



Pierrot

by Antoine Watteau

The man in the center of this painting, done in 1719, is a clown in a theatrical production. In the traditional Pierrot tales in French theater the Pierrot is cast as a clown, a buffoon. He is in love with Columbine, but she leaves him for Harlequin. Pierrot is a naive happy-go-lucky character. He never thinks of the future or the possibility that something might go wrong. But here he is shown sad and quiet, not romping or joking. The characters around him take no notice of him at all.

Watteau is one of the artists who shifted Baroque style into a less formal more flowing style of Rococo. He was not as frivolous as those who would come after him however.



Marie Antoinette a la Rose

by Elizabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun

Le Brun was trained as an artist first by her father and then by various family friends. By her early teens she was painting professionally, mostly portraits. She became court painter to Marie Antoinette, painting thirty portraits of the queen and her family. During the French Revolution Le Brun fled France with her young daughter and remained a refugee until the ascension of Napoleon.

This painting was done in 1783 in oil in canvas. Its soft colors and graceful sweeping lines are indicative of the Rococo style.



Embarkation for Cythera

by Antoine Watteau

This was painted in 1717 in oil on canvas. It depicts a party of aristocrats frivolously enjoying the outdoors. There are several amorous couples, cupids, and a statue of Venus, all showing love. In ancient mythology the island of Cythera was the birthplace of Venus. It is supposed to be a place where everyone can meet their true love.

This painting was the first of a popular new style known as fete gallant, wherein elegant aristocrats are depicted having lavish outdoor parties. The style would later be seen as a symbol of the excesses of the French aristocracy.



The Swing

by Jean-Honore Fragonard

Painted in about 1767 this is one of the best known paintings of the Rococo era. It shows a young woman in a frothy gown being pushed on a swing by an elderly man while her lover hides in the bushes nearby. She kicks her shoe off toward the statue of cupid while turning her back on the angelic cherubim near the older man. As she swings she allows her gown to creep immodestly up her legs. The swinger also wears a shepherdess hat, usually indicating purity and innocence, but here obviously used ironically. The painting was purposefully frivolous and immoral and these aspects were criticized heavily by Enlightenment philosophers.



Marquise de Pompadour by Francois Boucher

Painted in 1756 in oil on canvas this is one of many portraits of Madame Pompadour by Boucher. In this portrait she is seated in her private apartments, heavily decorated in the Rococo style which she helped make popular. She is also holding a book and her nearby writing table is supplied with implements. This painting shows off her intellectual skills and interest in the Enlightenment period. The opulent dress and surroundings are in direct opposition to the Enlightenment. Boucher is the artist most associated with the Rococo style.



Venus Consoling Love by Francois Boucher

This was painted in 1751 in oil on canvas. Venus is taking away Cupid's arrows, preventing him from the mischief of making people fall in love with one another. The nude Venus in the center of this painting is arranged diagonally, a composition used extensively in the Baroque. But unlike the Baroque the colors are light and airy and the topic is frivolous; it is nothing more than a portrait of a beautiful woman with no mythological or moral meaning behind it.



Marriage a la Mode: The Tête à Tête by William Hogarth

This is one of a series of paintings by this title. This one was painted in 1743 and is the second in the series of six. It shows the newly married couple already showing signs of moral wantonness. The dog pulls a lady's cap from the man's pocket and the woman's posture suggests moral looseness. The overturned furniture suggests a wild party and the broken sword shows that the man has been in a fight. As the couple sit together they have no interest in one another. The series was intended to show that the wealthy were not virtuous and that arranged marriages were one of the problems with the aristocratic culture.

