ART HISTORY
PORTABLE EDITION
THIRD EDITION

Fourteenth to Seventeenth Century Art

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THE BAROQUE PERIOD

The word *baroque* was initially used in the late 17th century as a derogatory term to characterize the exuberant and extravagant aspects of some of the art of the preceding century and a half. Today, *baroque* can designate certain formal characteristics of style, as well as refer to a period in the history of art lasting from the end of the sixteenth into the eighteenth century. Baroque style is 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. Artists created open compositions in which elements are placed or seem to move diagonally, expand upward, or overlap their supposed frames. Many artists developed a loose, free technique using rich colors and dramatic contrasts of light and dark, producing what one critic called an "absolute unity" of form. This unified concept extends to the more expansive unity between architecture, sculpture, and painting and the theatrical effects that could be created by what we would term a multimedia approach. Although many of the formal characteristics of the Baroque have been applied to other periods, like Hellenistic Greek styles, the term *baroque* will be used here to refer to the complex of styles—including a more restrained, classical stream—that developed against the historical backdrop of the Counter-Reformation, the advancement of science, the expanding world of exploration and trade, and the rise of private patronage in the arts.

By the seventeenth century, the permanent division within Europe between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism had a critical effect on European art. As part of the Counter-Reformation program that came to fruition in the seventeenth century, the Church used art to encourage piety among the faithful and to persuade those it regarded as heretics to return to the fold. Patronage of art in Catholic as well as Protestant countries was spurred by economic growth that helped to support not only the aristocracy but a large, affluent middle class eager to build and furnish fine houses and even palaces. Buildings ranged from magnificent churches and palaces to stage sets for plays and ballets, while painting and sculpture varied from large religious works and history paintings to portraits, still lifes, and genre paintings (scenes of everyday life). At the same time, scientific advances compelled people to question their worldview. Of great importance was the growing understanding that Earth was not the center of the universe but was a planet revolving around the sun (see "Science and the Changing Worldview," page 740).

Within these historical parameters, artists achieved spectacular technical virtuosity and an impressive ability to produce for their patrons and the market. Painters manipulated their mediums from the thinnest glazes to heavy impasto (thickly applied pigments), taking pleasure in the very quality of the material. A desire for realism led some artists to reach for a verisimilitude that went against the idealization of classical and Renaissance styles. The English leader Oliver Cromwell supposedly demanded that his portrait be painted "warts and all." Leading artists such as Rubens and Rembrandt organized their studios into veritable picture factories. Artists were admired for the originality of a concept or design, and their shops produced paintings on demand—including copy after copy of popular themes or portraits. The respect for the "original," or first edition, is a modern concept.

The role of viewers also changed. Earlier, Renaissance painters and patrons had been fascinated with the visual possibilities of perspective, but even such displays as Mantegna's ceiling fresco at Mantua (see Fig. 19-34) remained an intellectual conceit. Seventeenth-century masters, on the other hand, treated viewers as participants in the artwork, and the space of the work included the world beyond the frame. In Catholic countries, representations of horrifying scenes of martyrdom or the passionate spiritual life of a mystic in religious ecstasy inspired a renewed faith (see Fig. 22-6). In Protestant countries, images of civic parades and city views inspired pride in accomplishment (see Figs. 22-45, 22-49). Viewers participated in art like audiences in a theater—vicariously but completely—as the work of art reached out visually and emotionally to draw them into its orbit. The seventeenth-century French critic Roger de Piles described this exchange when he wrote: "True painting... calls to us and has so powerful an effect that we cannot help coming near it, as if it had something to tell us" (quoted in Puttfarken, page 55).
investigations of the natural world that had begun during the Renaissance changed the way people of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—including artists—saw the world. Some of the new discoveries brought a sense of the grand scale of the universe, while others focused on the minute complexity of the microscopic world of nature. As frames of reference expanded and contracted, artists found new ways to mirror these changing perspectives in their own works.

The philosophers Francis Bacon (1561–1626) of England and Rene Descartes (1596–1650) of France established a new scientific method of studying the world by insisting on scrupulous objectivity and logical reasoning. Bacon proposed that facts be established by observation and tested by controlled experiments. Descartes argued for the deductive method of reasoning, in which a conclusion was arrived at logically from basic premises—the most fundamental example being “I think, therefore I am.”

In 1543, the Polish scholar Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) published On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres, which contradicted the long-held view that Earth is the center of the universe (the Ptolemaic theory) by arguing that Earth and other planets revolve around the sun. The Church put the book on its Index of Prohibited Books in 1616, but Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) continued demonstrating that the planets revolve around the sun in elliptical orbits. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), an astronomer, mathematician, and physicist, developed the telescope as a tool for observing the heavens. His findings provided further confirmation of the Copernican theory, but since the Church prohibited teaching that theory, Galileo was tried for heresy by the Inquisition and forced to recant his views. As the first person to see the craters of the moon through a telescope, Galileo began the exploration of space that eventually led humans to take their first steps on the moon in 1969.

