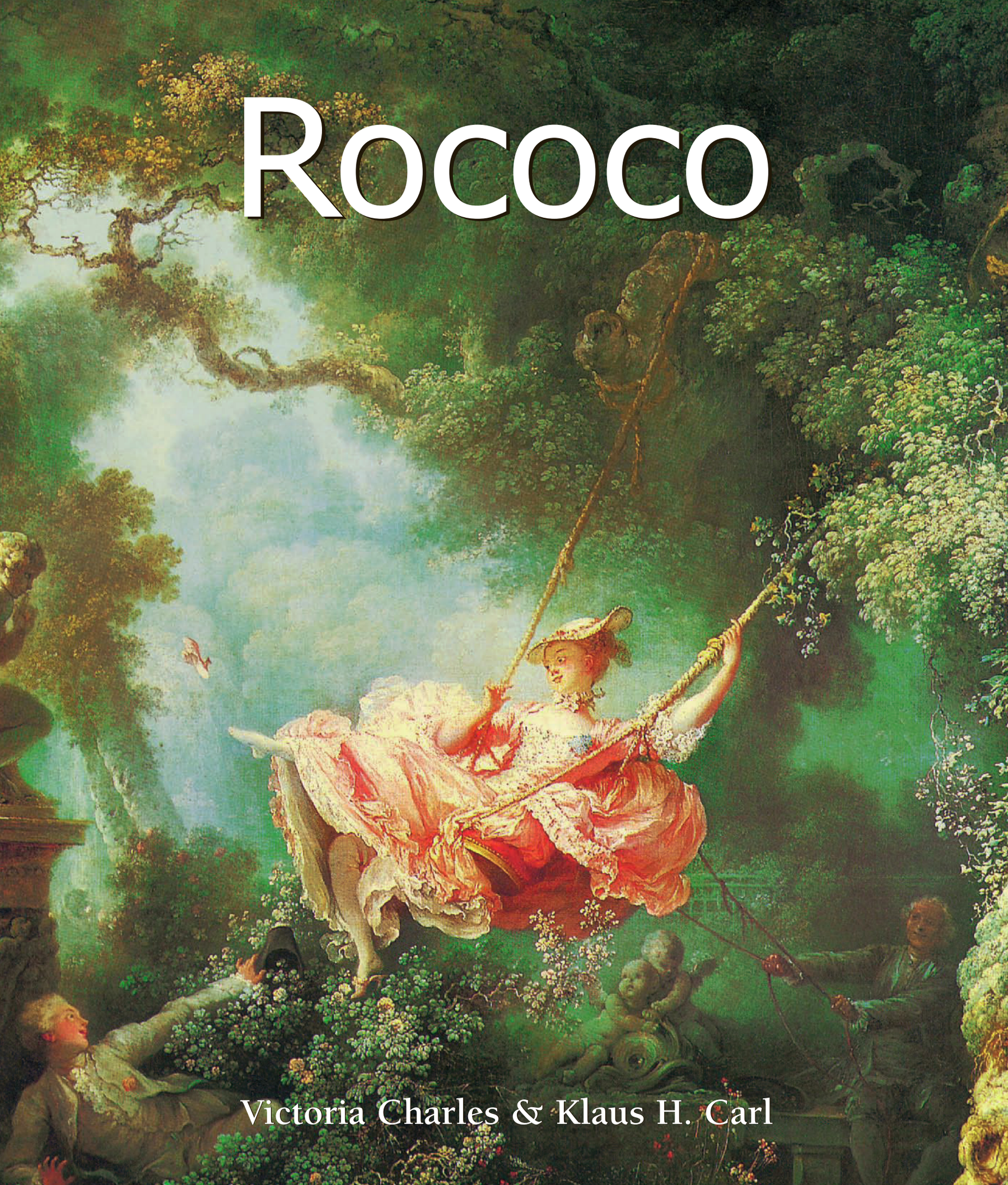
Rococo



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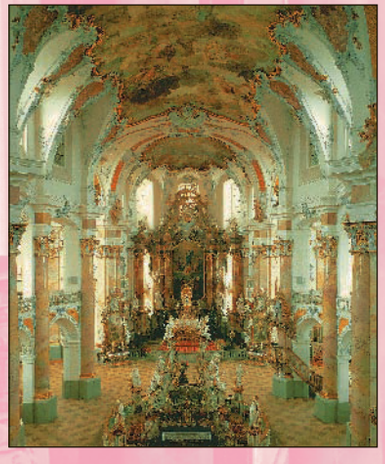




