Art History 101, Class 2—Renaissance and 17th-century Art

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The fifteenth century was a transitional time, marking the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance, which Stokstad calls "the beginning of the modern world, our own era." The word "Renaissance" is French for rebirth, but art and culture hardly died out during the Middle Ages, even if it seemed to be a comparatively dormant period to later generations. To their minds, it could not compare with the golden age of Greece and Rome.

The Renaissance could not have happened without the rise of the secular cultural movement known as humanism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Humanist scholars and philosophers focused their attention on human beings and their accomplishments, the business of this world rather than the next. They questioned everything, and looked for rational explanations to physical and theological phenomena rather than attributing them to divine intervention. The spread of humanism was partly the result of the new city-centered, secular economy, and a newly rich middle class who valued and funded learning, literature, and the arts. The results of this somewhat nebulous-seeming movement were in fact very tangible, and they can be seen reflected in the art of the period.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, there was a revival of interest in classical art, history and literature, a legacy of physical and intellectual excellence that had been somewhat

forgotten in the Middle Ages. Humanists sought out the physical and literary records of the ancient world, assembling libraries, collecting sculpture and fragments of architecture, and conducting rudimentary digs at ancient archaeological sites. Artists turned to antiquity for inspiration even as they continued to fulfill commissions for predominantly Christian subjects. From this period, we have a large number of surviving secular artworks as well as religious ones. The male nude so ubiquitous in classical art became an acceptable subject in Renaissance art, often justified as a religious image, like Michelangelo's *David,* which owes an obvious debt to the athletic ideal of antiquity and to the classical tradition of depicting the male god or hero nude, what is called "heroic nudity."

Humanists believed that education should be available to the laity as well as priests and monks, something that may seem self-evident today but it was a radical idea at the time. They investigated the natural world, and making detailed, accurate recordings of nature; several mathematical techniques for using perspective were developed at this time. The artist Paolo Uccello, who painted this magnificent scene, *The Battle of San Romano,* was reportedly so obsessed with the new study of perspective that he neglected his painting and his family and because "solitary, eccentric, melancholy, and impoverished." Notice the foreshortened fallen knight on the ground at left and the hills sloping away in the background. Stokstad tells us that such passion for science was typical of fifteenth-century artists.

For humanists, people, their deeds, and beliefs took on primary importance, and that was reflected in the new prominence of portraiture that was almost photographic in its realism and so true to life that it was sometimes unflattering, as on the right, where the artist, Piero della Francesca, has captured the sitter's broken nose. In traditional Italian fashion, the figures are portrayed in strict profile, remote from the viewer. The influence of Flemish art can be seen in the careful record of the clothing and jewels and in the luminous landscape, with its depth of perspective.

For the first time in the fifteenth century, the artist himself was valued as an individual; as Stokstad points out, more names of artists survive from the fifteenth century than from the previous 1400 years put together. By the sixteenth century, artists were so highly valued that they were well paid and sometimes even knighted, as Titian was. Humanism characterized painters, sculptors, and architects as liberal artists rather than manual laborers; they were not mere craftsmen but educated specialists, trained in the classics and mathematics.

Last week we talked about the influence of Flemish art in the fifteenth century. Today, we are going to turn our attention to Italy. For many people, the Renaissance and Italy—and particularly Florence, seen here--are synonymous. Italy in the late middle ages and early Renaissance was not the civilized, unified nation we know today. Politically, it was divided into independent states and republics. Power and patronage rested in the hands of a few wealthy, regional families like the Medici in Florence and the Visconti in Milan, who wanted to see themselves, their lands, and their possessions depicted as they were.

But Italy was united by its common heritage, descending from ancient Rome. If the Renaissance is often perceived today as an Italian phenomenon, it may be because the Italians had strong physical and spiritual links with the classical golden age the artists of the Renaissance sought to duplicate. Architecture inspired by ancient classical forms would become known as the Italian Renaissance style.

