

Chapter One

# Rococo, Enlightenment, and the Call for a New Art in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

The death of Louis XIV (FIG. 1-1) in 1715 marked the end of an era in France. The "Sun King" had epitomized absolutism, a system of government in which all power—legislative, judicial, and financial—is concentrated in the hands of a single ruler (see *Absolutism*, right). In his famous maxim "L'état, c'est moi" ("The State, it is I"), Louis had equated the monarch with the body of state.

Although Louis's death did not abolish the absolute monarchy, it did end the rigid, even stifling, control that he had exerted over the cultural and intellectual life of his time. This offered his subjects a chance to question the philosophical and religious principles on which absolutism was based. In time, such questioning would lead to the demise of monarchic rule at the hands of the revolutionaries of 1789.

## Louis XV and the Emergence of the Rococo Interior

During the lengthy reign of Louis XV (1715–74), the French upper class experienced a new social and intellectual freedom. Aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois (members of the bourgeoisie, or middle classes) focused on play and pleasure. Grace and wit were prized in social interactions.

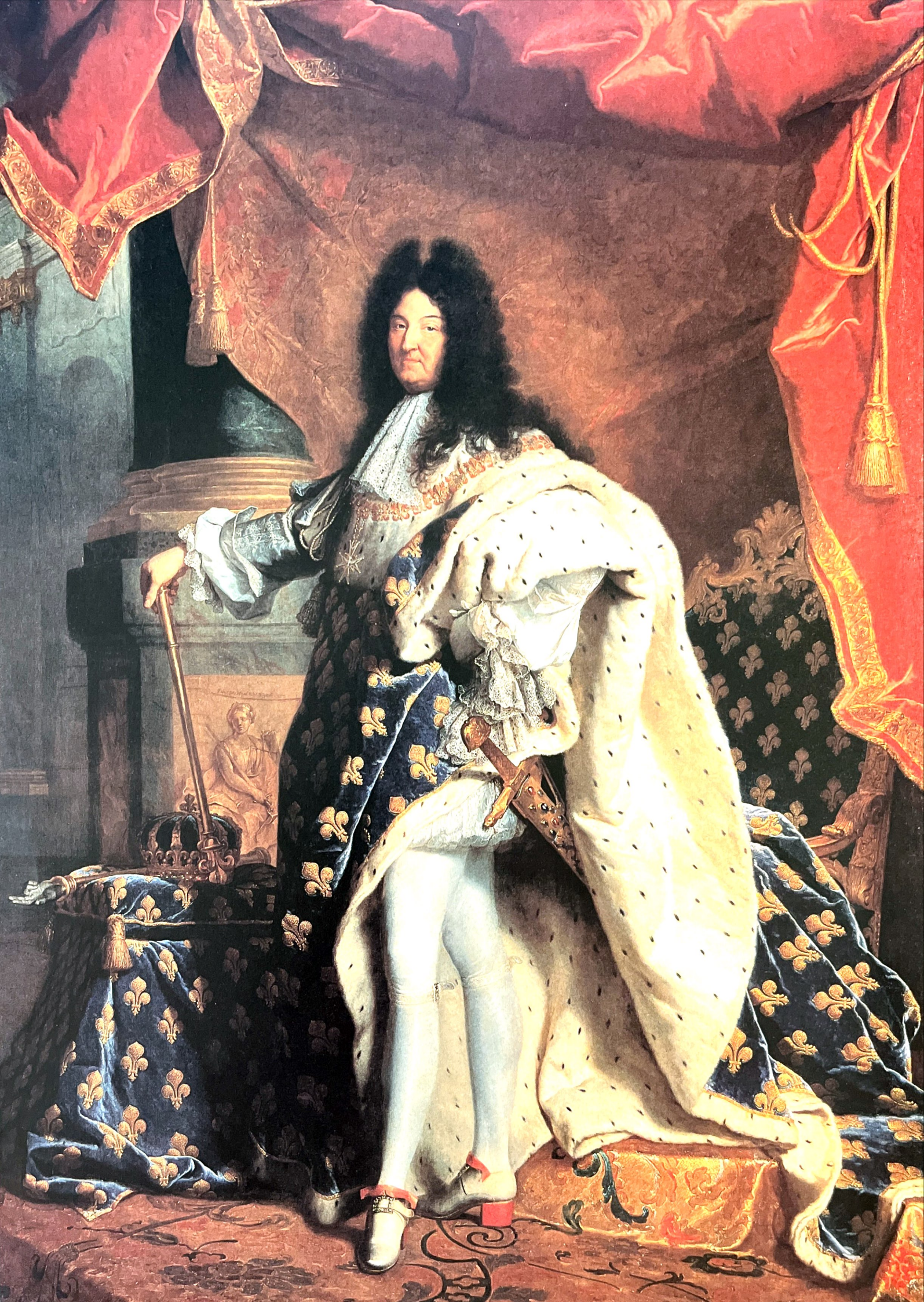
1-1 **Hyacinthe Rigaud**, *Portrait of Louis XIV*, 1701. Oil on canvas, 9'2" x 7'10" (2.79 x 2.4 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

## Absolutism

As strange as political absolutism may seem to us today, in the seventeenth century and for much of the eighteenth it was justified on both religious and pragmatic grounds. Monarchs were believed to derive their authority from God, who had ordained them as executors of his divine will on earth. The absolute rule was seen as a guarantee of order and security and the best safeguard against chaos and anarchy. Absolutism was the norm not only in France but also in Spain, Russia, and many of the Germanic states, such as Prussia and Saxony. Even in Britain, where it was tempered by the British constitution, the power of the king was sacrosanct.