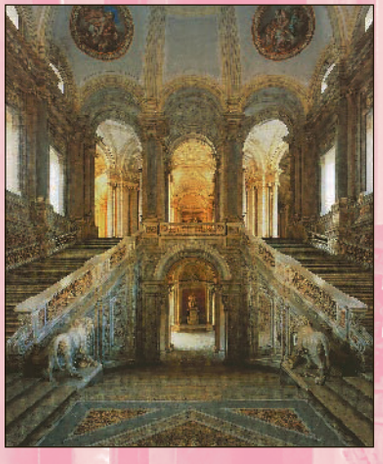












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Contemporary History

In the first quarter of the 18th century, in a barely noticeable transition, Baroque gave way to Rococo, also known as the late Baroque period. The unstoppable victory parade of the Age of Enlightenment, which began with the Reformation and the Renaissance, continued its unwavering march until the end of the 17th century in England, inching inexorably towards its climax, and throughout the 17th century formed the intellectual and cultural life of the entire 18th century. With this, the educated and prosperous bourgeoisie began to discuss works of art which had hitherto been largely left up to the nobility and the royal courts. If up until that point the clientele for architecture or paintings was drawn predominantly from the church and to a lesser extent from the nobility, and the artists were regarded rather as artisans organized into guilds, they now became individuals with independent professions. At the same time the artist was no longer obligated to create portraits or works based on mythology in accordance with never-changing, prescribed themes and commissions.

The most important instrument of the Enlightenment was prose, which was given a witty, inspirational, entertaining and universally comprehensible form in letters, pamphlets, treatises and historical works, since only these were able to reach the broad mass of the population. In France, between 1751 and 1775, the 29 volumes of the *Encyclopédie* were published jointly by Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Jean-Baptiste le Rond (1717-1783), who called himself d'Alembert, François Marie Arouet (1694-1778), and the self-styled Voltaire. This encyclopaedia encompassed not only the whole of human knowledge but also made available a collection of arguments against the fossilisation of learning.

Absolutism was the norm, in an era in which rulers possessed unbridled power over their territories and were able to govern



François Boucher, *The Toilet of Venus*, 1751.
Oil on canvas, 108.3 x 85.1 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Jacopo Amigoni, *Flora and Zephyr*, 1748.
Oil on canvas, 213.4 x 147.3 cm.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Hubert Robert, *Demolition of the Houses on the Pont Notre-Dame in 1786*, 1786.
Oil on canvas, 73 x 140 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

without any external controls or any obligation to their subjects. The instruments at their disposal were first and foremost the army, the Legislature with its officials bound by ties of unconditional obedience, the Church and finally the mercantile trading system. This era ended in France around the time of the death of Louis XIV (1715).

Wars

Other significant events during these absolutist years occurred in the first half of the restless 18th century, such as the victory over the Osmans (in 1717) of Prince Eugene of Savoy in the service of Austria. This victory inspired Carl Loewe (1796-1869) to compose the famous song "Prince Eugene, Noble Knight". During the same year, the Hapsburg Maria Theresa (1717-1780) was born, later named the Archduchess and Queen of Hungary, in whose extensive collection of titles can also be found that of a Roman Empress. In Russia, Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725) was still on the throne, and in the Italian state of Florence the Medicis continued to reign with Cosimo III (1642-1723). Between 1718 and 1729, and again from 1739 to 1748, England was fighting its wars against Spain, and the Russia-Austria alliance was again fighting the Turks in the 1730s. From 1740 to 1748, the War of the Austrian Succession raged with the First and Second Silesian Wars, in which European powers such as Bavaria, France, Prussia, the Netherlands and, of course, Austria partook.

Nor was the second half of this century significantly more peaceful. It began in 1756 with all the major powers in Europe



fighting the Seven Years War of Frederick II the Great of Prussia (1712-1786) who, with the two Schleswig Wars, had already brought his country to the edge of ruin against Austria's Empress Maria Theresa. Those then involved were in fact intensively preoccupied on three other continents with their colonial wars, but in 1754 faced a war against each other; it was not until 1756 that they concluded a non-aggression pact.