As we have seen, sculpture and other art forms followed a similar trajectory, as Christian subjects assumed the body types, poses, and even nudity of classical models. This is another David, by Donatello, of circa 1450, considered the first life-size male nude since antiquity. As a sculptor, Donatello was a master of both emotion and technique, working in a variety of materials. Fifteenth-century sculptors worked not only on a monumental scale for public display but also created small works designed to inspire and delight their owners in private. Small, easily transported bronzes helped to spread the classical taste across Europe in the late fifteenth century. In addition to being small in scale, such pieces were designed to be appreciated from every angle, and they have an explosive energy reminiscent of Hellenistic sculpture. This is Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Antaeus*; classical subjects or, often, small scale copies of well-known classical works were popular with collectors. Hercules was the patron of Florence and a favorite figure in the Renaissance; in this story he kills the evil giant Antaeus, the son of the earth goddess Gaia, in a wrestling match by lifting him off the earth, the source of his power; there is a variant of it in the Huntington collection.

Like their Flemish counterparts, Italian painters strove for ever-greater realism and precision, using more analytical techniques like mathematical formulas for creating convincing perspective in paintings, just as their classical predecessors had worked out precise formulas for the most appealing orders of architecture and body proportions. The goal was to make a painting resemble a view through a window, the view being the images represented and the window the picture plane. As Italian artists became more comfortable with mathematical formulas for perspective over the course of the fifteenth century, then came to rely less on these formulas and their pictures became more natural and relaxed, with multiple vanishing points and subtle gradations in plane instead of looking like a stage set. If you want to read more about mathematical perspective techniques, Stokstad has a brief overview on page 622.

The Italians showed little interest in oil painting, preferring to work in tempera, a type of paint made from egg yolks, or fresco, water based pigments painted on wet plaster to create murals, like you see here. Artists experienced in fresco were in great demand throughout the fifteenth century and traveled widely to decorate the walls and ceilings of churches, helping to spread regional styles throughout Italy.

Pope Sixtus the Fourth aggressively lured leading artists to the Vatican, which underwent a major restoration beginning in 1417, when the resolution of the Great Schism established one Pope in Rome. The Sistine Chapel was named after Sixtus, who commissioned it, though it was not finished in his lifetime. The chapel is approximately the same size as the Temple of Solomon described in the Old Testament, about 130 feet

long and 143 feet wide. Michelangelo's famous ceiling frescoes were among the last elements completed, in 1512; the wall frescoes are by fifteenth-century artists.

One artist who worked on the chapel walls was Sandro Botticelli. Originally from Florence, he returned there after working on the chapel and from then his career took a new direction, producing secular paintings of mythical subjects inspired by ancient works for educated humanist patrons like the Medici. His *Birth of Venus* has been interpreted as the birth of the idea of beauty, as Venus is the goddess of beauty. Unusually for an Italian artist, it is painted on canvas rather than wood panel, suggesting that it was intended to be a banner or a tapestry-like wall hanging. Botticelli's new focus on classical, somewhat erotic subjects was typical of the often-criticized worldliness of Florentine art and Florence in general, and he seems to have suffered a sort of spiritual crisis late in his career as the turn of the sixteenth century approached; many people feared that the world would end in the year 1500 and underwent dramatic religious conversions. Botticelli burned many of his earlier canvases and returned to inspirational religious paintings.

Another artist represented in the Sistine Chapel was Domenico di Tommaso Bigordi, known as Domenico "Ghirlandaio," meaning "garland maker," a nickname adopted by his father, a goldsmith known for his floral wreaths. Ghirlandaio was the most prolific Florentine painter of the late fifteenth century, skilled in both portraiture and religious works. He often included recognizable contemporary figures among the saints and angels in his religious paintings.

The early sixteenth century from the 1490s to 1527 is known as the High Renaissance, a high point in art history. The term was coined by the first Italian art historian Giorgio Vasari in 1550. It is sometimes also known as the "classical phase" or the "Imperial Style." Many of the most familiar Renaissance artworks were created during this period, including Michelangelo's *David* and his Sistine Chapel ceiling, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *Last Supper,* and Raphael's *School of Athens,* seen here. (All three of those seminal artists began their careers in Florence.) Though originating in Italy, the new High Renaissance style soon spread throughout Europe. The era saw the perfect synthesis of early Renaissance principles of harmony and balance with the monumentality of rediscovered classical ideals. Artworks were characterized by stability, calm, and timelessness—a powerful contrast to the almost constant warfare of the period. The Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation had profound effects on religious art both in the mainly Protestant north of Europe and the mainly Catholic south. Despite this, humanism continued to flourish in the sixteenth century. The new printing presses disseminated knowledge and encouraged literacy, and advances in cartography undermined traditional views of the world and led to a more accurate understanding of geography. It's no wonder that Italy saw itself as a new Athens, a center of learning and culture.