Seventeenth-century science explored not only the vastness of outer space but also the smallest elements of inner space, thanks to the invention of the microscope by the Dutch lens maker and amateur scientist Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723). Although embroiderers, textile inspectors, manuscript illuminators, and painters had long used magnifying glasses in their work, Leeuwenhoek perfected grinding techniques and increased the power of his lenses far beyond what those uses required. Ultimately, he was able to study the inner workings of plants and animals and even see microorganisms.

Soon, scientists learned to draw, or depended on artists to draw, the images revealed by the microscope for further study and publication. Not until the discovery of photography in the nineteenth century could scientists communicate their discoveries without an artist’s help.

Maria Sibylla Merian PLATE 9 FROM DISSERTATION IN INSECT GENERATIONS AND METAMORPHOSIS IN SURINAM 1719. Hand-colored engraving, 18½ × 13” (47.9 × 33 cm). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay Collection, funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. George G. Anderman and anonymous donor (1976.56)

Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) was unusual in making noteworthy contributions as both researcher and artist. German by birth and Dutch by training, Merian was once described by a Dutch contemporary as a painter of flowers, fruit, birds, worms, flies, mosquitoes, spiders, “and other filth.” At the time, it was believed that insects emerged spontaneously from the soil, but Merian’s research on the life cycles of insects proved otherwise; findings she published in 1673 and 1683 as The Wonderful Transformation of Caterpillars and (Their) Singular Plant Nourishment. In 1699, Amsterdam subsidized Merian’s research on plants and insects in the Dutch colony of Surinam in South America; her results were published as Dissertation in Insect Generations and Metamorphosis in Surinam, illustrated with sixty large plates engraved after her watercolors. Each plate is scientifically precise, accurate, and informative, presenting insects in various stages of development, along with the plants they live on.
people. Peter Mundy, an English traveler, wrote in 1640 that even butchers, bakers, shoemakers, and blacksmiths had pictures in their houses and shops. This taste for art stimulated a free market for paintings that functioned like other commodity markets. Artists had to compete to capture the interest of the public by painting on speculation. Naturally, specialists in particularly popular types of images were likely to be financially successful, and what most Dutch patrons wanted were paintings of themselves, their country, their homes, and the life around them. The demand for art gave rise to an active market for the graphic arts, both for original compositions and for copies of paintings, since one copperplate could produce hundreds of impressions, and worn-out plates could be reworked and used again.

**The Influence of Italy.** Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617) from Haarlem, the finest engraver in the Netherlands, perhaps in Europe, had visited Florence and Rome in 1590–91. His engravings of antiquities and of Mannerist paintings, which he made on his return, were widely circulated and introduced many people to Italian art (see Introduction, Fig. 24). The fascination continued. Flemish travelers like Leiden Cruyl (1640–1720) published engravings of the views of Rome he made in 1665 (see Fig. 22–21).

Hendrick ter Bruggghen (1588–1629) had spent time in Rome, perhaps between 1608 and 1614, where he must have seen Caravaggio’s works and became an enthusiastic follower. On his return home, in 1616, he entered the Utrecht painters’ guild, bringing Caravaggio’s style into the Netherlands. Ter Bruggghen’s **SAINT SEBASTIAN TENDED BY SAINT IRENE** introduced the Dutch painters to the new art of Baroque Italy (Fig. 22–40). The suffering and recovery of Saint Sebastian was equated to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. The sickly gray-green flesh of the nearly dead saint, set in an almost monochromatic palette, contrasts with the brilliant red and gold brocade of his garment—actually the cope of the bishop of Utrecht, which survived the destruction by Protestants and became a symbol of Catholicism in Utrecht. The saint is a heroic figure: His strong, youthful body is still bound to the stake. But Saint Irene (the patron saint of nurses) carefully removes one of the arrows that pierce him, and her maid is about to untie his wrists. In a typically Baroque manner, the powerful diagonal created by Saint Sebastian’s left arm dislodges him from the triangular stability of the group. His corpse is in transition and will soon fall forward. The immediacy and emotional effectiveness of the work are further strengthened by setting all the figures in the foreground plane, an effect strengthened by the low horizon line. The use of tenebrism and dramatic light effects, and realism recalling Caravaggio, made an impact on the Dutch artists who had not had the opportunity to travel to Italy. Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Rubens all admired ter Bruggghen’s painting.
BRUEGHEL AND RUBENS'S ALLEGORY OF SIGHT

In 1599, the Spanish Habsburg princess Isabel Clara Eugenia married the Austrian Habsburg archduke Albert, uniting two branches of the family. Together they ruled the Habsburg Netherlands for the king of Spain. They were patrons of the arts and sciences and friends of artists—especially Peter Paul Rubens. Their interests and generous patronage were abundantly displayed in five allegorical paintings of the senses by Rubens and Jan Brueghel. The two artists were neighbors and frequently collaborated; Rubens painted the figures, and Brueghel created the settings. Such collaboration between major artists was not unusual in Antwerp.

