral fortification and nation building through pursuit of the ideal**
- **Through the combination of these influences, plus the influence of the Academy in France, the Neo-Classical style took hold in the late 18th C.**

HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSICISM

- **History painting, starting in the 18th C, was somewhat different from the treatment of classical or biblical themes from the past**
 - **Artists began to pay attention the factual details of the scenes they painted:**
 - **this could mean including the scene in a geographically appropriate setting;**
 - **or making sure the manner of dress was correct for the area;**
 - **it could mean staging series of works (like D'Angiviller's commission of the history of French military heroes) throughout time**

HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSICISM

- **This opened the door to bringing History out of the realm legend and myth, and closer to the paradigm of the Enlightenment rationalism**
- **It coincides with a great interest in the factual existence of the past, the origin of the human nature and art, and the formation of the knowledge History as a set of 'scientific' disciplines: such as history, archaeology, anthropology, etc.**

HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSICISM

- **It also began to allow people to think developmentally about their relation to the past**
 - Wincklemann's idea about the life-cycle of the classical arts or birth, growth, decline, and death.
 - This allowed people in the 18th and 19th century to analogize history with the span and arch of an individual human life.
- **It also allowed for a framework of moral judgments to be read into history, as well as those peoples who didn't conform to the constructed historical trajectory of Europe.**
 - One that played a big part in the narratives of 'progress' in Modernity.

HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSICISM

- **One question might be:**

How many times can European culture go back to the well of Classical art?

Is neo-classicism, in its almost desperate attempt at attaining youthfulness through classicism, not itself decadent or farcical (much as they accused rococo art of being), rather than heroic and tragic?

How in step with the tide of history (the Zeitgeist) is History painting? Today it appears rather contrived.

18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



POUSSIN,
*Time Defending Truth from Envy and
Discord,*
1642



Angelica KAUFFMANN

*Zeuxis Selecting Models for
Helen of Troy, c. 1764*



Benjamin WEST

*Agrippina Landing at Brundisium
with the Ashes of Germanicus,*
Oil on canvas, 1766

- Perhaps the first Neo-classical Painting in terms of both form and content, treatment of theme and execution.

18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



BRENET,
Apollo Crowning the Arts,
1771

18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



DAVID,
Oath of the Horatii,
1784-5



18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



DAVID,
Death of Socrates,
1787



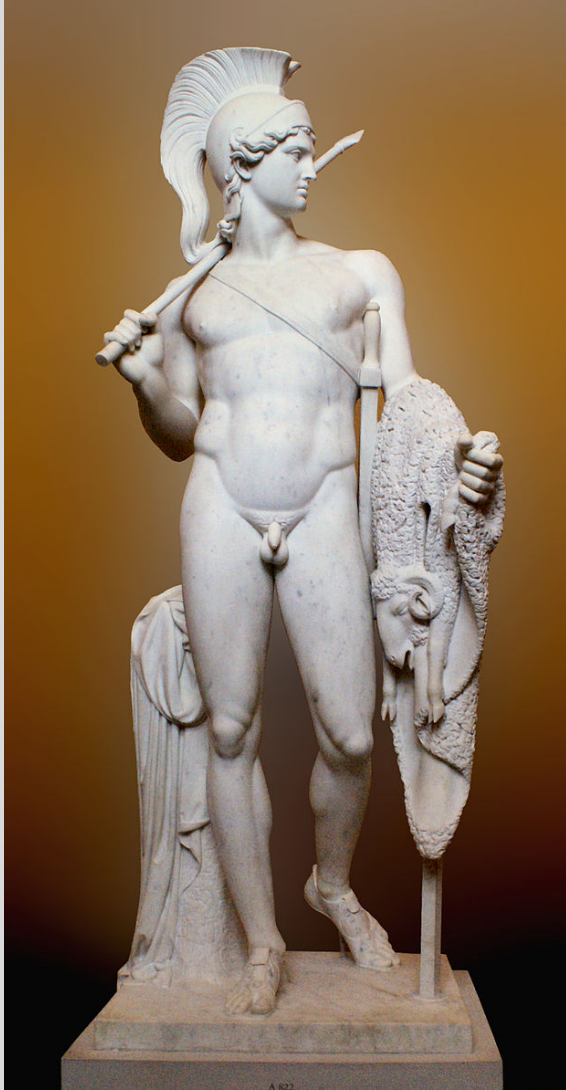
Angelica KAUFFMANN

*Zeuxis Selecting Models for
Helen of Troy, c. 1764*



Heinrich Friedrich FÜGER

*Brutus Sentences his Sons to
Death, 1799*



Bertel Thorvaldsen

Jason with the Golden Fleece,
1802

And

Cupid and Psyche, 1807

18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



DAVID,
Tennis Court Oath,
Fresco, 1791

18TH C: HISTORY PAINTING/NEOCLASSISM



DAVID,
Death of Marat,
1793