

Unit 6

Post-Renaissance Europe



1. The Venus of Urbino: Titian. c. 1538 C.E. Oil on canvas.

By the time he executed this work, Titian was established as the leading master of Renaissance art in Venice. Above all, he was known for his remarkable use of color, and his works - which spanned all the major genres, including church altarpieces, mythological painting, portrait art, and pastoral landscape - were increasingly sought after by members of Italian Royal Houses. He went on to become recognized as a genius in his own time. In many subjects and painting genres he set patterns that were copied by generations of painters, especially in portraiture.

Titian painted this picture for the Duke of Camerino Guidobaldo della Rovere (1514-74), who later became the Duke of Urbino, possibly to celebrate his 1534 marriage to Giuliana Varano. It shows a nude young woman, reclining on a bed in the opulent surroundings of a Renaissance palace. Although the pose of the subject, identified as Venus, recalls that of Giorgione's outdoor *Sleeping Venus* (which the young Titian had allegedly completed after Giorgione's death) the intent behind it - as



well as its detailed execution - is quite different. Titian has relocated Venus to an intimate, indoor setting, and made her look directly at the viewer - lending her a coquettish air in the process. Where Giorgione's nude is idealized, unattainable and almost demure, Titian's is both available and deliberately tempting. Indeed, the directness of Venus's expression is unmistakable: she stares directly at the viewer, quite unfazed about her nudity.

Despite her erotic air, however, Titian's *Venus* is no courtesan, and the painting is not a subtle promotion of casual infidelity. On the contrary, given that it was painted to commemorate Guidobaldo's marriage, it is almost certainly celebrating marital love and the physical intimacy between man and wife, a supposition supported by a number of details. In her right hand, for instance, the girl holds a posy of roses, which usually



symbolize love; also, the sleeping dog is a common symbol of fidelity; lastly, the maids in the background are depicted rummaging in a traditional cassone, where wives commonly stored their bridal goods (clothing and household linens). Perhaps the picture was conceived as an ideal model of behavior for Giuliana, the Duke's young bride. It was certainly not uncommon for pictures of an explicitly erotic nature to be commissioned to celebrate a wedding, although they would be intended for private viewing only.

The *Venus of Urbino* is full of artistic devices. To begin with, Titian achieves a beautiful contrast between the voluptuous curves of the girl's body and the vertical and horizontal lines of the dividing screen, floor tiles and other architectural elements. In addition, the play of light on the girl's body and Titian's delicate *chiaroscuro* lends a sculptural quality to her figure, and also enhances the silky drapery of the bed sheets. The floor tiles provide extra linear perspective, while the floral patterns of the couch and background tapestry - in conjunction with the rich color pigments of the screen and the maid's costume - help to unify and activate the composition.

**2. Il Gesù, including Triumph of the Name of Jesus ceiling fresco. Rome, Italy.
Giacomo da Vignola, plan (architect); Giacomo della Porta, facade (architect);
Giovanni Battista Gaulli, ceiling fresco (artist). Church: 16th century C.E.; facade:
1568–1584 C.E.; fresco and stucco figures: 1676–1679 C.E. Brick, marble, fresco,
and stucco.**

Youngest son of a Basque nobleman, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was brought up to be a knight. He set off to become a valiant soldier, but was wounded in the French siege of Pamplona. During a long convalescence period in the remote family castle, young Ignatius recuperated by reading Legends of the Saints and the Life of Christ. It was at that time he experienced his profound religious conversion. After years of penitence and prayer, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, run-ins with the Spanish Inquisition, and university studies in Spain and Paris, Ignatius arrived in Rome with several followers in 1537, and offered his services to the Pope. His new religious order, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540. By the time of Ignatius' death in 1556, the Jesuits numbered 1,000 in nine European provinces, and following the pioneer work of Francis Xavier in the Far East, were sending missionaries far and wide.

Ignatius transposed his soldierly ideals to the religious sphere, creating a tightly structured, rigorously trained, and deeply committed organization. The Society became the

Pope's "army" in the Counter Reformation, using as its weapons advanced academic studies, the education of youth, and zealous missionary activities. The Jesuits almost immediately began to argue against Protestant theologians in Church councils, set up excellent schools throughout Europe, and were bringing the Gospels to Africa, Asia and the Americas.