Of the five paintings, the ALLEGORY OF SIGHT is the most splendid: It is like an illustrated catalog of the ducal collection. Gathered in a huge vaulted room are paintings, sculpture, furniture, objects in gold and silver, and scientific equipment—all under the magnificent double-headed eagle emblems of the Habsburgs. We explore the painting inch by inch, as if reading a book or scanning a palace inventory. There on the table are Brueghel’s copies of Rubens’s portraits of Archduke Albert and Princess Isabel Clara Eugenia; another portrait of the duke rests on the floor. Besides the portraits, we can find Rubens’s Daniel in the Lions' Den (upper left corner), The Lion and Tiger Hunt (top center), and The Drunken Silenus (lower right), as well as the Madonna and Child in a Wreath of Flowers (far right), a popular seventeenth-century subject, for which Rubens painted the Madonna and Brueghel created the wreath. Brueghel also included Raphael's Saint Cecilia (behind the globe) and Titian’s Venus and Psyche (over the door).

In the foreground, the classical goddess Venus, attended by Cupid (both painted by Rubens), has put aside her mirror to contemplate a painting of Christ Healing the Blind. She is surrounded by the equipment needed to see and to study. The huge globe at the right and the armillary sphere with its gleaming rings at the upper left—the Earth and the solar system—symbolize the extent of humanistic learning, an image that speaks to viewers of our day as clearly as it did to those of its own. The books and prints, ruler, compasses, magnifying glass, and the more complex astrolabe, telescope, and eyeglasses may also refer to spiritual blindness—to those who look but do not see.

Jan Brueghel and Peter Paul Rubens  ALLEGORY OF SIGHT
From Allegories of the Five Senses. c. 1617-18. Oil on wood panel, 25⅓ × 43" (65 × 109 cm). Museo del Prado, Madrid.
PORTRAITS. Dutch Baroque portraiture took many forms, ranging from single portraits in sparsely furnished settings to allegorical depictions of people in elaborate costumes surrounded by appropriate symbols. Although the accurate portrayal of facial features and costumes was the most important gauge of a portrait's success, the best painters went beyond pure description to convey a sense of mood or emotion in the sitter. (We cannot know if it was an accurate representation of their personality in the modern sense, however.) Group portraiture documenting the membership of corporate organizations was a Dutch specialty. These large canvases, filled with many individuals who shared the cost of the commission, challenged painters to present a coherent, interesting composition that nevertheless gave equal attention to each individual portrait.

Frans Hals (c. 1581/85–1666), the leading painter of Haarlem, developed a style grounded in the Netherlandish love of realism and inspired by the Caravaggesque style introduced by artists such as ter Bruggghen. Like Velázquez, he tried to re-create the optical effects of light on the shapes and textures of objects. He painted boldly, with slashing strokes and angular patches of paint. When his work is seen at a distance, however, all the colors merge into solid forms over which a flickering light seems to move. In Hals's hands, this seemingly effortless technique suggests a boundless joy in life.
In his painting *Catharina Hooft and Her Nurse* (fig. 22-41), of about 1620, Hals captured the vitality of a gesture and a fleeting moment in time. While the portrait records for posterity the great pride of the parents in their child, the painting also records their wealth in its study of rich fabrics, laces, and expensive toys (a golden rattle). Hals depicted the heartwarming delight of a child, who seems to be acknowledging the viewer as a loving family member while her doting nurse tries to distract her with an apple.

In contrast to this intimate individual portrait are Hals’s official group portraits, such as his *Officers of the Haarlem Militia Company of Saint Adrian* (fig. 22-42), of about 1627. Less imaginative artists had arranged their sitters in neat rows to depict every face clearly. Instead, Hals’s dynamic composition turned the group portrait into a lively social event. The composition is based on a strong underlying geometry of diagonal lines—gestures, banners, and sashes—balanced by the stabilizing perpendiculars of table, window, tall glass, and striped banner. The black suits and hats make the white ruffs and sashes of rose, white, and blue even more brilliant.

