

## **History of Western Art**

### Part Four – From Neo-Classicism to Impressionism

#### **Assignment Four – Exercise 1**

##### **Notes on Chapter 14 – Enlightenment & Liberty**

18<sup>th</sup> Century is overlap between autocratic rule and democracy (albeit some rulers endeavoured to uphold some degree of fairness, justice and tolerance). End 18<sup>th</sup> century, American Declaration of Independence, French Revolution; rights of people and rulers not divinely appointed. (p607)

Until end of century, religion still powerful, musically, in architecture and art. Less innovation in architecture. However, although religious arts very dominant, such secular art and writing as was created, came to higher prominence, producing so-called ‘Age of Enlightenment’ (AoE).

AoE arose out of eg, Descartes, Locke, Newton, in late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Firm belief in power of man to solve problems, understand all. Emphasis on rational exploration of physical science, political systems, social and religious customs. Great emphasis on knowledge ('Dare to Know' – Kant). Great French Encyclopedia 1751. (p608)

##### **FRENCH ROCOCO ART**

Frivolity and delicacy of Rococo art apparently at odds with rationality of period and criticized by theorists as luxury of upper class. Had rationale in playing with rules, pushing boundaries of classical art and geometrical forms. If not ‘tasteful’ this was only discernible by those with ‘taste’ and understanding of what rules were, ie, educated classes. A deliberate taunt to ‘good (in classical terms) taste’.

Rococo began in France as deviation from Classicism. More spontaneous, lively, playful. Drawing vs colour, mind vs senses (Poussin vs Rubens). Drawing appeals to intellect, colour to senses. Colour provides true representation of nature. Locke claimed all ideas derived from experience not innate. Senses more powerful than the mind; pictures more important than poetry as they impact directly on sight without artificial signs to convey effect, pleasure of art is physical. (p609)

##### **Watteau, de Troy and the Rococo Interior**

Watteau not court artist but artist-craftsman. Worked in style of Rubens, painting range of subjects, esp well-dressed gentry promenading in gardens/outdoors. Gentry identified themselves and their life with figures in paintings. Balance between artificial and natural (also seen in garden planning); compositions carefully-planned yet appearing informal. Paintings essentially fantasy with hints of irony, Watteau himself in some, but struck true (or what they saw as true) to viewers. Work much interpreted/copied in other arts; porcelain, lacquer, textiles, enamel. Many prints and drawings also inspired by his work. Beautiful painter of diaphanous nature of silk fabric.

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Reading of Moliere (de Troy) – effortlessly relaxed poses of upper class subjects. Almost posed. Very contemporary dress/setting. Fine attention to detail; luxurious but comfortable furnishings; use of lighting, calculated but appears not so.

Hotel de Soubise, Paris one of few remaining Rococo examples. Lots of natural light from tall windows starting close to floor, exuberant, flamboyant yet delicate decor, large room yet intimate due to use of light and decor. Rococo introduced smaller, more intimate, rooms; elaborately decorated but human-scaled. (pp 609-12)

**Boucher, Chardin and Fragonard**

Hotel de Soubise one of best examples genre pittoresque; pictorial motifs.

Curling tendrils, delicate flowers, gaiety, delicacy and whimsy but also sensuality. Boucher paints sensual boudoir scenes; tenderness, lush flesh, perfume and powder.

Chardin paints below stairs scenes; rough figures, sombre palette, thick blocks of pigment. Enjoyed also by rich, possibly as counterbalance to their affluent lives. Espoused morality and properness. Master of colours of 'reality'; harmonious palette of earthy tones, esteemed by key art critic Diderot. (p613)

Fragonard painted private commissions; garden scenes brimming with vitality, life, sensuality. Progress of Love (series of 4 large pieces) returned by Mme du Barry in favour of more modest, prosaic series by Vien. By then (1760s) puritanical opposition to Rococo made it unfashionable. (pp613-16)

**THE ROCOCO IN GERMANY AND ITALY**

German Rococo inspired by Italianate Baroque. Intricate forms, elaborate textures, absence of Classical features. German Rococo and Baroque difficult to tell apart.

Poppelmann's Zwinger is exuberant, elaborate example of festival architecture, highly decorated, takes Classical and plays with it. Replaced wooden amphitheatre as permanent setting for parades, carousels. Commissioned for Augustus the Strong to celebrate his status, originally to be part of much larger piece. Augustus enjoyed exquisite, opulent. Founded Meissen factory (1710), first true porcelain in Europe. An elaborate exterior unlike French town-houses and German churches (eg Weiskirche) where extravagance reserved for interior. Although extravagant churches still pious, imagery and colour reflects religious if modern homage. Church sculpture (eg Gunther) painted wood, adopting Mannerism but also influence of Middle Ages naturalism. (pp 616-619)

