

Watteau

The Great Masters of European Art

Part 6: Rococo! Watteau, Boucher, Chardin and French painting under Louis XV

2 October – Gallery – Antoine Watteau.

9 October – Gallery – Boucher and Chardin.

16 October – Musée du Louvre – Watteau, Boucher and the masters of the fête galante.

Meet by information desk beneath Pyramid with ticket in hand at 10:15 am. Métro: Palais-Royal Louvre.

23 October – Musée du Louvre – Chardin and 18th century portraitists.

Meet by information desk beneath Pyramid with ticket in hand at 10:15 am. Métro: Palais-Royal Louvre.

Bibliography:

Levey, Michael Art and architecture in France 1700-1800, Pelican History of Art, Penguin.

Or: Levey, Michael Rococo to Revolution, Thames & Hudson.

Historical chronology:

Last years of the reign of Louis XIV

1700 - Philippe d'Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV becomes king of Spain.

1701-14 - War of the Spanish Succession between France and the Hapsburgs.

1711 - Death of the Grand Dauphin heir to the throne.

1715 - Death of Louis XIV. His five-year old great-grandson Louis XV becomes king.

The Regency

1715 - Philippe d'Orléans the king's cousin is proclaimed Regent. The young king and the court leave Versailles for the Tuileries palace in Paris.

1718 - John Law creates the bank of France and a stock exchange.

1720 - Resounding bankruptcy of new bank and stocks.

1723 - Majority of the King. Death of Regent.

Antoine Watteau 1684 - 1721

1684 – Born 10 Oct. in northern French town of Valenciennes son of Jean-Antoine Watteau, a master tiler.

1694-95 – He is probably apprenticed to Jacques-Albert Gérin, a local painter.

1702 – Watteau leaves for Paris probably in the company of Valenciennes painter-decorator hired to work at the Opera. In Paris he found employment in a workshop at Pont Notre-Dame, making copies of devotional images and popular genre paintings in the Flemish and Dutch tradition; it was in that period that he developed his characteristic sketchlike technique.

1703 – 08 - Employed as an assistant by the painter Claude Gillot, a minor painter of quotidian scenes (genre). In Gillot's studio Watteau became acquainted with the characters of the Italian commedia dell'arte (its actors had been expelled from France in 1698), a favorite subject of Gillot's that would become one of Watteau's lifelong passions. Afterward he moved to the workshop of Claude Audran III, an interior decorator, under whose influence he began to make drawings admired for their consummate elegance. Audran was the curator of the Palais du Luxembourg, where Watteau was able to see the magnificent series of canvases painted by Rubens for Queen Marie de Medici in the 1620's. The Flemish painter would become one of his major influences, together with the Venetian masters (Titian, Corregio) he would later study in the collection of his patron and friend, the banker Pierre Crozat.

1709 – Watteau tried to obtain the Prix de Rome, enabling promising young painters to go to study at the French Academy in Rome. He receives the second prize.

1712 – He won the prix de Rome on his second attempt but was considered so good that, rather than receiving the one-year stay in Rome for which he had applied, he was accepted as a full member of the Academy. He took five years to deliver the required « morceau de réception » (reception pièce).

1715 – Death of Louis XIV. Beginning of the regency of Philippe, Duc d'Orléans.

1716 – Academy accords to Watteau another extension for presenting his «morceau de reception».

1717 – Watteau at last presents The Pilgrimage to the isle of Cythera and is accepted as full member of the academy on 28 Aug. He lives with his patron Crozat.

1718 – Watteau living with fellow Flemish painter Nicholas Vleughels (1668-1737).

1720 – Watteau is living with his dealer Edme-François Gersaint. He had been sickly and physically fragile since childhood. In 1720, he travelled to London to consult Dr Richard Mead, one of the most fashionable physicians of his time and an admirer of Watteau's work. However London's damp and smoky air offset any benefits of Dr. Mead's wholesome food and medicines.

1721 – Watteau returns to France. He meets and has his portrait painted by the Italian artist Rosalba Carriera. He spent his last few months on the estate of his patron, Abbé Haranger, where he died on 18 July perhaps from tuberculous laryngitis at the age of 36. The Abbé said Watteau was semi conscious and mute during his final days, clutching a paint brush and painting imaginary paintings in the air.

Some major paintings:

New genre: the «fête galante»;

Pilgrimage (or Embarkation) to the Isle of Cythera 1717

Gilles (or Pierrot) c. 1717-19

«Enseigne de Gersaint (Gersaint's shop sign) 1720

Major followers:

Nicolas Lancret (1690 – 1743)

Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695-1736)