The company, made up of several guard units, was charged with the military protection of Haarlem. Officers came from the upper middle class and held their commissions for three years, whereas the ordinary guards were tradespeople and craftsworkers. Each company was organized like a guild, under the patronage of a saint. When the men were not on war alert, the company functioned as a fraternal order, holding archery competitions, taking part in city processions, and maintaining an altar in the local church (see also fig. 22-45.)
A painting long praised as one of Hals's finest works was recently discovered to be by Judith Leyster (c. 1609–60), Hals's contemporary. A cleaning uncovered her distinctive signature, the monogram JL with a star, which refers to her surname, meaning "pole star." Leyster's work shows clear echoes of her exposure to the Utrecht painters who had enthusiastically adopted Caravaggio's realism, dramatic tenebrist lighting effects, large figures pressed into the foreground plane, and, especially, theatrically presented themes. Since in 1631 Leyster signed as a witness at the baptism in Haarlem of one of Hals's children, it is assumed they were close; she may also have worked in Hals's shop. She entered Haarlem's Guild of Saint Luke in 1633, which allowed her to take pupils into her studio, and her competitive relationship with Frans Hals around that time is made clear by the complaint she lodged against him in 1635 for luring away one of her apprentices.

Leyster is known primarily for her informal scenes of daily life, which often carry an underlying moralistic theme. In her lively **SELF-PORTRAIT** of 1635 (Fig. 22–43), the artist has paused momentarily in her work to look back, as if the viewer had just entered the room. Her elegant dress and the fine chair in which she sits are symbols of her success as an artist whose popularity was based on the very type of painting underway on her easel. (One critic has suggested that her subject—a man playing a violin—may be a visual pun on the painter with palette and brush.) Leyster's understanding of light and texture is truly remarkable. The brushwork she used to depict her own flesh and delicate ruff is finer than Hals's technique and forms an interesting contrast to the broad strokes of thick paint used to create her full, stiff skirt. She further emphasized the difference between her portrait and her painting by executing the image on her easel in lighter tones and soft, loose brushwork. The narrow range of colors, sensitively dispersed in the composition and the warm spot-lighting are typical of Leyster's mature style.

**Rembrandt van Rijn.** The most important painter working in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century was Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69). Rembrandt, one of nine children born in Leiden to a miller and his wife, enrolled at the University of Leiden in 1620 at age 14 but chose instead to study painting with a local artist. Later he studied briefly under
Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), the principal painter in Amsterdam at the time. From Lastman, a history painter who had worked in Rome, Rembrandt learned the new styles developed in Rome by Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio: naturalism, drama, and extreme tenebrism. He was back in Leiden by 1626, painting religious and historical scenes as well as fantasy portraits from models likely drawn from his family and acquaintances. Late in 1631 he returned to Amsterdam to work primarily as a portrait painter, although he continued to paint a wide range of narrative themes and landscapes.

In his first group portrait, THE ANATOMY LESSON OF DR. NICOLAES TULP (fig. 22-44) of 1632, Rembrandt combined his scientific and humanistic interests. Frans Hals had activated the group portrait rather than conceiving it as a simple reproduction of figures and faces; Rembrandt transformed it into a dramatic narrative scene. Doctor Tulp, who was head of the surgeons' guild from 1628 to 1653, sits right of center, and the other doctors gather around to observe the cadaver and listen to the famed anatomist. Rembrandt built his composition on a sharp diagonal that pierces space from right to left, uniting the cadaver on the table, the calculated arrangement of speaker and listeners, and the open book into a climactic event. Rembrandt makes effective use of Caravaggio's tenebrist technique. The figures emerge from a dark and undefined ambience with their faces framed by brilliant white ruffs. Radiant light from an unknown source streams down on the juxtaposed arms and hands, as Dr. Tulp, flexes his own left hand to demonstrate the action of the cadaver’s arm muscles. Unseen by the viewers are the illustrations of the huge book. It must be the edition of Andreas Vesalius’s study of human anatomy, published in Basel in 1543, which was the first attempt at accurate anatomical illustrations in print. Rembrandt’s painting has been seen as an homage to Vesalius and to science, as well as a portrait of the members of the Amsterdam surgeons’ guild.

Prolific and popular with Amsterdam clientele, Rembrandt ran a busy studio producing works that sold for high prices. The prodigious output of his large workshop and of many followers who imitated his manner has made it difficult for scholars to define his body of work, and many paintings by students and assistants formerly attributed to Rembrandt have recently been assigned to other artists. Rembrandt's
nature work reflected his cosmopolitan city environment, his study of science and nature, and the broadening of his artistic vocabulary by the study of Italian Renaissance art, chiefly from engravings and paintings. Thanks to prints imported by the busy Amsterdam art market, he could study such works as Leonardo’s Last Supper (see Introduction, Fig. 18).