Leonardo da Vinci's fame is based on only a few works, for he had many interests outside of painting, including engineering, mathematics, and the natural sciences. He was a brilliant inventor and equally comfortable drawing machines and people. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Italian artists began to give up tempera for the more flexible

medium of oil paint. Among its many intriguing qualities, the Mona Lisa is notable for being an early Italian oil painting.

The Last Supper has become so famous in its own right that we tend to forget the humble circumstances of its creation. It is not a painting but a mural; appropriately for a dinner scene, it decorates the dining hall of the Monastery of Santa Maria in Milan. Da Vinci was in Milan working as a civil engineer when he painted it as a favor to the ruling Duke. But instead of painting in fresco on wet plaster in water-based paint, he experimented with painting on dry plaster, using an oil and tempera concoction of his own invention. Within just fifty years, the painting had deteriorated so badly that the figures could hardly be seen, and since then there has been a constant struggle to save it from itself. By the seventeenth century, the monks valued the painting so little that they cut a doorframe through it. It was nearly destroyed by bombing in World War II, and today it can be seen by appointment only.

Those of you who have read *The Da Vinci Code* are already aware of the numerical symbolism, geometrical tricks, and narrative puzzles within the painting, a medieval scholarly tradition here applied to a High Renaissance work. The painting continues to fascinate and puzzle scholars. Just last week a book was published in Italy claiming that da Vinci embedded a 40-second musical composition in *The Last Supper*, a very plausible theory considering that in addition to his many other talents da Vinci was also a musician.

Leonardo was fascinated by these types of puzzles and formulas, so prevalent in classical art theory as well. His famous drawing the *Vitruvian Man* illustrates the writings of the first-century Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius, who determined that the ideal human body should be eight heads high and able to fill both a circle and a square.

If Leonardo's fame is based on a relatively small body of work, Raphael's is based on a large body of work produced in a tragically short amount of time; he died at 37. A well-organized studio and a talent for delegating work to assistants allowed him to be remarkably productive in his short life. His soft, luminous Madonnas with their long fingers may remind you of those gentle southern Italian Madonnas hanging in the Arabella galleries.

There was an ongoing debate in Renaissance Italy over whether painting or sculpture was the superior art form. Michelangelo argued for sculpture, for he considered himself a sculptor first and a painter second; he also dabbled in architecture and poetry. He studied painting as an apprentice to Ghirlandaio, and sculpture as an apprentice to a student of Donatello's. Early in his career, around the turn of the century he produced a tomb sculpture for St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican in the form of a pieta, a term meaning "pity" in Italian and referring to the depiction of the Virgin Mary cradling her dead son Jesus, usually executed as a sculpture. Pietas were common in northern Europe but unusual in Italian art at the time. It caused a sensation, and Michelangelo is said to have snuck into the church at night to sign the piece and put an end to all the speculation about who created it.

Though Michelangelo wanted to be remembered for his sculpture, he is probably most famous for painting the Sistine chapel ceiling frescoes, a miserable task that he did mostly for the money, aided by a team of assistants. In the iconic central scene titled *The Creation of Adam,* God brings to life Adam, a man created in his own image; notice how Adam's heroic body and pose mirror those of God. Michelangelo's Sistine chapel ceiling reinforced the humanist idea of the dignity of all human beings as creatures of God.

Venice was another major Renaissance center, but one that was somewhat cut off from the rest of Italy, not just by its geography but by its unique system of government, headed by an elected duke or doge. Venetians saw themselves as not just equal but superior to Florence and Rome. As a major seaport and a wealthy commercial power, Venice received imports and influences from a variety of cultures, including the far east, and the Venetians had plenty of money to lavish on the arts. Possibly because of their maritime heritage, and possibly because of humidity problems in their walls, the Venetians were the first to use large canvas paintings instead of frescoes. They also pioneered the use of oil paints on both wood and canvas, which allowed for the rich color and lighting effects characteristic of Venetian Renaissance art. Someone asked last week about the use of store-bought paint. In the early sixteenth century, Venice was the first place to have professional retail "color sellers" who prepared pigments and mixed oil paints for artists who chose not to do so themselves.