The last quarter of the 18th century finally came to an end with a few fairly short wars: the war of the Bavarian Succession in the years 1778-1779, the war between Russia and Sweden (1788-1790) and that between Russia and Poland in 1792 (the fifth conflict between these two nations), which did not directly concern Europe. Meanwhile on Russia's throne was Tsarina Catherine II, also called Catherine the Great (1729-1796), who established her country as a major power. The English and the French were still busy fighting each other, and the Native Americans had to come to terms with the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the United States of America. The century ended, after the French Revolution of 1789, with the Bombardment of Valmy (1792) and the Revolutionary Wars, which crossed with Napoleon I into the 19th century.

Music

The style and form of the music in France, which hitherto had been determined by Louis XIV (1638-1715), was in lively competition, especially in the operatic sphere, with Italian music; this reached its ultimate peak between 1752 and 1754 in the Buffonist conflict unleashed by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi

Canaletto (Antonio Canal),
A View of Walton Bridge, 1754.
Oil on canvas, 48.8 x 76.7 cm.
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.



Andreas Schlüter, *Equestrian Statue of Prince Elector Frederick William the Great*, 1689-1703.
Bronze on stone base, height: 290 cm.
Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin.

Étienne-Maurice Falconet, *Monument to Peter the Great*, also known as *The Bronze Horseman*, 1767-1778.
Bronze.
Senate Square, St. Petersburg.

(1720-1736) with his *La serva padrona*. Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) finally pitched into the dispute with his new harmonic theory *Treatise on Harmony Reduced to Its Natural Principles*, which propelled him to fame throughout Europe. In the ballrooms and on all festive occasions, the graceful minuet reigned supreme.

With his cantatas and oratorios, Germany's Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767), friend of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and George Frederick Handel (1685-1759), was one of the great Baroque masters. In England, Handel was still writing predominantly Baroque music, and in Italy the music scene was dominated by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) with his sonatas and violin concertos.

In these restless times in Germany, Johann Sebastian Bach, who was not properly recognised until almost 100 years later, was writing his incredibly comprehensive opus of concertos and chamber music. His sons, already part of the early classical movement, took the music on to symphonies and sonatas, one of the great masters of which was Ludwig van Beethoven, with his concertos, symphonies, sonatas, chamber music and orchestral works. He brought the slowly departing century to a close with his "Rage Over a Lost Penny". The other grand master was the genius Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), who also created operas, concertos, symphonies, sonatas and orchestral works. The third in this group of grand masters was Mozart's friend and fellow Freemasons lodge member Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), who was regarded as the true inventor of the symphony and the string quartet, and who spent a large part of his life far removed from the music scene on the country estate of the Esterházy family.

Inventions

In the sphere of inventions introduced to accelerate productivity, the English were supremely outstanding. For example, two years after the end of the Seven Years War, the first working steam engine, later developed by James Watt (1736-1819), heralded the start of the age of mechanisation. The "Spinning Jenny", a spinning machine, was developed in 1764, probably by James Hargreaves (1720-1778), Henry Cavendish (1731-1810) and Joseph Priestly (1733-1804), all of whom were concerned with


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Jean-Marc Nattier, *The Battle of Lesnaya*, 1717.
Oil on canvas, 90 x 112 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



Antoine Watteau, *The Pilgrimage to the Island of Cythera*, 1717.
Oil on canvas, 129 x 194 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.



physics in general and with electricity and chemistry in particular. It is in fact Priestley who is regarded not only (erroneously) as the inventor of the rubber eraser, but also was the first to isolate the element oxygen in 1774.

In medicine, John Hunter (1728-1793) made a decisive breakthrough in the treatment of gunshot wounds, so that affected parts of the body no longer had to be immediately and extremely painfully amputated. The patient still had to be held down by a row of strong men and provided with copious amounts of alcohol, but the number of injured men condemned to live out their lives on a pension, receiving charity or alms, decreased considerably.

Icarus's dream of flight became a reality for the first time with the invention of the hot air balloon in 1783. Constructed from a lined, linen cover by the brothers Joseph-Michel (1740-1810) and Jacques-Étienne Montgolfier (1745-1799), the first hot air balloon flew over two kilometres at a height of about 2000 metres and then landed in a field. Simultaneously, Jacques Charles (1746-1823) developed his gas balloon, which set off from the Champs de Mars near Paris and landed in a field near today's Charles de Gaulle Airport, whereupon the farm hands working there, utterly nonplussed, set upon it with pitch forks. In conclusion, the 18th century was shaped by genius, war and invention.