In 1642, Rembrandt was one of several artists commissioned by a wealthy civic-guard company to create large group portraits of its members for its new meeting hall. The result, Captain Frans Banning Cocq Mustering His Company (Fig. 25-45), carries the idea of the group portrait as drama even further. Because of the dense layer of grime and darkened varnish on it and its dark background architecture, this painting was once thought to be a night scene and was therefore called “The Night Watch.” After cleaning and restoration in 1973-74 it now exhibits a natural golden light that sets afire the palette of rich colors—browns, blues, olive green, orange, and red—around a central core of lemon yellow in the costume of a lieutenant. To the dramatic group composition, showing a company forming for a parade in an Amsterdam street, Rembrandt added several colorful but seemingly unnecessary figures. While the officers stride purposefully forward, the rest of the men and several mischievous children mill about. The radiant young girl in the left middle ground, carrying a chicken and wearing a money pouch, may be a pun on the kind of guns (klaue) that gave the name (the Kloveniers) to the company. Chicken legs with claws (klaauw in Dutch) also are part of their coat of arms. She may stand as a kind of symbolic mascot of the militia company.

In his enthusiasm for printmaking as an important art form with its own aesthetic qualities, Rembrandt was remarkably like Albrecht Dürer (See Figs. 21-9, 21-10). He focused on etching, which uses acid to inscribe a design on metal plates. His earliest etchings date from 1627. About a decade later, he began to experiment with making additions to his compositions in the drypoint technique, in which the artist uses a sharp needle to scratch shallow lines in a plate. Because etching and drypoint allow the artist to work directly on the plate, the style of the finished print can have the relatively free and spontaneous character of a drawing. Rembrandt’s commitment to the full exploitation of the medium is indicated by the fact that in these works he alone
carried the creative process through, from the preparation of the plate to its inking and printing, and he constantly experimented with the technique, with methods of inking, and with papers for printing.

Rembrandt experienced a deep religious faith that was based on his personal study of the Bible. His deep consideration of the meaning of the life of Christ can be studied in a series of prints, THREE CROSSES, that comes down to us in five states, or stages, of the creative and printing process. (Only the first and fourth are reproduced here.) Rembrandt tried to capture the moment described in the Gospels when, during the Crucifixion, darkness covered the earth and Jesus cried out, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." In the first state (fig. 22-46), the centurion kneels in front of the cross while other terrified people run from the scene. The Virgin Mary and John share the light flooding down from heaven. By the fourth state (fig. 22-47), Rembrandt has completely reworked and reinterpreted the theme. In each version, the shattered hill of Golgotha dominates the foreground, but now a mass of vertical lines, echoing the rigid body of Jesus, fills the space, obliterates the shower of light, and virtually eliminates the former image, including even Mary and Jesus's friends. The horseman holding a lance now faces Jesus. Compared with the first state, the composition is more compact, the individual elements are simplified, and the emotions are intensified. The first state is a detailed rendering of the scene in realistic terms; the fourth state, a reduction of the event to its essence. The composition revolves in an oval of half-light around the base of the cross, and the viewer's attention is drawn to the figures of Jesus and the people, in mute confrontation. In Three Crosses, Rembrandt defined the mystery of Christianity in Jesus's sacrifice, presented in realistic terms but as something beyond rational explanation. In Rembrandt's late works, realism relates to the spirit of inner meaning, not of surface details. The eternal battles of dark and light, doom and salvation, evil and good—all seem to be waged anew.
As he aged Rembrandt painted ever more brilliantly, varying textures and paint from the thinnest glazes to thick impasto, creating a rich luminous chiaroscuro, ranging from deepest shadow to brilliant highlights in a dazzling display of gold, red, and chestnut brown. His sensitivity to the human condition is perhaps nowhere more powerfully expressed than in his late self-portraits which became more searching as the artist aged. Distilling a lifetime of study and contemplation, he expressed an internalized spirituality new in the history of art. In his SELF-PORTRAIT of 1658 (FIG. 22-48), the artist assumes a regal pose, at ease with arms and legs spread and holding a staff as if it were a baton of command. Yet his face and eyes seem weary, and we know that fortune no longer smiled on him (he had to declare bankruptcy that same year). A few well-placed brush strokes suggest the physical tension in the fingers and the weariness of the deep-set eyes. Mercilessly analytical, the portrait depicts the furrowed brow, sagging flesh, and prematurely aged face of one who has suffered deeply but still retains his dignity.

JAN (JOHANNES) VERMEER. One of the most intriguing Dutch artists of this period is Jan (Johannes) Vermeer (1632–75), who was also an innkeeper and art dealer. He entered the Delft artists' guild in 1653 and painted only for local patrons. Meticulous in his technique, with a unique compositional approach and painting style, Vermeer produced fewer than forty canvases that can be securely attributed to him; and the more these paintings are studied, the more questions arise about the artist's life and his methods. Vermeer's VIEW OF DELFT (FIG. 22-49), for example, is no simple cityscape. Although the artist convinces the viewer of its authenticity, he does not paint a photographic reproduction of the scene; Vermeer moves buildings around to create an ideal composition. He endows the city with a timeless stability by a stress on horizontal lines, the careful placement of buildings, the quiet atmosphere, and the clear, even light that seems to emerge from beneath low-lying clouds. Vermeer may have experimented with the mechanical device known as the camera obscura (see Chapter 30), not as a method of reproducing the image but as another tool in the visual analysis of the landscape. The camera obscura would have enhanced optical distortions that led to the "beading" of highlights (seen here on the harbored ships and dark gray architecture), which creates the illusion of brilliant light but does not dissolve the underlying form.