Titian became the official painter to the Venetian Republic in 1516. He was famous for his mastery of light and color, created using the oil paints favored in Venice. He was also a great portraitist; the Holy Roman Emperor Charles the Fifth would not let any other artist paint him. Titian made a specialty of female nudes. Renaissance female nudes were usually painted as Eve or Venus to excuse their nudity. In Venice, paintings of reclining nude women became popular in sophisticated court circles among educated men well versed in classical mythology. Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, created for the Duke of Urbino, probably depicts a flesh-and-blood Venetian courtesan; apart from the title and the roses in her hand, there are none of the usual attributes of Venus, and she inhabits a very Venetian palazzo staffed by maids in modern dress. This proud nude was a source of inspiration for artists for generations to come, including Manet.

The term "mannerism" comes from the Italian world *maniera,* meaning self-aware elegance. It usually refers to the period between the High Renaissance and the emergence of the Baroque in the seventeenth century. As a style, it involves intellectually intricate subjects, skilled technique, and an interest in beauty for it's own sake. Mannerist artwork were as complex in their compositions as their subjects, which often came from obscure sources and were chosen not for their familiarity but for their dramatic potential. Stokstad writes that "mannerism is an attitude, a point of view, as much as a style." She also cautions that the term has inspired controversy among art historians. In general, it is characterized by virtuosity, intricacy, sophistication, elegance, eroticism, unusual colors, and distortions or manipulations of accepted formal conventions. For example, Bronzino's *Allegory with Venus and Cupid* contains all the formal, iconographical, and

psychological characteristics of Mannerist art. It is a beautiful but bizarre image, visually stunning yet frustratingly enigmatic. It may have been intended as an intellectual game for a sophisticated patron. Stokstad describes it as "one of the strangest paintings in the sixteenth century."

Giovanni da' Bologna, known as Giambologna, was actually born Jean de Boulogne in Flanders, but lived and worked in Florence. He saw himself as a rival to Michelangelo, and became the most important sculptor in Italy after Micheangelo's death. The twisting forms of his *Rape of the Sabine Women* are characteristic of mannerism, and this is a typically unsettling Mannerist piece. Mannerism's complex and subtle iconography and visual brilliance would continue into the baroque era.

Table discussion: Renaissance art at The Huntington

Today, the term "Baroque" implies something ornate, irregular, over-the-top and unnecessarily convoluted. When applied to art and architecture, it was initially a derogatory term describing the exuberant and somewhat excessively ornamental style of the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century. Stokstad defines the baroque as being "characterized by an emotional rather than intellectual response to a work of art and by an interest in exploiting the dramatic moment through choice of subject and style." Baroque artists experimented with compositions in which the subject seems to move or overlap their frames, making the viewer part of the scene, and cupids or *putti* and other objects float or fly through the air. They combined architecture, painting, and

sculpture in single artworks that defy categorization, like the Cornaro Chapel in Rome, entirely designed by Bernini in a sensual and spectacular display of color, texture, and rich materials. In the sixteenth century, the decoration of churches had been somewhat austere, but the during the Counter Reformation the Catholic church began to favor opulent and spectacular visual effects to heighten the emotional involvement of worshipers.

The seventeenth century is a difficult period to study, whether from an art historical perspective or any other perspective, because it was one of tremendous change and turmoil, with few common threads. There were turbulent religious wars as Germany, England, Switzerland, and parts of the Netherlands broke away from the Catholic Church and became Protestant. Tragically, Protestant reformers often destroyed what they considered to be idolatrous images in churches, including sculpture, stained glass, and wall paintings. With the sudden loss of patronage for religious art in the newly Protestant lands, many artists had to find new patrons and themes. They turned to portraiture, still-life, landscape painting, and so-called genre painting or scenes of everyday life using themes drawn from mythology, literature, and folklore as well as the religious subjects that had dominated western art since the medieval period. More than ever, art was a commodity, and leading artists like Rubens and Rembrandt organized their studios in to mini-factories producing multiple copies of their most popular works. The world of exploration, colonization, and trade expanded, accompanied by a dramatic explosion in scientific knowledge. Artist began to study anatomy, and attempted to paint underlying

skeleton and muscle as well as skin. Intellectual fascination with ancient Rome turned into full-scale archeological excavations and the unearthing of major artworks.