Philosophically, absolutism fitted perfectly into the understanding of the universe as the "Great Chain of Being." Following this concept, all forms of life were linked in a hierarchic fashion, beginning with God, the "Supreme Being," and ending with the lowest microscopic creatures. If any class of beings were to exert undue pressure, the chain might break and chaos would reign. The poet Alexander Pope (1688–1744), in his *Essay on Man* (1732–3), expressed the idea most concisely:

Vast chain of being! Which from God began  
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,  
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,  
No (magnifying) glass can reach; . . .  
Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroyed;  
From Nature's chain whatever link you strike,  
Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.





1-2 Palace and Gardens of Versailles, France. Aerial photograph.

A new intellectual curiosity gave rise to a healthy skepticism toward well-worn truths.

The cultural differences between the reign of Louis XIV and that of Louis XV are clearly expressed in the spaces in which the social life of the aristocracy took place. The great palace that Louis XIV had built at Versailles (FIG. 1-2), outside Paris, was the center of court life in the late seventeenth century. Here the King entertained the powerful nobles of France to prevent them from rising up against him, as they had done during his childhood (when his mother served

as regent) in an outbreak called the *Fronde*. The grandiose Baroque palace, with its tall arches and heavy columns, was meant to overwhelm the French people and foreign visitors alike. At its heart sprawled a vast ballroom (FIG. 1-3), 34 feet wide and 239 feet long (two-and-a-half times the length of a basketball court). One of its walls had seventeen tall windows, overlooking the palace gardens; the other had seventeen mirrors, which made the hall look twice as wide. The opulent décor of this "Gallery of Mirrors"—ceiling, paintings, statues, tapestries, and chandeliers



1-3 Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Gallery of Mirrors, Palace of Versailles, 1678–84. Versailles.



1-4 **Germain Boffrand**, Salon de la Princesse, Hôtel de Soubise (currently National Archives), 1732. Paris.

1-5 Ceiling decoration of the Chambre de Parade de la Princesse (Stateroom of the Princess), Hôtel de Soubise (currently National Archives), 1732. Stucco, detail. Paris.



(it took some three thousand candles to light the room)—made it a perfect setting for the rigidly orchestrated receptions and formal balls that took place here during the heyday of Louis XIV's reign.

By comparison with Versailles, the reception rooms or "salons" of the eighteenth-century Hôtel de Soubise (FIG. 1-4) are modestly scaled. This Parisian *hôtel* or mansion belonged to one of France's leading noble families. It was refurbished after the death of Louis XIV, when the aristocracy, happy to leave the "golden cage" of Versailles, moved back to Paris. Designed by Germain Boffrand (1667–1754), the interiors of the Hôtel de Soubise have a light and playful character that is quite different from the imposing splendor of the interiors of Versailles. These rooms, designed for informal social gatherings, tend to be intimate rather than grandiloquent. Frequently oval or round in shape, their walls are decorated with elegantly carved wood paneling, punctuated by encased paintings and mirrors. Fancy stucco decorations articulate the curved ceilings. Both the woodcarvings and the stucco work (FIG. 1-5) display organic, winding forms, reminiscent of vines, unfurling leaves, shells, or fantastic rock formations. "Rococo," the term used to describe the decorative and fine arts during the reign of Louis XV, comes from the French word *rocaille*, which refers to the rockeries in contemporary gardens that presumably inspired these decorations.



1-6 **François Boucher,**  
*The Gracious Shepherd*, 1736–9.  
Oil on canvas, 49 x 65 $\frac{1}{16}$ "  
(1.25 x 1.67 m). Chambre de Parade  
de la Princesse (Stateroom of the  
Princess), Hôtel de Soubise (currently  
National Archives). Paris

1-7 (below) **François Boucher,**  
*Mars and Venus Surprised by  
Vulcan*, 1754.  
Oil on canvas, 64 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 28"  
(1.64 m x 71 cm). Wallace Collection,  
London