Il Gesù (The Church of the Holy Name of Jesus) is the Jesuit Mother Church. It occupies the site St. Ignatius chose for his headquarters shortly after he founded the Society of Jesus in 1540. That year Pope Paul III Farnese gave the Society a small neighborhood chapel, Santa Maria della Strada (Our Lady of the Wayside), which although conveniently located, soon proved much too small for the expanding order. Ignatius' dreams for a large and appropriate church-headquarters were not realized in his lifetime. It took over 40 years, three foundation-stone ceremonies, and six architects (Nanni di Baccio Bigio, Michelangelo, Vignola, Giacomo della Porta, and Jesuits Giovanni Tristano and Giovanni de Rosis), before Il Gesù was consecrated in 1584.

Spiritually, Il Gesù incorporates Jesuit values and articulates Catholic doctrine as reaffirmed by the Counter Reformation. Architecturally, it marks a transition between Renaissance and Baroque. The plan of the Gesù became the model for Jesuit churches throughout the world.

Il Gesù stands in the heart of downtown Rome, on one of the city's busiest and noisiest intersections. It is a meeting place for all classes and generations of the city's population. "St. Ignatius placed a great deal of emphasis on the location of the Society's churches. He always built his headquarters in urban centers, where the Jesuits could easily carry out their preaching, teaching and social ministries." Father Tom Lucas, from the Jesuit University of San Francisco, is one of the Society's experts on St. Ignatius and Jesuit architecture. He was in Rome as the

English Press and Information Officer for the 34th General Congregation, and agreed to a consultation with *Inside the Vatican*.

Father Lucas continued: "II Gesù, for instance, was situated at a perfect crossroads between the Pope and his court, the Campidoglio (center of city government), and teeming city life in a developing neighborhood, where rich and poor, Jews and Christians, the refined and the illiterate, lived and worked side by side."

II Gesù's façade served as the model for Catholic churches for centuries to come. Giacomo della Porta's sober tripartite front has classical elements, although its enormous side volutes already anticipate the Baroque.

"This type of façade," Father Lucas explained, "achieves Ignatius' idea of the church as a gateway, through which the Jesuits emerge for their apostolic activities in the city and in the world, and through which the city is drawn into the sacramental life of the church. It stands, carefully oriented to the surrounding streets and piazza, as a great portal inviting the passerby to enter."

Any visitor is struck by the difference between II Gesù's interior and that of earlier Roman churches. Here we have the nave as one huge hall, a shallow apse with the altar moved up front, and side chapels blocked off as separate entities (so that all attention is riveted to the altar).

Father Lucas continued: "The significance of Jesuit architecture was not its novelty, but its functionalism. Jesuit churches take earlier elements and make them into a practical package which emphasizes Church teachings, as defined by the Council of Trent. The interior accentuates the two great functions of a Jesuit church: its large central nave with the laterally placed pulpit serves as a great auditorium for preaching, and the highly visible and prominent altar serves as a theatrical stage for the celebration of the Real Presence in the Eucharist."



3. ***Henri IV Receives the Portrait of Marie de' Medici. Peter Paul Rubens. 1621– 1625***
C.E. Oil on canvas

The Marie de' Medici Cycle is a series of twenty-four paintings that Marie, the queen of France and wife of Henry IV, commissioned from Peter Paul Rubens in 1621. They were commissioned to decorate her Luxembourg Palace in Paris and were hung in one large room so that the entire cycle could be viewed as a whole. They now hang in the Louvre in Paris. Marie and her advisors were part of the artistic process and dictated to Rubens the subject of each painting, and to a certain extent had control over the composition as well. Records of letters between the artist and the queen's advisors, dictating compositional details and subject matter, survive in the historical record.

In the cycle, Marie's major life events and struggles are depicted using a great deal of allegory. Most of the paintings are filled with mythological and allegorical figures. Three of the paintings in the cycle are portraits, but the remaining 21 picture events from Marie's life. Throughout the cycle, attempts to lend legitimacy to Marie's power and justify past actions can be identified. A major theme throughout the cycle is her conflict with her son Louis XIII. Following the death of her husband Henry IV, Marie acted as regent for her son who was not yet of age. The people of France considered her to be an effective ruler, but shortly after her son took over full power of the state, their conflict of interest began. The conflict primarily surrounded issues of policy. The fire beneath the conflict seems to have been kindled by numerous advisors within Louis' court who were enemies of Marie.

By the time Marie commissioned this cycle she and her son had reconciled but that came only after years of personal as well as military conflict. The peace between them was short-lived. In 1631, Louis exiled his mother for good and in 1642 she died in Germany without ever returning to France. The cycle can be read as an attempt to paint Marie as a benevolent mother who has been wronged by an ill-advised son. By using allegory and symbolism, however, Rubens was able to touch on subjects that were still sensitive.