Though an admirer of classical proportions in the Renaissance tradition, Bernini was one of the pioneers of the baroque style. Named official Vatican architect in 1629, Bernini was also a sculptor, painter, and playwright—a skill set appropriate to the multimedia baroque style. Here we see his interpretation of the ever-popular biblical subject David. It is both more mature and more dynamic than Michelangelo and Donatello's Davids. Instead of posing like a male model, he is in motion, bending and twisting, his features contorted in exertion. We are seeing the thrilling climax of the story of David and Goliath rather than the static beginning or aftermath. As well as being a much more three-dimensional composition than those Renaissance precursors, this *David* includes the surrounding space as part of the composition by implying the presence of an unseen adversary, Goliath, somewhere behind the viewer. The viewer becomes part of the action—a radical new direction for art.

Caravaggio took realism to new extremes, painting the lowlife of Rome: fortune tellers, cardsharps, and street urchins dressed as musicians or mythological figures. His *Bacchus* on the left has a sunburned face and hands; Caravaggio painted what he saw, making no attempt to idealize or romanticize his subjects, or convince his audience that this is anything other than a street urchin in a toga. He worked directly from models without elaborate preparatory drawings. Although they must have been carefully planned, his compositions give the impression of immediacy. We can also see reflected here the

growing interest in still life. Caravaggio began his career as a specialist painter of fruit and vegetables, and when he began to paint on his own he included elements of still life with his half-length figures, usually large, brightly lit, and set close to the picture plane, or the "front" of the canvas.

He used lighting to create a dramatic contrast within his paintings, a technique called *tenebrism*, in which forms emerge from a dark background into a strong light, often coming from a single source outside the painting, like a spotlight. This is the same technique used to great effect by Wright of Derby in the eighteenth century. Some patrons and critics rejected Caravaggio's borderline vulgar naturalism, but others, particularly the younger generation of artists, recognized him as an innovator.

One famous follower of Carvaggio was Artemisia Gentileschi, the most important female artist of the period. Though women were excluded from the apprenticeship system, she was the daughter of an established painter and he trained her from childhood to follow in his footsteps. Gentileschi bravely tackled unfeminine genres like biblical and history painting; on the left is one of her many graphic interpretations of the biblical story of the virtuous Jewish widow Judith seducing and then with the help of her maid beheading the invading Assyrian general Holofernes. It is both visually and emotionally arresting, the tension inherent in the scene, with the figures captured mid-beheading, enhanced by the dramatic use of light and shadow—grabbing the viewer's attention in a manner typical of the baroque. In addition to being an early feminist tale, the story of Judith had particular resonance in Florence, where Gentileschi worked, and where she became the first female

painter accepted into the Accademia di Arte. On the right is one of her self-portraits, as the allegory of painting; some critics have observed that not only did she portray herself as the embodiment of painting, but the heroines in her paintings bear a striking resemblance to the artist herself. Though less well known today, in her time she attained an international reputation that helped to spread Carvaggio's style beyond Rome.

The influence of Flanders declined as religious strife divided the region. The most famous Flemish painters of the seventeenth century, Antony Van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens worked extensively outside of their homeland. Van Dyck lived in Italy for seven years and then became official court painter to Charles the First of England; that's one of his many portraits of Charles, on the left. Rubens worked in England as well; he also spent eight years traveling all over Italy and was a contemporary and supporter of Caravaggio. The intense emotion and dramatic lighting and diagonal composition of his *Raising of the Cross* altarpiece in Antwerp on the right recall Caravaggio, though the intense colors and realistic textures are derived from the Flemish tradition.

A Protestant convert to Catholicism, Rubens was equally at home painting for secular clients and the Catholic church. One of his most important patrons was Marie de Medici, Queen-Regent of France, who commissioned Rubens to paint a series of 24 twelve-foot-high canvases telling the story of her life, and celebrating the queen's role as mother of Louis the Thirteenth and founder of the new Bourbon dynasty. The series mixes fact, fantasy, allegory, political propaganda, and classical imagery, portraying her life, in Stokstad's words, as "one continuous triumph overseen by the ancient gods of Greece

and Rome." In this scene, the queen arrives at Marseilles on a ship bearing the Medici arms to marry Henri the Fourth. An allegorical figure representing France, in a helmet and blue robe decorated with fleur-de-lis, welcomes her with open arms, and the airborne figure of Fame blows not one but two trumpets to announce her arrival. In the water, Neptune and his nude minions escort the ship to shore. The vivid colors, layered textures, and compositions crowded with figures and activity give these enormous canvases sustained visual excitement. The series is now displayed in its entirety in the Louvre.