Vermeer seemed to favor enigmatic scenes of women in their homes, alone or with a servant, who are occupied with
some cultivated activity, such as writing, reading letters, or playing a musical instrument. Most of his accepted works are of a similar type—quiet interior scenes, low-key in color, and asymmetrical but strongly geometric in organization. Vermeer achieved his effects through a consistent architectonic construction of space in which every object adds to the clarity and balance of the composition. An even light from a window often gives solidity to the figures and objects in a room.

All emotion is subdued, as Vermeer evokes the stillness of meditation. Even the brushwork is so controlled that it becomes invisible, except when he paints reflected light as tiny droplets of color.

In WOMAN HOLDING A BALANCE (Fig. 22–30), perfect equilibrium creates a monumental composition and a moment of supreme stillness. The woman contemplates the balance and so calls our attention to the act of weighing and
judging. Her hand and the scale are central, but directly over her head, on the wall of the room, an image of Christ in a gold aureole appears in a large painting of the Last Judgment. Thus, Vermeer's painting becomes a metaphor for eternal judgment. The woman's moment of quiet introspection before she touches the gold or pearls, shimmering with the reflected light from the window, also recalls the vanitas theme of the transience of life, allowing the painter to comment on the ephemeral quality of material things.

Life in the City, Genre Scenes. Continuing a long Netherlandish tradition, genre paintings of the Baroque period—generally painted for private patrons and depicting scenes of contemporary daily life—were often laden with symbolic references, although their meaning is not always clear. A clean house might indicate a virtuous housewife and mother while a messy household suggested laziness and the sin of sloth. Ladies dressing in front of mirrors certainly could be succumbing to vanity, and drinking parties led to overindulgence and lust.

One of the most refined of the genre painters was Gerard ter Borch (1617–81). In his painting traditionally known as The Suitor's Visit (Fig. 22–51), from about 1658, a well-dressed man bows gracefully to an elegant woman arrayed in white satin, who stands in a sumptuously furnished room in which another woman plays a lute. Another man, in front of a fireplace, turns to observe the newcomer. The painting appears to represent a prosperous gentleman paying a call on a lady of equal social status, possibly a courtship scene. The dog in the painting and the musician seem to be simply part of the scene, but we are already familiar with the dog as a symbol of fidelity, and stringed instruments were said to symbolize, through their tuning, the harmony of souls and thus, possibly, a loving relationship. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the theme is not so innocent; that the gestures here suggest a liaison. The dog could be interpreted sexually, as sniffing around, and the music making could be associated with sensory pleasure. Ter Borch was renowned for his exquisite rendition of lace, velvet, and especially satin, and such wealth could be seen as a symbol of excess. One critic has
even suggested that the white satin is a metaphor for the women's skin. If there is a moral lesson, it is presented discreetly and ambiguously.

Another important genre painter is Jan Steen (1626-79), whose larger brushstrokes contrast with the meticulous treatment of ter Borch. Steen painted over 800 (mostly undated) works but never achieved financial success. Most of his scenes used everyday life to portray moral tales, illustrate proverbs and folk sayings, or make puns to amuse the spectator. Steen moved about the country for most of his life, and from 1670 until his death he kept a tavern in Leiden. He probably found inspiration and models all about him. Early in his career Steen was influenced by Frans Hals, and his work, in turn, influenced a school, or circle of artists working in a related style, of Dutch artists who emulated his ever-changing style and subjects. Steen could be very summary or extremely detailed in his treatment of forms. His paintings of often riotous and disorderly interiors gave rise to the saying "a Jan Steen household."

Jan Steen's paintings of children are especially remarkable, for he captured not only their childish physiques but also their fleeting moods and expressions with rapid and fluid brushstrokes. His ability to capture such transitory dispositions was well expressed in his painting THE DRAWING LESSON (Introduction, Fig. 17). Here, youthful apprentices—a boy and a well-dressed young woman—observe the master artist correct an example of drawing, a skill widely believed to be the foundation of art. The studio is cluttered with all the supplies the artists need. On the floor at the lower right, objects such as a lute, wine jug, book, and skull also remind the viewer of the transitory nature of life in spite of the permanence art may seem to offer.