The Presentation of her Portrait to Henry IV Jean Audran, a French artist born in 1667, was raised by his uncle Gerard, who instructed him in the technique of engraving. By the age of 20 he was a well-known artist and in 1707 he was appointed engraver to the French king. Here he reproduced one of Rubens' paintings from the Marie de' Medici cycle. In this scene, Henry IV looks at a portrait of Marie de' Medici, deliberating on his future marriage. Hymen, the Roman goddess of marriage, and Cupid, the Roman god of love, hold the painting for him. Jupiter and Juno, shown here with Jupiter's most characteristic attribute, the eagle, and Juno's, the peacock, look down on the scene from above, giving their support and approval.



A personification of France looks over Henry's shoulder. The sky, which is darkened by clouds and smoke, suggests the disasters that accompany war and war seems still to be raging in the distance. But the images of war are an invention of Rubens, perhaps to justify the fact that the king repeatedly delayed the marriage. During the time their marriage was being negotiated he was not, in fact, at war. The presence of France, who appears five times in the cycle, suggests that Henry's choice of Marie as a wife had more to do with diplomacy and the politics of the state than with love. Nonetheless, the inclusion of Jupiter and Juno makes it clear that the match was made in heaven.

4. Caravaggio, *Calling of St. Matthew* and *Inspiration of St. Matthew*, oil on canvas, c. 1599-1600

Saint Matthew was one of the twelve apostles, and author of the first Gospel. The tale of the calling of Saint Matthew is found in the New Testament, Matthew 9:9: *"And when Jesus passed on from thence, he saw a man sitting in the custom house, named Matthew; and he said to him: Follow me. And he arose up and followed him."*

Matthew was a Jewish tax collector sometimes also known as Levi the toll collector. Avaricious and presumably money-mad, Matthew was to give up his worldly possessions and take to the straight and narrow path when Jesus called him into his service while Matthew was working at the tax collector's stand at the Capernaum. In this painting, Caravaggio depicts the very moment when Matthew first realizes he is being called. Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew* was executed for the left wall of the Contarelli chapel of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. Cardinal Matteo Contarelli had saved for years to pay for the decoration of his chapel with scenes from the life of Saint Matthew, his namesake.

In other works on this theme, Saint Matthew is depicted inside a building, with Christ outside (in accordance with the Biblical text) calling upon him through a window. Both before and after Caravaggio this subject was frequently used as a pretext for anecdotal genre paintings. In this work Caravaggio draws inspiration from his own world, placing the biblical scene in modern reality. This work is evidence of Caravaggio's artistic confidence. He was not comfortable with the traditions of contemporary idealizing history painting and so he regressed to the subjects of his youth which had previously earned his success.



Additionally, in this work there is a likeness between the gesture of Jesus as pointing towards Matthew and that of God as he awakens Adam in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel.

The Calling of Saint Matthew can be divided into two parts. The figures on the right form a vertical rectangle while those on the left create a horizontal block. The two sides are further distinguished by their clothing and symbolically, by Christ's hand. The artist's use of light and shadow adds drama to this image as well as giving the figures a quality of immediacy. Many other artists later followed Caravaggio's example and copied this technique. The figures are engulfed by shadow and it is only the beaming light that shines across the wall and highlights the fact of St Matthew and the seated group that brightens the canvas.

The light penetrating the painting travels from right to left. It emerges from just above Jesus and yet seems a potent extension of him. The words of Christ, as of yet unspoken, are embodied in this image, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) The tax collectors and their table with its coins, quills and ledgers find themselves bathed in the light. While it illuminates their grime, their dirt, their sins... the light offers to cleanse them as well.

There is some debate in the artistic community about which of the figures in Caravaggio's piece is Levi (also known as the future St. Matthew). Given the fact that the Contarelli chapel has two other Caravaggio pieces with a bald, bearded St. Matthew (*The Inspiration of St. Matthew* and *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*), it has been surmised that the bearded man in the center of the group is St. Matthew. With eyebrows raised and finger pointed (presumably at himself), he seems to ask, "Me?"

However, others identify St. Matthew as the young man at the end of the table. Head bowed, shoulders hunched under the weight of his misdeeds and the troubles of his wayward life. Preoccupied, his fingers absently fumble with his ill-gotten coins. He is aware of the man at the door. And he is aware of the call. But his shame, his fear, his sense of utter unworthiness overwhelms him. Does salvation rest with this Rabbi at the door? Or is it found in the coins in my hands and the friends at my table? Can I shake my past, my irredeemable past and walk a different way? Perhaps, just perhaps with his help, I can be pulled from this blackness into a radiant light.

5. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, 1636, etching

In an age of cinematic super heroes and role-playing games, who hasn't imagined themselves at one time in their life as something other than what they were? The seventeenth-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn certainly did. In his 1636 etching, *Self-Portrait with Saskia*, both he and his wife are shown wearing historical clothing. Rembrandt wears a fanciful 16th-century style plumed beret tilted at a jaunty angle and a fur-trimmed overcoat, while Saskia wears an old-fashioned veil. Such play-acting was not unusual for Rembrandt who only twice represented himself in the manner that was most popular at the time, as a contemporary Amsterdam gentleman.



Whether painting, etching or drawing, Rembrandt, who produced more self-portraits than any artist before him (roughly 75), preferred to show himself in a variety of different imagined roles. You can see him as a soldier in old-fashioned armor, a ragged beggar, a stylish Renaissance courtier, an exotically clad Oriental leader and even Saint Paul.

In addition to serving as one of many self-portraits, this small etching can also be regarded as an example of a marriage portrait. The young woman shown seated at the table with the 30 year old Rembrandt is his wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh. The two married on June 22, 1634 and remained together for thirteen years until Saskia's untimely death at the age of 30. Surprisingly, it is the only etching that Rembrandt ever made of Saskia and himself together.

This etching, produced only two years after their marriage, depicts the thirty-year-old Rembrandt and his new bride. It is the only etching in which the artist portrays himself with Saskia. Rembrandt looks up confidently while drawing, or possibly in the process of making an etching, while Saskia is seated by his side. As a result of the printing process the image is reversed; Rembrandt has shown his hands at rest because he was right-handed and might not have wanted to give the impression he was drawing with his left. Rembrandt and Saskia are not

wearing contemporary dress, indicating that this is not simply a drawing from life. The image is probably intended as an illustration of the idea that ‘love brings forth art’.

The two figures are presented in half-length, seated around a table before a plain background. Rembrandt dominates the image as he engages the viewer with a serious expression. The brim of his hat casts a dark shadow over his eyes, which adds an air of mystery to his countenance. Saskia, rendered on a smaller scale and appearing rather self-absorbed, sits behind him. It’s almost as if we have interrupted the couple as they enjoy a quiet moment in their daily life.

Rembrandt, however, has transformed the traditional marriage portrait into something more inventive. This etching marks the first time that Rembrandt has presented himself as an artist at work. In his left hand he holds a porte-crayon (a two-ended chalk holder) and appears to have been drawing on the sheet of paper before him. By identifying himself as a draftsman, Rembrandt draws attention to his mastery of what was regarded as the most important basic skill of an artist.



Is he drawing Saskia or is she simply there to support and inspire her husband as he works? While the marks on his paper don’t provide conclusive evidence of his subject, it certainly was not unusual for Rembrandt to use his wife as a model. In the years that they were married, she would sit for her husband on numerous occasions.

Etching is a printmaking process in which a metal plate (usually copper) is coated with a waxy, acid-resistant material. The artist draws through this ground with an etching needle to expose the metal. The plate is then dipped in acid, which “bites” into the exposed metal leaving behind lines in the plate. By controlling the amount of time the acid stays on the plate, the artist can make shallow, fine lines or deep, heavy ones. After the coating is removed, the plate is inked then put through a high-pressure printing press together with a sheet of paper to make the print. Typically, an artist can produce about 100 excellent impressions from a single plate.

Rembrandt is regarded as the greatest practitioner of etching in the history of art and the first to popularize this technique as a major form of artistic expression. His work in this medium

spans nearly his entire career with nearly 300 etchings to his name. We see a lot of variety in these works as he renders all manner of subjects popular at the time including history, landscapes, still life, nudes, and everyday life, in addition to portraits.

Typically, Rembrandt used a soft ground that would allow him to “draw” freely on his plate (most early etchers used a hard ground), and many of his early etchings have the immediacy and spontaneity of a rapid sketch. In fact, most evidence suggests that he worked directly on the plate, most likely with a preparatory drawing in front of him to serve as a guide. As with his painted works, he developed a very individualized style that clearly set him apart from his contemporaries. His highly experimental nature led him to explore the effects of using different types, weights, and colors of paper for printing his works.

Rembrandt is also known for his practice of varying the degree to which he etched a plate, an approach seen here. The figure of Rembrandt is more deeply bitten than that of Saskia, a technique that not only suggests that the artist is closer to us, but also places greater emphasis on him. The figure of Saskia, on the other hand, is more lightly etched, with the effect that she is seated farther away and plays a less important role. These differences have led some to suggest that Rembrandt may have etched Saskia first, and then added himself in the front. This notion is supported by the lines of her dress which appear to continue under his overcoat.