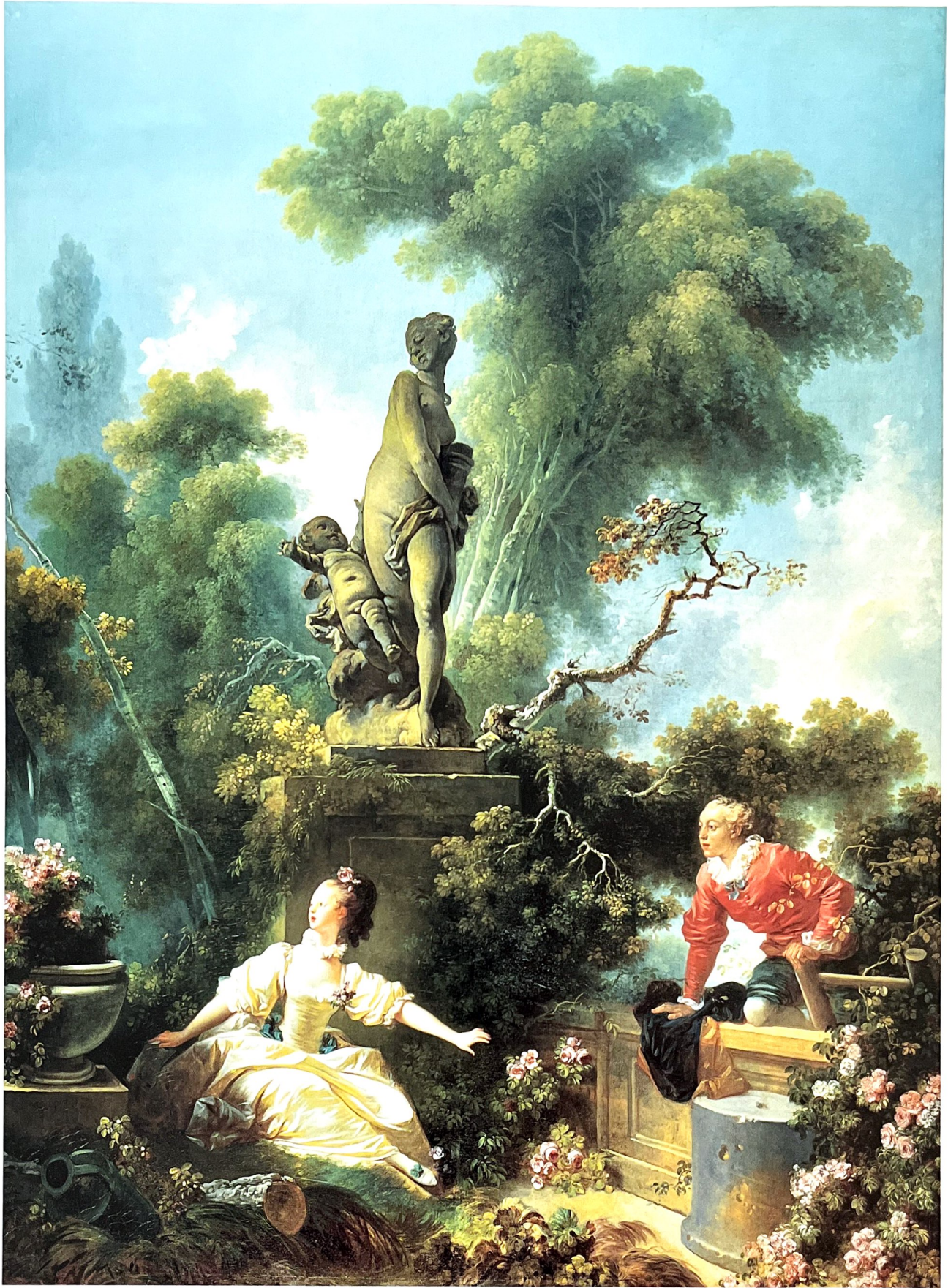
Some of the leading artists of the time contributed to the interior decoration of the Hôtel de Soubise. *The Gracious Shepherd* (FIG. 1-6), by François Boucher (1703–1770), is typical of the paintings that embellish its interiors. A young shepherd presents a shepherdess with a little bird in a cage, the first phase in a courtship that will, no doubt, lead to her own capture by love. Given the social realities of the eighteenth century, it is obvious that these fashionably coiffured and fancily dressed young people are not really shepherds. Instead, Boucher's idyllic pastoral scene is an escapist fantasy, meant to evoke nostalgia for the simple pleasures of country life.

### Rococo Decoration: Paintings, Sculptures, and Porcelains

Boucher was the most famous decorative painter during the reign of Louis XV. In addition to pastoral idylls, he produced numerous mythological scenes in which nymphs and goddesses, all young, gorgeous, and brazenly nude, abandon themselves to sexual pleasure. Venus, the Roman goddess of love, figures prominently in Boucher's work. In the painting reproduced in FIG. 1-7, her husband, Vulcan, finds her in bed with her lover Mars, a development that, in her ecstasy, she fails to notice. As is characteristic of Boucher's work, the scene is quite contrived: an undulating mattress is suspended in a forest, while fluttering putti (cupids) flutter around with enormous satin bed sheets.

The work of Boucher's younger colleague Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) shows another aspect of Rococo decorative painting. Fragonard was especially drawn to





1-8 **Jean-Honoré Fragonard**, *The Secret Meeting*, from the series *The Progress of Love*, 1771–3. Oil on canvas, 10' 5" x 8' (3.17 x 2.44 m). Copyright © Frick Collection, New York.



1-9 (left) **Etienne-Maurice Falconet**, *Seated Cupid*, 1757. Marble, height 35" (90 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

1-10 Sèvres Manufactory, A pair of potpourri vases with lids, 1761. Soft-paste porcelain, height 11½" (29.2 cm). Decorations painted by Charles-Nicholas Dodin (1734–1803). Detroit Institute of Arts.

the playful lives and loves of the aristocratic youth of his day. *The Secret Meeting* (FIG. 1-8) is one of four decorative panels (a series collectively entitled *The Progress of Love*) commissioned by Madame du Barry, the last of Louis XV's many mistresses. In it, a young man has found a ladder to scale the wall surrounding the estate of his sweetheart's parents. The girl, who has agreed to a secret rendezvous, looks anxiously around, suspecting that someone has followed her. Although Fragonard's painting deals with a contemporary theme, it presents no less a fantasy than the works of Boucher. The contrived eagerness of the two lovers and their charming "love nest," guarded by a statue of Venus and Cupid, all form a highly pleasing artifice.