Emanuel de Witte (1617-92) of Rotterdam specialized in architectural interiors, first in Delft in 1640 and then in Amsterdam after settling there permanently in 1652. Although many of his interiors were composites of features from several locations combined in one idealized architectural view, de Witte also painted faithful "portraits" of actual buildings. One of these is his PORTUGUESE SYNAGOGUE, AMSTERDAM (Fig. 22-52), of 1680. The synagogue, which still stands and is one of the most impressive buildings in Amsterdam, is shown here as a rectangular hall divided into one wide central aisle with narrow side aisles, each covered with a wooden barrel vault resting on lintels supported by columns. De Witte's shift of the viewpoint slightly to one side has created an interesting spatial composition, and strong contrasts of light and shade add dramatic movement to the simple interior. The canted figure in the foreground and the dogs provide a sense of scale for the architecture and add human interest.

Today, the painting is interesting both as a record of seventeenth-century synagogue architecture and as evidence of Dutch religious tolerance in an age when Jews were often persecuted. Ousted from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, many Jews had settled first in Flanders and then in the Netherlands. The Jews in Amsterdam enjoyed religious and personal freedom, and their synagogue was considered one of the outstanding sights of the city.

LANDSCAPE. The Dutch loved the landscapes and vast skies of their own country, but those who painted them were not slaves to nature as they found it: The concept was foreign to this time period. The artists constructed and refined their work in the confines of their studio and were never afraid to remake a scene by rearranging, adding, or subtracting to give their compositions formal organization or a desired mood. Starting in the 1620s, view painters generally adhered to a convention in which little color was used beyond browns, grays, and beiges. After 1650, they tended to be more individualistic in their styles, but nearly all brought a broader range of colors into play. One continuing motif was the emphasis on cloud-filled expanses of sky dominating a relatively narrow horizontal band of earth below. Painters specialized in the sea, the countryside, the city, and its buildings. Paintings of architectural interiors also became popular and seem to have been painted for their own beauty, just as exterior views of the land, cities, and harbors were.

The Haarlem landscape specialist Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29-82), whose popularity drew many pupils to his workshop, was especially adept at both the invention of
dramatic compositions and the projection of moods in his canvases. His **Jewish Cemetery** (Fig. 22–53), of 1655–60, is a thought-provoking view of silent tombs, crumbling ruins, and stormy landscape, with a rainbow set against dark, scudding clouds. Ruisdael was greatly concerned with spiritual meanings of the landscape, which he expressed in his choice of such environmental factors as the time of day, the weather, the appearance of the sky, or the abstract patterning of sun and shade. The barren tree points its branches at the tombs. Here the tombs, ruins, and fallen and blasted trees suggest an allegory of transience. The melancholy mood is mitigated by the rainbow, a traditional symbol of renewal and hope.

**Still Lifes and Flower Pieces.** The Dutch were so proud of their artists’ still-life paintings that they presented one (a flower piece by Rachel Ruysch) to the French queen Marie de’ Medici when she made a state visit to Amsterdam. A still-life painting might carry moralizing connotations and commonly had a **vanitas** theme, reminding viewers of the transience of life, material possessions, and even art.

One of the first Dutch still-life painters was Pieter Claesz (1596/97–1660) of Haarlem, who, like the Antwerp artist Clara Peeters, painted “breakfast pieces,” that is, a meal of bread, fruits, and nuts. In subtle, nearly monochromatic paintings, such as **Still Life with a Watch** (Fig. 22–54), Claesz seems to give life to inanimate objects. He organizes dishes in diagonal positions to give a strong sense of space, and he gives the maximum contrast of textures within a color scheme of white, grays, and browns. The brilliant yellow lemon provides visual excitement with its rough curling peel, juicy flesh, and soft pulpy inner skin. The tilted silver tazza contrasts with the half-filled glass that becomes a towering monumental presence and permits Claesz to display his skill at transparencies.
and reflections. No longer are inanimate objects represented for their symbolic value as in fifteenth-century Flemish painting, yet meaning is not entirely lost, for such paintings suggest the prosperity of Claesz's patrons. The food might be simple, but the lemon is a luxury imported from Mediterranean lands, and the silver ornamental cup graced the tables of only the wealthy. Finally, the meticulously painted time-piece suggests a deeper meaning—perhaps human achievement in science and technology, or perhaps it also becomes a minac symbol of the inexorable passage of time and the fleeting life of human beings, thoughts also suggested by the interrupted breakfast.

Still-life paintings in which cut-flower arrangements predominate are referred to simply as “flower pieces.” Significant advances were made in botany during the seventeenth century through the application of orderly scientific methods and objective observation (see “Science and the Changing Worldview,” page 746). The Dutch were major growers and exporters of flowers, especially tulips, which appear in nearly every flower piece in dozens of exquisite
variations. The Dutch tradition of flower painting peaked in
the long career of Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750) of Amster-
dam. Her flower pieces were highly prized for their sensi-
tive, free-form arrangements and their unusual and beautiful
color harmonies. During her seventy-year career, she
became one of the most sought-after and highest-paid still-
life painters in Europe—her paintings brought twice what
Rembrandt’s did.