**6. San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. Rome, Italy. Francesco Borromini (architect).
1638–1646 C.E. Stone and stucco.**

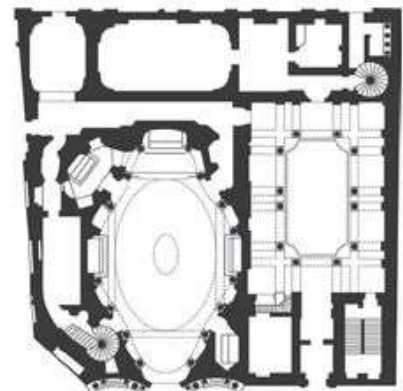
The intersection of two of the wide, straight avenues created by Pope Sixtus V inspired city planners to add a special emphasis, with fountains marking each of the four corners of the crossing. In 1634, Trinitarian monks decided to build a new church at the site and awarded the commission for San Carlo Aalle Quattro Fontane (St. Charles at the Four Fountains) to Francesco Borromini (1599–1667). Borromini, a nephew of architect Carlo Maderno, had arrived in Rome in 1619 from northern Italy to enter his uncle’s workshop. Later, he worked under

Bernini's supervision on the decoration of St. Peter's, and some details of the Baldacchino, as well as its structural engineering, are now attributed to him, but San Carlo was his first independent commission. Unfinished at Borromini's death, the church was nevertheless completed according to his design.

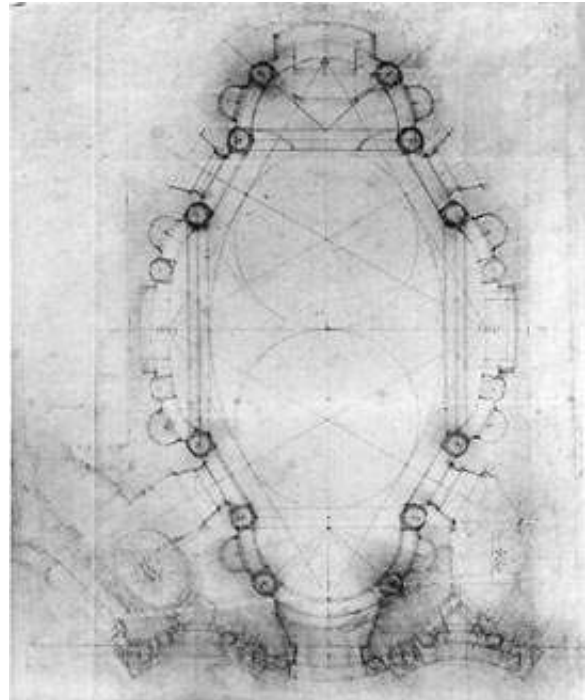


Borromini went well beyond any of his predecessors or contemporaries in emphasizing a building's sculptural qualities. Underscoring this functional interrelation of the building and its environment is the curious fact that the church has not one but two facades. The second, a narrow bay crowned with its own small tower, turns away from the main facade and, tracking the curve of the street, faces an intersection. (The upper facade dates seven years after Borromini's death, and it is uncertain to what

degree the present design reflects his original intention.) Borromini set his facade in undulating motion, creating a dynamic counterpoint of concave and convex elements on two levels (for example, the sway of the cornices). He emphasized the three-dimensional effect with deeply recessed niches. This facade is not the traditional flat frontispiece that defines a building's outer limits. It is a pulsating, engaging component inserted between interior and exterior space, designed not to separate but to provide a fluid transition between the two.



San Carlo stands on a narrow piece of land, with one corner cut off to accommodate one of the four fountains that give the church its name. The interior is not only an ingenious response to an awkward site but also a provocative variation on the theme of the centrally planned church. To fit the irregular site, Borromini created an elongated central-plan interior space with undulating walls. In plan, San Carlo is a hybrid of a Greek cross (a cross with four arms of equal length) and an oval, with a long axis between entrance and apse. The side walls move in an undulating flow that reverses the facade's motion. Vigorously projecting columns define the space into which they protrude



just as much as they accent the walls attached to them. Robust pairs of columns support a massive entablature, over which an oval dome, supported on pendentives, seems to float. The coffers (inset panels in geometric shapes) filling the interior of the oval-shaped dome form an eccentric honeycomb of crosses, elongated hexagons, and octagons. These coffers decrease sharply in size as they approach the apex, or highest point, where the dove of the



Holy Spirit hovers in a climax that brings together the geometry used in the chapel: oval, octagon, circle, and—very important—a triangle, symbol of the Trinity as well as of the church's patrons. The dome appears to be shimmering and inflating—almost floating up and away—thanks to light sources placed in the lower coffers and the lantern.