Decorative statues such as the one depicted in Fragonard's painting abounded during the Rococo era. Venus and Cupid were favored subjects, as were shepherds and shepherdesses. *Seated Cupid* (FIG. 1.9), by Etienne-Maurice Falconet (1716–1791), was destined for the Parisian residence of Madame de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV. (The building now serves as the French Presidential Palace.) It shows Cupid holding his finger to his lips as he quietly pulls an arrow from his quiver. The statue engages the viewer by making him or her an accomplice in Cupid's furtive attack on an invisible "victim." Who could refuse to participate in his little game, which ultimately leads to sweet love?

No French eighteenth-century room would have been complete without the presence of some porcelain vases, candlesticks, or figurines. Although porcelain had been made in China since the eighth century CE, European manufacturers did not master the technique until the eighteenth. The most luxurious porcelains were produced in Sèvres, near Paris, in a factory that was controlled by the royal administration. A pair of potpourri vases (FIG. 1-10), made to contain fragrant flowers and spices, exemplifies the originality of eighteenth-century Sèvres porcelains. Their playful forms, outlined by a succession of inward and outward curves, are enhanced by both three-dimensional and painted decorations. A delicately molded bunch of flowers on the lid of each vase is matched by a painted bouquet on one side. On the other, a fanciful scene of Chinese life shows the eighteenth-century love of chinoiserie, exotic fantasies informed by the scarce knowledge that Europeans had of China.

### The Enlightenment

With their lighthearted paintings, charming sculptures, and playful, delicate porcelains, Rococo interiors served as a perfect backdrop for the intimate gatherings that were fashionable among eighteenth-century high society. The



1-11 **Maurice-Quentin de La Tour**, *Portrait of Madame de Pompadour, Salon of 1755*. Pastel, 69 x 50<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (1.75 x 1.28 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

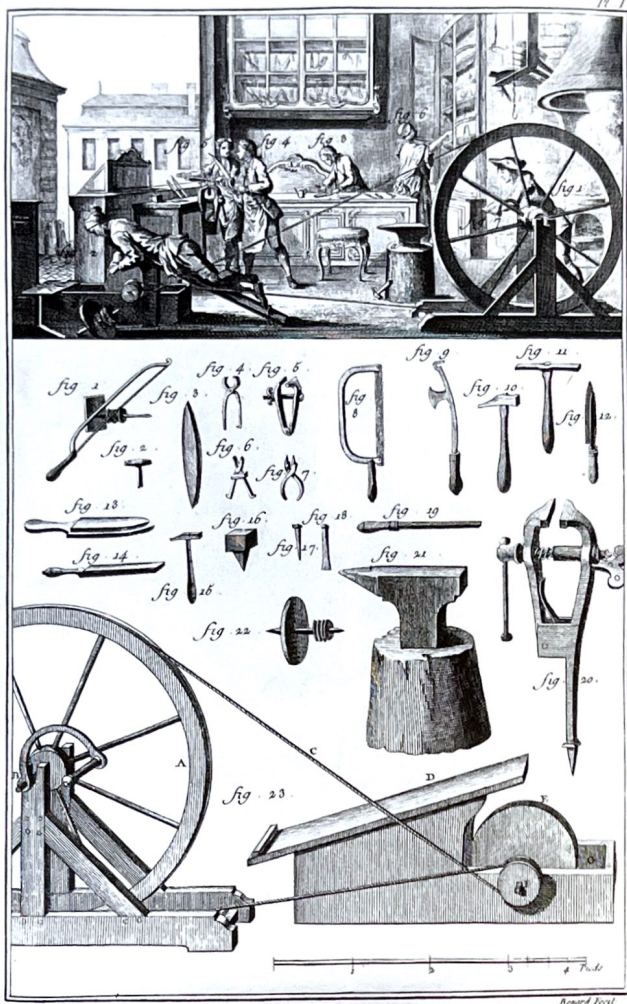
well-known hostesses of the day knew that the success of their "salons" depended on sparkling, quick-witted conversation. Thus they were eager to include among their guests some of the leading intellectuals of the day. Fortunately, there was no shortage of brilliant minds in Paris. The playful, libertine spirit of the age stimulated a new freedom of thought, and a willingness to challenge the convictions of the past.

This was the period of the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement that had originated in seventeenth-century Britain but culminated with the French *philosophes* of the eighteenth century. Men such as François-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694–1778), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), and Jean d’Alembert (1717–1783) had an unflinching belief in the power of reason. Reason, they felt,

could explain all natural phenomena. It was also the basis for a moral code by which all men could abide. Challenging such ingrained beliefs as the Great Chain of Being and the Divine Right of Kings (see *Absolutism*, page 19), the *philosophes* even called into question the existence of God.