In her FLOWER STILL LIFE (FIG. 22–55), painted after
1700, Ruysch placed the container at the center of the can-
vas’s width, then created an asymmetrical floral arrangement
of pale oranges, pinks, and yellows rising from lower left to
top right of the picture, offset by the strong diagonal of the
tabletop. To further balance the painting, she placed high-
lighted blossoms and leaves against the dark left half of the
canvas and silhouetted them against the light wall area on the
right. Ruysch often emphasized the beauty of curving flower
stems and enlivened her compositions with interesting addi-
tions, such as casually placed pieces of fruit or insects, in this
case a large gray moth (lower left) and two snail shells.

Flower painting, a much-admired specialty in the seven-
teenth- and eighteenth-century Netherlands, was almost
never a straightforward depiction of actual fresh flowers.
Instead, artists made color sketches of fresh examples of each
type of flower and studied scientifically accurate color illus-
trations in botanical publications. Using their sketches and
notebooks, in the studio they would compose bouquets of
perfect specimens of a variety of flowers that could never be
found blooming at the same time. The short life of blooming
flowers was a poignant reminder of the fleeting nature of
beauty and of human life.

FRANCE

The early seventeenth century in France was marked by
almost continuous foreign and civil wars. The assassination
of King Henri IV in 1610 left France in the hands of the queen,
Marie de’ Medici (regency 1610–17; see FIG. 22–36), as
regent for her 9-year-old son, Louis XIII (ruled 1610–43).
When Louis came of age, the brilliant and unscrupulous Car-
dinal Richelieu became chief minister and set about increasing
the power of the Crown at the expense of the French
nobility. The death of Louis XIII again left France with a
child king, the five-year-old Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715).
His mother, Anne of Austria, became regent, with the assis-
tance of another powerful minister, Cardinal Mazarin. At
Mazarin’s death in 1661, Louis XIV (see FIG. 22–1) began his
long personal reign, assisted by yet another able minister,
Jean-Baptiste Colbert.

An absolute monarch whose reign was the longest in
European history, Louis XIV expanded royal art patronage,
making the French court the envy of every ruler in Europe.
The arts, like everything else, came under royal control. In
1635, Cardinal Richelieu had founded the French Royal
Academy, directing the members to compile a definitive dic-
tionary and grammar of the French language. In 1648, the
Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was founded,
which, as reorganized by Colbert in 1663, maintained strict
control over the arts (see “Grading the Old Masters,” page
799). Although it was not the first European arts academy,
none before it had exerted such dictatorial authority—an
authority that lasted in France until the late nineteenth cen-
tury. Membership in the academy assured an artist of royal
and civic commissions and financial success, but many tal-
tented artists did well outside it.

Architecture and Its Decoration at Versailles

French architecture developed along classical lines in the sec-
ond half of the seventeenth century under the influence of
Francois Mansart (1598–1666) and Louis Le Vau (1612–70).
When the Royal Academy of Architecture was founded in
1671, its members developed guidelines for architectural
design based on the belief that mathematics was the true basis
of beauty. Their chief sources for ideal models were the books
of Vitruvius and Palladio (see Chapter 20).

In 1668, Louis XIV began to enlarge the small château
built by Louis XIII at Versailles, not far from Paris. Louis
moved to the palace in 1682 and eventually required his
court to live in Versailles; 5,000 aristocrats lived in the palace
itself, together with 14,000 servants and military staff
members. The town had another 30,000 residents, most of whom
were employed by the palace. The designers of the palace and
park complex at Versailles (FIG. 22–56) were Le Vau, Charles
Le Brun (1619–90), who oversaw the interior decoration,
and André Le Nôtre (1613–1700), who planned the gardens
(see “French Baroque Garden Design,” page 796). For both
political and sentimental reasons, the old Versailles château
was left standing, and the new building went up around it.
This project consisted of two phases: the first additions by Le
Vau, begun in 1668; and an enlargement completed after Le
Vau’s death by his successor, Jules Hardouin-Mansart
(1646–1708), from 1670 to 1688.

Hardouin-Mansart was responsible for the addition of
the long lateral wings and the renovation of Le Vau’s central
block on the garden side to match these wings (FIG. 22–57).
The three-story elevation has a lightly rusticated ground
floor, a main floor lined with enormous arched windows sep-
arated by Ionic pilasters, an attic level whose rectangular win-
dows are also flanked by pilasters, and a flat, terraced roof. The
overall design is a sensitive balance of horizontals and verti-
cals relieved by a restrained overlay of regularly spaced pro-
jecting blocks with open, colonnaded porches.

In his renovation of Le Vau’s center-block façade,
Hardouin-Mansart enclosed the previously open gallery on
the main level, creating the famed HALL OF MIRRORS
(FIG. 22–58), which is about 240 feet (73 meters) long and