Art

With regard to the works of architecture and sculpture, as the concepts of the Baroque period range from 1600 to 1720, the word "Rococo" was introduced to discuss the years between 1720 and about 1780. The term "Rococo" perhaps comes from the word *rocaille* ("mussel"), which emerged in French emigrant circles. This was followed by a transitional period from around the end of the 18th century, as a kind of counter-movement towards the greater simplicity of neoclassicism.

Of course this arrangement is not entirely appropriate. since throughout the 17th century there had already been a turn towards classicism, particularly in architecture. The distinctions made are therefore, like the use of the term "Renaissance" for northern European painting of the 15th and of the first half of



Carle van Loo (Charles-André van Loo), *Spanish Concert*, 1754.
Oil on canvas, 164 x 129 cm.
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Pietro Longhi, *The Rhinoceros*, 1751.
Oil on canvas, 62 x 50 cm.
Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.

the 16th century, not always valid and thus do not always apply universally.

Particularly in the Netherlands, painting was the absolute antithesis of what the inventors of the name Baroque understood by it. They considered the works of architecture and sculpture created since the end of the 16th century in Italy and their presence in some countries north of the Alps as a group detached from the High Renaissance. Within works such as these, they found features which indicated a deviation from the rules of the classical age and a pointless, arbitrary exaggeration of the fullness of form.

The term Baroque, invented to characterise this art, at the same time contained an unfavourable criticism of the artistic endeavours throughout the 17th century. Even after the movement, the term Baroque had a negative connotation and was used in the art world to describe all that was despicable and reprehensible. In the 17th century, art lacked deep roots in the broad population. Thus it remained elitist, a courtly art which was accessible only to the nobility and the sophisticated members of society. As a result of the logic of the age, the art at the end of the 18th century collapsed and was swept away by the storms of revolution.

Not until much later, around the end of the 19th century, was the conceptual confusion of the 17th century revisited with a fresh perspective and assessment of the historical developments and a better overview of the socio-political situation. There had already been exaggeration even to the point of tastelessness prior to and during the 17th century, but simply no more so than in earlier periods of world history. Generally speaking, so-called Baroque art was in all spheres merely a reflection of the spirit of the age.

The age of Baroque predominantly coincided with the reign of Louis XIV. Afterwards, in the Regency (Régence) and the first half of the reign of Louis XV (1710-1774), the hitherto strong, powerful forms changed into light, playful and gracefully sinuous lines, bringing to the fore the ornate, mussel-like forms. Asymmetry was raised to the status of law. In interior decoration, all deep shadows and strong colours were avoided; in addition to an abundance of gold, light colours were most popular.

Only the return to the straight and narrow, which was at the same time associated with a stronger inclination towards classical forms and nature, led art into the era that saw the days of Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764) and the reign of Louis XVI (1754-1793): the age of Early Classicism, also known as the Pigtail Style or Rococo.

It has become the absolute norm to label these artistic expressions as purely decorative. The characteristic features of ornamentation were not rediscovered in architecture. Although painting and decorative art are both rooted in cultural history, when examined from an artistic standpoint, they have totally different origins. Architecture in particular developed quite differently in some countries, so that here the term Rococo coincides in terms neither of space nor time or style with the artistic life of the first half of the 18th century.

Taking all this into consideration, there is still a variety of interpretations of the art of the 18th century. The artistic scene expanded; France retained its predominance yet spread in new directions. For the artists of Europe, Italy remained the academic centre in which they completed their foundation and training, while Spain and the Netherlands changed places with England and Germany, who moved slightly forward and attempted to make up for lost ground.

In the sphere of painting, pastels gained ground, proving to be especially effective in capturing the dainty charms of Rococo women. In addition, however, in the representation of works of art, the technique changed. Gradually the use of woodcut disappeared; the copper plate engraving and the etching were thus complemented by the scraped leaves of "Black Art". This technique, invented as early as 1640 by Ludwig von Siegen, a Hessian officer, was a process by which the light areas could be

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Jean-Baptiste Greuze,
The Village Bride, 1761.
Oil on canvas, 92 x 117 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.







Jean-Honoré Fragonard,
Inspiration, c. 1769.
Oil on canvas, 80 x 64 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-Siméon Chardin,
Child with Top, 1738.
Oil on canvas, 67 x 76 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Jean-Marc Nattier, *Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France, Reading the Bible*, 1748.
Oil on canvas, 104 x 112 cm.
Musée national du château de Versailles, Versailles.