Among the great eighteenth-century hostesses to entertain the likes of Voltaire and Diderot was Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764). Born Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, she received the title of Marquise de Pompadour from Louis XV when she became his leading mistress in 1745. Beautiful, clever, and talented, she was a refined patron of literature and the arts and an arbiter of "good taste." Her famous pastel portrait (FIG. 1-11) by Maurice-Quentin de La Tour (1704–1788) shows the royal mistress seated at a





1-12 *The Cutler's Shop*. Illustration in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, 1762–77 (plate volumes). Engraving. Private Collection, London.

table piled with books, a globe, and sheet music. A portfolio stuffed with drawings and prints leans against the table leg. Dressed in a white satin dress embroidered with sprigs of roses, she exudes worldliness and sophistication.

Madame de Pompadour became the special protector of one of the great intellectual undertakings of the eighteenth century, the *Encyclopédie*, a multi-volume illustrated encyclopedia that encompassed all contemporary knowledge, from philosophy and literature to astronomy and technology. Protection was something much needed by the *Encyclopédie* since, from the beginning, the undertaking was attacked by the Roman Catholic Church for its progressive tone and the irreligious bent of many of its articles.

The chief editors of the *Encyclopédie* were the philosopher–writer–critic Diderot and the mathematician D'Alembert, who engaged an army of contemporary scholars, scientists, and artists to write articles and draw illustrations. *The Cutler's Shop* (FIG. 1-12), one of many plates depicting contemporary trades, shows in detail the entire manufacturing process of cutlery, including the workshop and the tools of the trade. The image reveals the eighteenth-cen-

tury passion for rational order and systematization. It also speaks of a new fascination with technology that would soon give rise to the Industrial Revolution.

The *Encyclopédie* drew heavily on earlier examples of similar projects, notably the English *Cyclopaedia* of Ephraim Chambers (c.1680–1740), published as early as 1728. As mentioned, the British were really the main initiators of Enlightenment thought. At the end of the seventeenth century, John Locke (1632–1704) had already challenged the idea of the Divine Right of Kings and declared that political power was justified only if it served the public good—an idea that would greatly influence the American Constitution.

Locke also asserted that knowledge is derived from sensual experience, as opposed to being innate. This idea was the essence of a philosophical system called Empiricism, and it affected early eighteenth-century art theory by inverting the relative importance attached to different art forms. Previously, literature had been held in highest esteem because it appealed to the intellect. Now the fine arts and music were given priority, because these were experienced directly by the senses. Influenced by Locke, the French theorist Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670–1742) praised pictures over poems because they “act upon us directly through the organ of sight; and the painter does not employ artificial signs to convey his effect . . . the pleasure we derive from art is a physical pleasure.” This idea was radically opposed to the ideas of an earlier generation of theorists, such as the painter and designer Charles Le Brun (see page 43), who felt that painting was a matter of intelligence and theory.

### The Rococo outside France

Dubos's notion that art provides physical pleasure is central to the Rococo aesthetic. This aesthetic governed not only the interiors of the Parisian homes of the French aristocracy, but also eighteenth-century churches and monasteries in central and southern Europe. That religious architecture thrived during the eighteenth century may at first seem strange, in view of the religious skepticism of the period. This skepticism, however, had little impact outside the small circles of British Enlightenment philosophers and French *philosophes*. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, religion remained the undisputed mainstay of society at large.

A small but perfect example of Rococo religious architecture is the Wieskirche, or “Church of the Meadow,” built by Johann Baptist Zimmermann (1680–1758) and his brother Dominikus (1685–1766). Located in southern Germany, in the Bavarian countryside, the modest white exterior of this oval-shaped pilgrimage church gives no hint of the exuberance of its interior (FIG. 1-13). Inside, one is immediately drawn to the altar, which stands before



1-13 **Johann Baptist Zimmermann and Dominikus Zimmermann**, Wieskirche, 1745–57. Pfaffenwinkel, Bavaria.

an elaborate backdrop of architectural, sculptural, and painted decorations. Light streaming in through large windows glints off the gilded decorative stucco work all around the church. Looking up, one sees a large, exuberant ceiling painting. The interior's dominant colors, white, pink, and gold, lend a sense of lightness and airiness to the building despite the elaborateness of its decorations. Like

Boffrand's salons in France, the Zimmermanns' church interior was meant to evoke sensual delight, yet its purpose was not to provide erotic excitement but rather to bring the soul closer to God.

Among the striking aspects of Rococo architecture is the contrast between the clarity and simplicity of its basic structures and the richness of its ornamentation. The great



1-14 **Giovanni Battista Tiepolo**, *The Institution of the Rosary*, 1738-9. Ceiling fresco, 45'11" x 14'9" (14 x 4.5 m). Church of Santa Maria del Rosario, Venice.

architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983) drew a parallel with the music of the time. He found in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) and George Frederick Handel (1685–1759) an analogous use of a basic structure that is embellished and heightened by grace notes and trills. Bach and his contemporaries did not write these “embellishments” into the music, but left it up to the performers to improvise them. In the same way, Rococo architects designed only the main structure and left the painting, carving, and stucco work to local craftsmen, who could show off their imagination and virtuosity through intricate ornamental work.