Rubens' lasting influence can be felt right here at the Huntington. Robyn Asleson, author of The Huntington's *British Paintings* catalogue, called his portrait of his second wife, Helena Fourment, "the most admired portrait in mid-eighteenth-century Britain." Now in Lisbon, it had entered Sir Robert Walpole's famous collection at Houghton Hall in about 1730, and it was admired by British artists and patrons alike. Rubens' wife was a popular masquerade costume in England, and that is which Lady Frances Courtenay wears in her portrait by Thomas Hudson of 1741 in the Huntington collection. This is one of the earliest eighteenth-century interpretations of Rubens wife, but the costume, the pose, and the distant sunset appear in several portraits of the era; it was especially popular for portraits of married women and brides-to-be.

Rubens's friend, countryman, and collaborator Van Dyck excelled in portraiture. Rubens employed him in his studio as a painter of heads, and the necessity of blending his brushstrokes seamlessly with another artists' honed his technical skill. Van Dyck's father was an Antwerp silk merchant, and his skill for depicting textiles was valued by wealthy

patrons who wished to show off their fine clothes. On the left is Charles the first's French-born queen Henrietta, and on the right, the king's cousins, Lords John and Bernard Stuart, both of whom would die in the Civil War a few years after this portrait was painted.

Even more than Rubens' wife, Van Dyck's paintings inspired eighteenth-century imitations. At first glance these two paintings might look like they were completed at the same time, and that was a deliberate choice on Gainsborough's part. Like many eighteenth century artists, he admired Van Dyck's bravura style, and he also thought that portraits in the costume of an earlier era—known as Vandyke dress at the time—would transcend fashion and become timeless. Like the cavaliers on the left, the Blue Boy wears his hair long and unpowdered, a high collar and matching cuffs of needle lace, a short, slashed doublet of jewel-toned, and ribbons at his knees and shoes. He carries a cloak and a wide-brimmed feathered hat. But on closer inspection, his breeches are cut in the short, close-fitting 18th century mode, the ribbons are large bows instead of bunches of small ribbons, his shoes are conventional 18th-century shoes, and his hair is more of a combover than a cavalier mane. The suit is actually a studio prop that appears in several portraits by Gainsborough, and it may have started life as a masquerade costume, for Vandyke dress was a popular choice for masquerades, and it was also worn by young boys in archery competitions in the eighteenth-century. I want to emphasize that the eighteenth-century "VanDyck" could have just as easily been called the "Rubens" style; more than a single artist, it imitated the rich artistic tradition of baroque era. The many portraits referencing Helena Fourment are part of the same trend.

Stokstad gives a very thorough overview of seventeenth century art in the Netherlands, or the Dutch republic, so I'm not going to spend much time on Dutch art, but it would be difficult to discuss seventeenth century painting without some mention of Rembrandt, an artist particularly important for the Huntington because we do have a Rembrandt studio piece in the collection; Rembrandt ran a busy studio, and because he had so many assistants, students, and followers it is very difficult to attribute his paintings, and there are a lot of not-quite Rembrandts out there. Arabella Huntington owned no fewer than six Rembrandts now in the Metropolitan Museum's collection. Those paintings are featured in the Met's current exhibition *The Age of Rembrandt: Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* Not only is there a catalogue of that exhibition available, but you can download the audio tour from the Met's website, metmuseum.org.

Rembrandt was primarily a portrait painter, and he left several self portraits like the one on the left. He also popularlized a new type of portrait called a *tronie*, like the one on the right, or the studio piece in the Huntington collection. A tronie is not so much a portrait as a character study of an evocative face, with the sitter often dressed in exotic clothing. His monumental painting *The Night Watch* is actually a group portrait commissioned by a wealthy civic guard company. Rembrandt takes the idea of a group portrait to a whole new level, injecting drama, movement, and several extraneous figures.