7. *Fruit and Insects.* Rachel Ruysch. 1711 C.E. Oil on wood

While other types of still life painting became less popular in Holland by the late seventeenth century, flower pictures retained their desirability and popularity. The Dutch continued to cultivate a wide variety of species of flowers for business and pleasure during the 1600s. The prosperity of the merchant class encouraged the proliferation of private gardens where new varieties of flowers were eagerly sought and cultivated. Patrons often wanted flower painters to record their best or rarest blossoms.



Rachel Ruysch and Jan van Huysum were the two most prominent and successful painters specializing in flower pictures in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Ruysch's complex paintings of flowers, fruits, and fauna were widely admired during her lifetime, and her reputation has not diminished since her death. One indication of the esteem in which her talent was held were the high prices her contemporaries regularly paid for her paintings. Ruysch sold her works for 750 to 1,250 guilders as compared with Rembrandt, who rarely received more than 500 guilders for his canvases.

Ruysch was born into a highly distinguished family, which encouraged her talents. Her father, an eminent professor of anatomy and botany in Amsterdam, had an extensive collection that Rachel could study up close and draw upon for her compositions. In fact, the lizards and insects she included in some of her paintings might very well have been observed among the

specimens in her father's collection. Her mother was the daughter of the noted architect Pieter Post, who designed the royal residence near The Hague. Given this stimulating intellectual and artistic milieu, Rachel's talents were bound to thrive.

Ruysch married an undistinguished portrait painter named Jurien Pool in 1693. They were married over fifty years, and Rachel bore ten children. Despite this large family and the burdens of domestic responsibilities, about a hundred authenticated works are attributed to her. The family moved to The Hague in 1701, and over the next years Ruysch developed an international reputation. From 1708 to 1716 she was court painter to the Elector Palatine, Johan Wilhelm von pfalz, whose court was located in Dusseldorf. During these years most of her paintings were kept in the Elector's collection.

In her works, each type of fruit, flower, insect, or animal is botanically accurate, demonstrating Ruysch's close study of natural phenomena. Ruysch's choice of colors, delicate brushwork, and precise description of object textures are aspects of her highly appreciated technique. Ruysch also bathed her compositions in an enveloping atmosphere that heightened the illusionism of her works.

On a symbolic level, Ruysch's paintings, like those of many of her contemporaries, are vanitas images. The ripening fruit, grain, and blooming flowers all retain their symbolic associations with the transience of earthly existence, the passing vanities of the temporal world. Lizards were seen as creatures of decomposition, awaiting the end of the body's brief existence. This lizard is devouring an egg—a clear reference to the life cycle, birth and death. Butterflies were common symbols of the resurrected soul in the afterlife. However, these somber symbolic associations do not interfere with the purely sensual pleasure one can take in the accuracy and variety of the depicted objects.

Ruysch's position in the history of art is clear and secure. She was the last of the great Flemish and Dutch flower painters. Towering over her contemporaries, she enjoyed a highly productive and successful career. Her works are never monotonous. She maintained a consistently high level of excellence in paintings that reveal a range of dynamic compositional formulas. Using a wide variety of plants, insects, fruits, etc., she created monumental paintings of widely recognized and enduring quality.

8. Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture at the Orrery* (in which a lamp is put in place of the sun), c. 1763-65, oil on canvas

Technological advance fueled a new enthusiasm for mechanical explanations about the wonders of the universe. The fascination science held for ordinary people as well as for the learned is the subject of *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture at the Orrery* by the English painter Joseph Wright of Derby (1734– 1797). Wright specialized in painting dramatic candlelit and moonlit scenes. He loved subjects such as the orrery demonstration, which could be illuminated by a single light from within the picture.



Wright's painting encapsulates in one moment the Enlightenment, a philosophical shift in the eighteenth century away from traditional religious models of the universe and toward an empirical, scientific approach. It is important to note the term given this new way of thinking. "Enlightenment" indicates an active process, undertaken by an individual by group.

The age of Enlightenment is most closely associated with scientists and inventors, but writers and artists also played major roles. They helped spread enlightenment concepts via the written word and printed image, and inspired others to think rationally about the world in which they lived. The provincial English painter Joseph Wright of Derby became the unofficial artist of the Enlightenment, depicting scientists and philosophers in ways previously reserved for Biblical heroes and Greek gods.

In the painting, a scholar demonstrates a mechanical model of the solar system called an orrery, in which each planet (represented by a metal orb) revolves around the sun (a lamp) at the correct relative velocity. Light from the lamp pours forth from in front of the boy silhouetted in the foreground to create dramatic light and shadows that heighten the drama of the scene. Awed children crowd close to the tiny orbs that represent the planets within the arcing bands that symbolize their orbits. An earnest listener makes notes, while the lone woman seated at the left and the two gentlemen at the right look on with rapt attention.