Few Rococo craftsmen were well known. Yet some decorative painters, such as Boucher and Fragonard, achieved national reputations. Even more famous was the Venetian painter Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696–1770), who decorated churches and palaces throughout central and southern Europe. Tiepolo’s *The Institution of the Rosary* (FIG. 1-14) in the vault of the church of Santa Maria del Rosario in Venice is a breathtaking example of his work. This huge ceiling painting commemorates the introduction, by St Dominic (c.1170–1221), of a devotional practice of prayers and meditations, which was aided by a rosary, a string of beads on which the prayers were counted off. The painting gives viewers the illusion that, through an opening in the ceiling, they are looking up into another space, beyond our earthly realm. In that space, a monumental staircase leads up to a huge building. At the top of the stairs St Dominic hands over the rosary beads to mankind. Beyond him, we see the Virgin Mary and the Christ child hovering on light-filled clouds, with angels fluttering around them.

Tiepolo has composed the scene so that our eye is guided in zigzag fashion from the bottom of the fresco, which “spills over” the frame into the space of the church, to the group of angels at the top. (To create the “spill-over” effect, a piece of carefully shaped canvas has been attached to the fresco to overlap the stucco edge.) The movement of the eye becomes a metaphor for the transport of the soul, guided by religion, from earth into heaven. This transport is likewise suggested by the color scheme, which moves from dark, earthly colors to light pastel tones. Tiepolo’s art marries Rococo sensuality and Enlightenment reason. In this painting the emotions of religious ecstasy are invoked by the methodical manipulation of perspective, composition, and color.

### Portrait Painting in Britain

While Rococo decoration flourished in central and southern Europe, it failed to take root in the north. In countries such as Britain, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and the northern German states, the demand for art was largely confined to easel paintings, that is, paintings that were done on an easel, framed, and hung on a wall.



1-15 **Thomas Gainsborough**, *Portrait of Mary, Countess Howe*, c.1760. Oil on canvas, 8 x 5' (2.44 x 1.52 m). Kenwood House, Iveagh Bequest, London.

In Britain, the most powerful nation in northern Europe, wealthy nobles decorated their homes with Old Master paintings. Contemporary artists were employed almost exclusively to paint family portraits, for which there was great demand. The *Portrait of Mary, Countess Howe* (FIG. 1.15), by Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), is but one example of the many portraits of the nobility that were produced in eighteenth-century Britain. Painted around 1763, it shows a life-size portrait of the countess taking an evening stroll. Her high heels and pink lace dress are hardly suited for this activity, and she must lift her lace apron to prevent it from catching on a thistle. The incongruity of her situation reminds us that the painting is nothing like a modern snapshot, capturing the countess in an unguarded moment. Instead, the portrait is carefully engineered to illustrate her station in life. The landscape background marks her as a member of the nobility, for she, like other landed aristocrats, owed her wealth and social status to the land. The costly silks, laces, and pearls signify her family’s financial well-being.



1-16 **Jean-Baptiste Chardin**, *Saying Grace*, c. 1740. Oil on canvas, 19 x 15 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (49.5 x 38.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

In spite of all the portrait's contrivances, Gainsborough has managed to give it a sense of spontaneity. The countess's bouncy step and pretty face, with a hint of a smile, suggest an intelligent woman with an independent spirit. The portrait is painted in a loose, free manner that belies the constraints of its composition. The virtuoso rendering of the silk and lace, and the freely sketched landscape background, tie Gainsborough's art to Rococo painting on the European mainland.

### The Eighteenth-Century Artist: Between Patronage and the Art Market

Tiepolo and Boucher, perhaps the best-known artists of the first half of the eighteenth century, were "fine art entrepreneurs." Tiepolo traveled around Europe with an army of assistants to execute huge decorative wall and ceiling paintings for princely palaces and religious buildings. Boucher, whose activities remained largely confined to France, was an entrepreneur of a different kind. In addition to producing decorative pictures for the homes of wealthy aristocrats, he provided numerous designs for

manufacturers of luxury goods, such as the Sèvres porcelain factory and the Gobelins tapestry manufactory. Both artists worked almost exclusively on commission and commanded substantial fees. Boucher is known to have earned some 50,000 *livres* a year; a Paris university professor, by comparison, would have made about 1,900 *livres*.

Of the many artists who made their reputations and their fortunes as portrait painters, Gainsborough at the height of his career charged 30 guineas (c. \$6,500) for a head, 60 for a half-length, and 100 guineas for a full-length portrait. He could easily earn £1,000 (c. \$200,000) a year, allowing him to keep his own coach and to assemble a small collection of paintings. In France, La Tour demanded, and was paid, the unprecedented sum of 48,000 *livres* for his pastel portrait of *Madame de Pompadour* (see FIG. 1-11).

While decorators such as Boucher and portraitists such as Gainsborough depended on wealthy patrons (kings, nobles, religious institutions, and the like) for a living, a small but growing number of eighteenth-century artists produced directly for the art market. They painted pictures without commissions but in the hope that collectors would buy them. These artists generally turned away from mythological or religious scenes to focus instead on "lesser"



1-17 **Bernard Lépicier,**  
Print after Chardin's *Saying  
Grace*, 1744. Engraving,  
12¾ x 10" (32.3 x 25.2 cm).  
Bibliothèque Nationale,  
Département des Estampes  
et de la Photographie, Paris.

subjects such as genre (scenes from daily life), landscape, and still life.

In France, Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699–1779) sold still lifes and genre pictures to art connoisseurs who appreciated the quiet charm of his subjects, the subtlety of his compositions, and the tactility of his paint surfaces. His painting *Saying Grace* (FIG. 1-16) shows a sober middle-class interior with a mother bending over the dinner table. Two children, an older girl and a younger boy (little boys wore skirts until the early twentieth century), are seated opposite her. As in all paintings by Chardin, action and narrative are limited: the mother watches the little boy say his prayers as she places the dishes on the table.