In France, the seventeenth century was dominated by the taste of one man, Louis the Fourteenth. His name has become synonymous with the excess of the *ancien regime*, or

old regime: political absolutism, unparalleled luxury and opulence, military glory, grand architectural schemes. As a tastemaker, he put his personal stamp not just on France but on all of 17th-century Europe. Louis was undoubtedly a brilliant and gifted individual; but another explanation for his dominance must surely lie in his longevity; he became king in 1643 while still a child, at age 5, and ruled 72 years, dying in 1715 just shy of his 77th birthday, in an age when the average lifespan was more like 40 or 45. In her biography of Louis, Nancy Mitford remarked that he "seems to have known that he would live to be old. His plans, both artistic and political, were for a long term. Another reason for his vast influence was that France itself was a force to be reckoned with, having the largest population of any country in western Europe—with a population of 23 million in 1700 compared to 6 million in Great Britain and Spain, and a gross national product and military to match.

Much of the credit for the ascendancy of French art market in the 17th century belongs to Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis' brilliant finance minister, who stopped at nothing to stimulate the French economy, from sweeping agricultural improvements to the foundation of luxury furniture, textile, and metalwork manufactories that would find French and foreign customers. He was determined to make France not only independent of its European neighbors, but the world's leader in taste and technology. As Louis waged a never-ending series of expensive wars across Europe, the French luxury goods industry generated a great deal of revenue for his war chest, and enhanced the king's image at home and abroad. Louis believed that it was France's right and duty to set the standard of culture and artistic achievement for all of Europe, and his to set the standard

for France, whether in art, architecture, music, cuisine, or dress. Here, a tapestry depicts the visit of the king, Colbert, and other ministers to the Gobelins manufactory, a government-sponsored workshop where a variety of luxury goods were created.

Perhaps Louis greatest and best-known achievement was building Versailles and introducing its regimented court culture, but he did not make Versailles his full-time residence until 1682. Previously, he lived at the palace that is now the Louvre museum, and it is for that royal residence that the two Savonnerie carpets in the Huntington collection were created.

The Hall of Mirrors was built to link the kings and queen's apartments, at Versailles. But the hall was much more than a functional passageway; it was designed to dazzle visitors with ornately rendered symbolism and royalist propaganda. Mirrors were also a highly exclusive luxury item in the 17th century, being a relatively new and rare technology at the time. The techniques used to make mirrors were perfected in Renaissance Venice; by the middle of the seventeenth century, mirrors were produced all over Europe, including in Paris. But they were extremely expensive, especially the larger variety, which were much harder to make than smaller, hand-held versions. The mirrors in the hall of mirrors are actually small mirrors combined to form large ones; it was said that the hall used up Europe's entire output of mirrors for the year it was built. The painted ceiling as much as the mirrored and marbled walls contributes to the effect of over-the-top ornamentation and luxury. As the sole route from the royal apartments to the chapel, the hall became the court's unofficial living room, the ultimate place to see and be seen

Louis was a talented dancer and as a young man he played the role of Apollo, the Sun God, in a court ballet; from then on, he called himself the Sun King, and he was portrayed as such in portraits, poems, and theatrical performances. He loved to dress up, whether for court balls, pagaents, and masquerades or just to have his picture painted; here he is on the left as Jupiter, with his thunderbolt and eagle, and on the right as a Roman soldier riding into battle, invoking the iconography of classical mythology and literature to glorify the most modern of monarchs.

Claude Gellée, known as Le Lorrain or simply Claude, was a French landscape painter who worked in Italy and was strongly influenced by the concept of an ideal classical landscape. In Rome he studied with a noted architectural painter, and his works are populated with orderly classical edifices and stately ruins. He was fascinated with natural light and often included sunrises or sunsets in his landscapes. He relied upon a consistent one-point perspective, with figures neatly organized by foreground, middle ground, and background. But instead of an orderly, symmetrical composition, here he leads the viewer into the painting in a zigzag fashion, the eye moving from the ruins on the left to the palace on the right, then left and right across the water to the horizon. The small figures of the queen of Sheba and her courtiers in the foreground seem incidental, dwarfed by the landscape and the spectacular meeting of sea and sky on the horizon.

Lorrain was another seventeenth-century artist revered in eighteenth-century England, where amateur landscape painters looked used small tinted convex mirrors called

"Claude glasses" to focus their subject into a small, neat view, and give them a soft, mellow tinge, like the coloring of the master.

Table discussion: Seventeenth-century art at The Huntington