**Tiepolo, Guardi and Canaletto**

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Parts of Germany embrace and develop a ‘hyper-Rococo’ style but Wurzburg commissioned Tiepolo for unique Italian style for ceiling of Kaisersaal. Unique in allowing to be seen from several viewpoints shows complete command of fresco. Presents Enlightenment view of World and fascination with other countries/cultures. Tribute also to Venetian style and Veronese. Italy remained true to its artistic past. Tintoretto beautiful paintings of Venice but Canaletto preferred by English. Portraits by Carrera also desirable. Venice falls to Napoleon 1797 (pp619-22)

#### **ENGLISH SENSE AND SENSIBILITY**

English eschew German/Italian Baroque. Revert to Palladio, building in Neo-Palladian robust, self-confident style also adopted by Americans. Neo-Palladian houses signify wealth, decorum, Classical education, propriety. (p622)

#### **Hogarth and Gainsborough**

Hogarth paintings restrained but with Rococo elements signifying affectation. However, English designers develop version of Rococo in furniture, metal-works, book front pages. French artists chosen to produce engravings of his work. Hogarth morally upright but secular not Protestant. Believed in weddings forged by love (but between those appropriate in class). Influenced by writer Addison. Natural not artificial, natural not wild but according to the order of the universe of Newton, everything in its place. (eg; Gainsborough’s portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews, set in their own estate). (p622-23)

#### **Landscape and Classicism**

Landscape park popular with British upper class. Not strict in order, often with monument to British liberty, but separated from wildness by ditch (ha-ha); symbolic of class divide. Sign of unostentatious, unpretentious wealth. Dalliances with Gothic and Chinese and inclusion of Classical temples, grottos a diversion from Classical norm. Reminders of Grand Tour. Robert Adam, following Grand Tour of Italy, strives to recapture true Classical style in later works. Adam designs all aspects of interiors, allowing mass-manufacture of his designs. Wedgwood pottery reproduced his designs, no design influence. Artisan/craftsman gap widens. Foundation of Royal Academy (RA) acknowledges superior skill of artist over craftsman. (1768) Reynolds first director of RA obsessed by status and wealth; promotes portraiture, incorporating Classic ideals and attitudes in poses of sitters. Did not follow fashion, painted educated in normal clothing, upper classes in stylised, almost mythological poses. (pp 623-25)

Kaufmann first of two female founder members of RA (and only ones until 1920s) painted ceiling of RA lecture room. 4 large ovals, self-portraits but historical in style, allegorical representing key elements of art; colour, design, composition and genius. (pp 625-26)

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American West designed centrepiece. Convention was for; allegory with personification of victory/war etc; heroic with Classical costume; reportage. West combination of historical but in contemporary dress emphasised moral message in painting; calm courage in face of death, judgement by posterity and immortality on earth not divine judgement. Hero (Wolfe) will live on in memories of future. Appealed to sensibility; sympathy, tender heart, complementing hard-headed rationalism. ‘Man of Sensibility’ much admired. (pp 626-627)

Declaration of Independence made Wolfe print very lucrative. Constitution based on principles of natural law. Epitomising this, Jefferson chose Maison Carree at Nimes as model for state capitol of Virginia. (p 627)

#### **NEO-CLASSICISM OR THE ‘TRUE STYLE’**

American Houdon renounces Rococo style in statues of presidents and others dressed in contemporary own clothing. In 1750s Rococo also renounced in France, Germany, England as Enlightenment called for ‘logic, clarity, simplicity and moral rectitude’ (WHA p628). Call for return to didactic art. Demand for ‘new art’, the ‘true style’, much later, Neo-Classicism.

‘Neo-Classical’ coined in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century but had been seen in art and architecture in 1800s. Essence was for, not copying, Classical art (esp. Greek statuary) but embodying in new art the aesthetic of Classical art, ‘noble simplicity and calm grandeur’ (Winckelmann) (WHA p630)

#### **Canova and David**

Sculptor Canova refused invitation to copy famous Roman statues, instead insisting he would only develop if working on his own account. Given free reign produces Theseus and the Dead Minotaur in marble; first time this moment in story captured in marble (Theseus contemplating his achievement after killing Minotaur). As result given prestigious commissions for tombs of two popes.

Made full-size clay models, cast in plaster, enabling rough-hewn blocks to be ‘pre-prepared’ by assistants. Freestanding, gentler statues, often mythological, highly valued. Classical but modern interpretation. Cupid and Psyche erotic, tangible and passionate, self-absorbed. Placed on turntable so viewable from all sides. Some pieces intended for museums, a new venue; museums now places of education.

David trained in Paris and Rome. Oath of the Horatii didactic work to improve public morals. Message was nobility of Rome, stoicism and patriotism. Shows masculine courage vs female tenderness.

Following storming of Bastille and revolution in France (1789) David joined revolutionary Jacobin club. Painted revolutionary martyrs. Dead Marat arguably greatest political painting. Executed when moderates prevailed. Architectural changes stylistic not so political; return to antique to give bold, simple design, rejecting Baroque for clear-cut lines, simple windows, minimal ornament, static mass.