Like many independent artists, Chardin made a steady second income through the sale of print reproductions of his paintings to a middle-class clientele (see *Reproducing Works of Art*, page 33). To increase their market appeal, these prints were frequently sold in series, with verses appended to the bottom of each print. The caption of a

print after *Saying Grace* (FIG. 1-17) reads: "The sister slyly laughs at her little brother who hems and haws through his prayer. He does not care but hurries on, spurred on by his appetite." The text "enlarges" the narrative content of the image by developing the characters of the children (the sly girl and the greedy little boy) and analyzing their motivations (the boy's hunger). By offering the viewers a "canned" interpretation, captions added to the popularity and marketability of prints.

Prints were so lucrative that some artists painted with the print market foremost in mind. The English artist William Hogarth (1697–1764), to this end, painted several series of pictures that were the eighteenth-century painted equivalents of modern soap operas. One of the best-known is *Marriage-à-la-mode* (or *Fashionable Marriage*). This series of six paintings follows the sad course of an arranged marriage between the daughter of a rich bourgeois merchant and the son of an impoverished aristocratic family. As the betrothed pursue their private pleasures, the earl contracts venereal disease and his wife gets caught

1-18 **William Hogarth**, *The Death of the Countess*, from the series *Marriage-à-la-Mode*, c. 1743. Oil on canvas, 27 x 35" (68.6 x 88.9 cm). National Gallery, London.



## Reproducing Works of Art

Today reproductions of works of art are so plentiful and ubiquitous that we can hardly imagine a time when they were coveted by collectors and sold for substantial prices. For most of the history of art, reproducing a work of art meant literally to re-produce it, that is, to copy it by hand. Such copies were frequently made by the artist himself on the request of a patron or collector. It took the invention of printing to allow for the manufacture of multiple reproductions, on paper and usually in reduced format.

From the sixteenth century, the print technique most frequently used to reproduce art was engraving. To make a reproductive engraving, the engraver drew, on paper, a reduced copy of the painting or sculpture to be reproduced. He then engraved a copy of the drawing into a copper plate. From this plate, with the help of a bottle of ink and a printing press, several dozens or even hundreds of reproductions could be printed. Because of the way engravings were made, each one generally reproduced a mirror image of the original work of art. In addition,

engravings lacked color and were restricted to line. None of this hindered the demand for reproductive prints, which was the more widespread since, before the institution of museums at the end of the eighteenth century, public access to art was limited.

Reproductive prints became especially popular in the eighteenth century, when new technical inventions, including color printing, made it possible to make reproductions that came increasingly close to the original. In addition, print publishers thought of ever new ways of marketing prints, as they "packaged" them in albums, with explanatory texts written by experts, or sold them as "furniture" prints, ready to be framed and hung on the wall.

Reproductive prints generally show the names of two artists, below the image. On the left is the name of the author of the original work, often in combination with the Latin word *pinxit* ("painted") or *delineavit* ("drew"). On the right is the name of the printmaker, generally before the Latin *sculpsit* ("engraved").

with her lover; the marriage ends with his death and her suicide. It is this tragic end that is represented in the final painting (FIG. 1-18), in which the unfaithful wife has collapsed in a chair after taking an overdose of laudanum. While the doctor feels her pulse, an old nurse brings over her little child for a final farewell kiss.

Hogarth had announced the print series after his paintings in the *London Daily Post* of 1742: "MR. HOGARTH intends to publish by Subscription, SIX PRINTS from Copper-Plates, engrav'd by the best Masters in Paris, after his own Paintings; representing a variety of Modern Occurrences in High-Life and called MARRIAGE-A-LA-MODE." The series was quite successful among a well-to-do middle-class public which apparently framed these prints and hung them in their parlors.

### The Education of the Artist and the Academy

Eighteenth-century art education for the most part followed the age-old model that had developed in the context of the medieval guilds. An aspiring young artist, often no more than fourteen years old, was apprenticed to an established master to learn the trade "from the bottom up." This system allowed young artists to learn the practical aspects of their chosen craft—painters would learn how to mix colors, and sculptors would learn to carve marble. When it came to the "higher" aspects of art, such as its history, theory, and aesthetics, however, apprenticeships did not always suffice.