What we are shown here are domestic demonstrations in family residences where children share adult wonder at the workings of nature. The spectators in the picture respond to the idea of this newly perceived universal order with wonder, fascination, or awe. Their illuminated faces, emerging from the darkness of the room and darkness of ignorance, signify the illumination of their minds by the light of Science. They are literally experiencing Enlightenment, in both physical and intellectual senses. In effect, *A Philosopher Lecturing at the Orrery* does depict a moment of religious epiphany. Much like the central figure in Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew*, the figures listening to the philosopher's lecture in Wright's painting are experiencing conversion...to science.

The wonders of scientific knowledge mesmerize everyone in Wright's painting. The artist visually reinforced the fascination with the orrery by composing his image in a circular fashion, echoing the device's orbital design. The postures and gazes of all the participants and observers focus attention on the cosmic model. Wright scrupulously rendered with careful accuracy every detail of the figures, the mechanisms of the orrery, and even the books and curtain in the shadowy background.

9. The Swing. Jean-Honoré Fragonard. 1767 C.E. Oil on canvas

The origin of Fragonard's *The Swing* is by chance known. The writer Charles Collé recorded having met the painter Gabriel-François Doyen on 2 October 1767: 'Would you believe it!' A gentleman of the court had sent for him shortly after a religious painting of his had been exhibited in Paris and when Doyen presented himself he found him at his 'pleasure house' with his mistress. 'He started by flattering me with courtesies', Doyen related, 'and finished by avowing that he was dying with a desire to have me make a picture, the idea of which he was going to outline. "I should like", Madame (pointing to his mistress) on a swing that a bishop would set going. You will place me in such a way that I would be able to see the legs of the lovely girl, and better still, if you want enliven your picture a little more..." I confess, M. Doyen said to me, that this proposition, which I wouldn't have expected, considering the character of the picture that led to it, perplexed me and left me speechless for a moment. I collected myself, however, enough to say to him almost at once: "Ah Monsieur, it is necessary to add to the essential idea of your picture by making Madame's shoes fly into the air and having some cupids catch them."

Doyen did not accept the commission, however, and passed it on to Fragonard. The identity of the patron is unknown. The idea of having himself and his mistress portrayed was evidently dropped by the patron, whoever he may have been. The picture was depersonalized and, due to Fragonard's extremely sensuous imagination, became a universal image of joyous, carefree sexuality.

The theme is that of love and the rising tide of passion, as intimated by the sculptural group in the lower center of the picture. (Dolphins driven by cupids drawing the water-chariot of Venus symbolize the impatient surge of love). Beneath the girl on the swing, lying in a great bush, a tangle of



flowers and foliage, is the young lover, gasping with anticipation. The bush is, evidently, a private place as it is enclosed by little fences. But the youth has found his way to it. Thrilling to the sight now offered him, the youth reaches out with hat in hand. (A hat in eighteenth-century erotic imagery covered not only the head but also another part of the male body when inadvertently exposed.) The feminine counterpart to the hat was the shoe and in *The Swing* the girl's shoe flies off her pretty foot to be lost in the undergrowth. This idea had been suggested originally by Doyen, as he recounted to Collé, and in French paintings of the period a naked foot and lost shoe often accompany the more familiar broken pitcher as a symbol of lost virginity.

The abandon of the lovers, the complicity of the sculpture of Cupid on the left, gesturing that he will not tell, the putti with a dolphin beneath the swing who seem to urge her on, and the poor bishop to the right, all work together to create an image that bursts with anticipation and desire, but also maintains a sense of humor.

Within the larger art-historical tradition, *The Swing* riffs on the genre of boudoir paintings—canvases that feature a woman in her private chambers, primed or procured for a romantic liaison. In contrast, the activity of *The Swing* takes place outside. The decision to situate the scene in an overgrown garden both foreshadows the impending Romantic era's emphasis on nature and allows the central female figure to take a more active role in the scene. In 18th-century France, gardens were becoming romantic sites of bourgeois escape; the fashionably dressed woman here appears like a flower in full bloom. The natural setting also contributes to the keen sense of romantic storytelling embedded in Fragonard's masterpiece. *The Swing*, Hart and Stevenson write, "is discursive almost to a fault, encouraging witty, brittle, scabrous salon talk."

The Swing's implied narrative, like the best gossip, has contributed to the painting's enduring popularity among aesthetes and sophisticates—scandal never gets old. In 2001, Yinka Shonibare created an installation that brings the painting's central figure into three dimensions and adds a multicultural character; it features a dark-skinned mannequin clothed in the Dutch wax print that's popular in West Africa. In a less highbrow homage, Disney's *Frozen* (2013) riffed on the painting with a swinging scene for Anna, its central character.