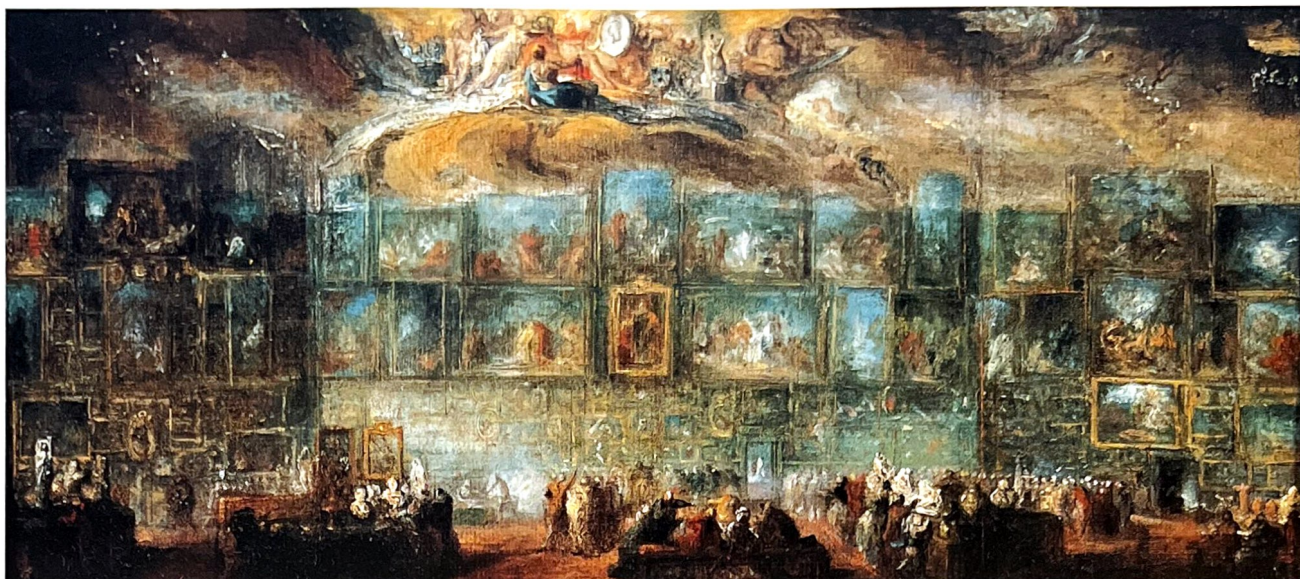
Partly in response to this shortcoming, an alternative model of art education gained ground during the eigh-

teenth century. As early as 1648, the French Council of State had approved the foundation of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which was to serve as a school of figure drawing. Here, young artists, under the supervision of an academy member, could draw from casts of Classical sculptures and live models. The purpose of the academy was not to replace apprenticeships, but rather to supplement their practical training with exposure to Greek and Roman sculptures, which were seen as the fountainhead of the Western artistic tradition.

The French Academy, though especially influential in Europe, was not the first institution of its kind. It had been preceded by several smaller academies in Italy, some dating as far back as the sixteenth century. As a national, government-sanctioned institution, however, the French Academy set an important example that, in the eighteenth century, was followed everywhere. Academies were founded in Vienna (1692), Madrid (1744), Copenhagen (1754), St Petersburg (1757), and London (1768), to mention only a few.

Eighteenth-century academies had two other missions besides teaching. First, they had to uphold artistic standards; second, they had to secure due respect for the visual arts within the broader cultural realm. To uphold artistic standards, academies developed reward systems that encouraged artistic competition. In most countries, the highest reward was membership of the academy itself, an honor that was reserved for well-established artists. (The British Royal Academy, from its foundation until the present, has never had more than forty members, according to its original statutes.) Academies also organized com-





1-19 **Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin**, *The Salon of 1767*, 1767. Watercolor and gouache, 9<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (25 x 48 cm). Private Collection.

petitions for young artists. In France the winners of the most prestigious art contest were given the funds for a trip to Rome, where they could study Classical and Renaissance art at first hand. To this end, the French Academy even established an academy in Rome where winners of the *Prix de Rome*, or Rome Prize, could live and work for four years.

### Academy Exhibitions

To secure for the visual arts a place of dignity in the cultural realm, academies organized periodic art exhibitions showing works by the membership and other artists approved by a member-appointed jury. The French initiated this practice. At first, academy exhibitions were at irregular intervals, but after 1737 they became annual or biannual. Held in the Louvre, the unused royal palace in Paris, they were called "Salons" after the large square reception room, the so-called Salon Carré, in which the works were displayed. Other academies followed the French example. In Britain, for example, the Royal Academy began organizing annual exhibitions in 1768 and has continued to do so ever since.

It is impossible to overrate the importance of these exhibitions. On the one hand, they allowed the general public to experience the art of their time. Academy exhibitions were thus a major force in the gradual democratization of the arts that took place in the late eighteenth century and in the course of the nineteenth. On the other, they gave artists the opportunity to show their works in public. Since there were no commercial galleries in the eighteenth century, these exhibitions were essential for artists to make a name. Although academy exhibitions gave artists public

exposure, they did not allow them to sell their works. Such transactions were arranged privately, between artist and patron. Artists received prospective clients in their studios to show paintings and negotiate sales. Only in rare instances did they involve a dealer. Generally, eighteenth-century art dealers avoided contemporary art, which was considered risky; they preferred to sell older works of art.

A painting of *The Salon of 1767* (FIG. 1-19), by Gabriel-Jacques de Saint-Aubin (1724–1780), suggests what the French Academy exhibitions looked like in the eighteenth century. The walls of the Salon are crammed with pictures. Close to the ceiling are the large history paintings, which were considered the highest form of painting by academic standards. Below these hang portraits, landscapes, genre pictures, and still lifes. In the center of the room, on large tables, sculptures of nude gods and goddesses, portrait busts, and reliefs are displayed. Visitors mill around the room, scrutinizing and discussing the works. The visual effect of the Salon must have been dazzling, with the sea of colors on the walls and the swirls of people milling about below. Add to this the din of voices and the midsummer heat and it is clear that a visit to the Salon must have been quite overwhelming.