10. Yinka Shonibare, *The Swing (After Fragonard)*, 2001

Trained as a painter, Yinka Shonibare later moved on to photography, sculpture, installation, and film. His work addresses issues of power in contemporary and historical culture. Shonibare sees areas of excess as a means to represent that power. The artist formulates relationships between classes, races, and power structures using highly associative “African” fabrics (Dutch wax-printed cotton) to create clothing, rooms, and environments. This type of fabric, popular in Africa, is often assumed to originate there. Actually, the material was developed in Indonesia, then exported to England and the Netherlands, then sold to African merchants. Like this fabric, Shonibare has moved between continents; born in London in 1962 to Nigerian parents, the family shortly thereafter moved to Lagos, Nigeria. Shonibare returned to England at age 16 to attend boarding school, followed by art studies in London, which is where he now lives and works.

Shonibare uses the same distinctive fabric in his sculptures and installations to make copies of European costumes and furnishings. In *The Swing (after Fragonard)*, Shonibare creates a sculpture of the central figure in Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s 1776 painting. To many, the original painting represents the frivolous spirit and loose morality of French aristocracy shortly before the revolution. However, Shonibare’s work is not just a parody of the original: “I made a piece of work about this painting because I actually admire the work very much,” he says.

“And I like the contradiction of taking something that’s supposedly ‘ethnic’ and putting that onto classical European painting.”

The Swing (after Fragonard) is an installation in which a life-size headless female mannequin, extravagantly attired in a dress in eighteenth-century style made of bright African print fabric, reclines on a swing suspended from a verdant branch attached to the gallery ceiling. Beneath her, a flowering vine cascades to the floor. The figure is static, poised at what appears to be the highest point of her swing’s forward trajectory. Her right knee is bent, while her left leg



stretches out in front of her, causing her skirts to ride up. She appears to have just kicked off her left shoe, which hangs midair in front of the figure, suspended on invisible wire.

Yinka Shonibare's *The Swing* (after Fragonard), made in Sheffield in 2001, is based on an iconic Rococo painting by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Swing* (*Les hazards heureux de l'escarpolette*), 1767 (Wallace Collection P430), which depicts an aristocratic young woman in a frothy pink dress sweeping through a garden on a swing. In her abandon, she has kicked off one tiny pink shoe; Fragonard catches the moment the shoe arcs through the air. The woman is watched by two men; one pushes her from behind a tree, while the other lies in the foliage beneath her, precisely and mischievously placed to look up her billowing skirts.

Shonibare's work paraphrases this scene, replicating part of the composition in three dimensions. He has preserved the woman on the swing, her shoe in mid-flight, and some of the foliage that surrounds her, but excluded the two men and much of the garden. The woman is dressed in African print fabric, representing a different kind of decorative opulence from Fragonard's silk and lace. This creates a disjunction; the sculpture is both familiar and strange. The artist's intention is that the piece should be viewed straight on, with the figure seen from the same angle Fragonard depicted it in the painting. However, because the installation is rendered in three dimensions, viewers can walk around the swinging woman in the gallery space, placing themselves in the position of either of the men in the painting. The audience becomes directly implicated in the erotic voyeurism of Fragonard's image, and, like the reclining man in the painting, can also look up the woman's skirt. The mannequin wears knickers made of the same fabric as her underskirt.

Shonibare's figure retains the ornate dress and highly-recognizable pose of the original, but is isolated and headless. Instead of pastel silks and cascades of lace, her ornate gown is composed of graphic cotton prints in contrasting patterns of the kind favored in Africa today, but Shonibare has altered the fabric to include fashion logos such as Chanel. The sculpture suggests a worldly woman of leisure, but raises questions as to her race, economic status, and identity.

Shonibare's mannequins are characteristically presented without their heads--a playful reference to the beheading of the aristocracy during the French Revolution and the redistribution of power and land. He says: "It amused me to explore the possibility of bringing back the guillotine in the late 1990s . . . for use on the historical icons of power and deference." He has

also noted that the absence of heads in his sculptures removes direct connotations of race or individual identity.

Shonibare's mannequins are clothed in elaborate costumes from the period just before the French Revolution, when the European aristocracy controlled vast wealth, land and power. Referencing art history and the paintings of Jean-Honoré Fragonard in particular, with their depictions of luxury and privilege, Shonibare's sculptural tableaux portray idyllic, romanticized narratives as well as imagined scenarios of sexual decadence and violence.