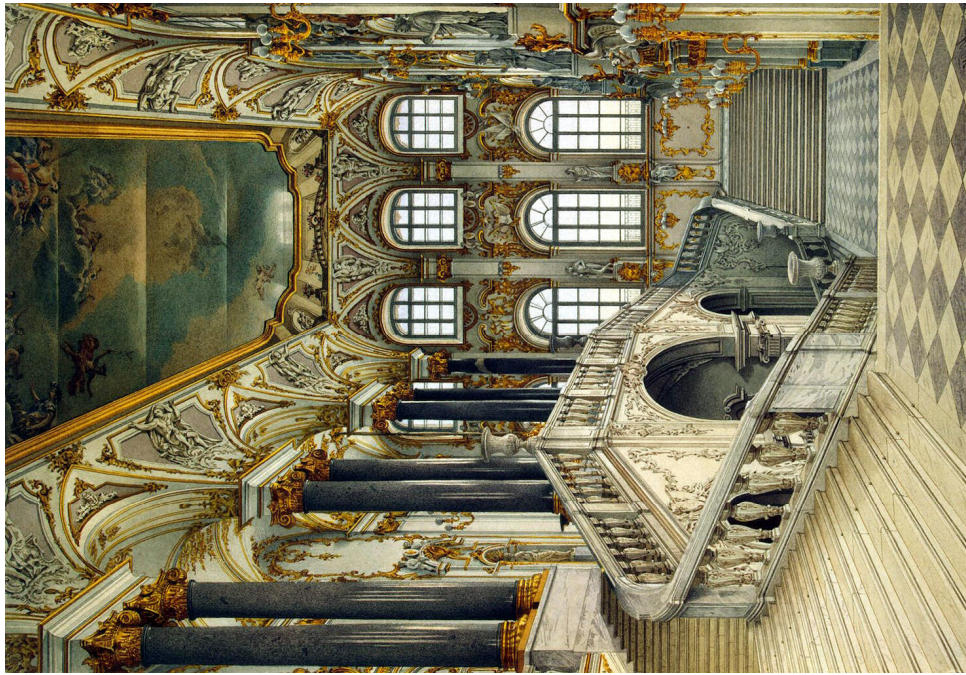
The soft colors and sweeping brush strokes are definitely Rococo, but the subject matter is firmly English middle class, as the artist is.



The Enraged Musician by William Hogarth

Most of Hogarth's work was in etchings, art that was intended to be mass produced for the middle class to buy. This piece, done in 1741, was one of these. In this one the musician in the window is annoyed by the cacophony in the street. There is a crying baby, a boy dragging a clattering hornbook, street performers, hawkers crying their wares, and a barking dog. In the center of the composition is a lovely milkmaid lifting her skirts out of the city muck and singing. Hers is probably the only lovely sound, but is drowned out by others around her.

She represents the country, purity, and innocence. The musician, intent on stopping the noise, cannot hear the lovely sound of her voice and misses the innocence and perfection of nature that she represents.



Jordan Staircase, Winter Palace

by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli

Rastrelli was an Italian architect who spent his career in Russia designing palaces, churches, and estates for the Royal family and nobles. He designed in the Rococo style.

This is a drawing of an interior staircase in the Winter Palace, Saint Petersburg. The ornate ceiling moldings, highly decorated walls, painted ceiling, and gold gilding are elements of the Rococo design. The palace was finished in 1732 and was used part time as the royal residence. It was intended to show the might and power of the throne of Russia.



Mr. and Mrs. Andrews

by Thomas Gainsborough

Painted in about 1750 this combines the artist's two greatest skills: portrait painting and landscape painting. The composition is unique in having the sitters outside and part of the landscape. The sinuous curves, off center, asymmetrical placement of the couple, and the soft colors are all Rococo in style, but the wholesomeness of the scene is thoroughly British. The couple in this portrait were part of the landed gentry. They made their money by lending with interest to other nobles including the Prince of Wales, through trade with the American colonies, and through their land rents.



The Blue Boy

by Thomas Gainsborough

This was painted in 1770 in oil on canvas. The costume the boy is wearing is from a century earlier in reference to Antony van Dyke's paintings of the royal family. The subject of the painting, Jonathan Buttall, is the teenage son of a wealthy London merchant.

Gainsborough was the son of a country weaver. As a boy he copied his mother's passion for painting and practiced constantly. By the age of ten he was sufficiently accomplished that his father agreed that he could go to London to seek an apprenticeship. This is his most famous painting.



Lord Heathfield of Gibraltar

by Joshua Reynolds

Lord Heathfield had successfully defended Gibraltar for the British against the Spanish and French. In this portrait he is shown surrounded by the smoke of the war cannons, the key of the rock of Gibraltar clutched in his hand. This was painted in 1787 in oil on canvas.

Reynolds was one of the founders and the first president of the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Such organizations first became popular during the Rococo period and similar groups were started in major cities all over Europe.

Rococo Art Cards

Rococo art is often called late Baroque. It is a continuation and softening of the Baroque style. Where Baroque was religious, serious, and symmetrical, Rococo was secular, lighthearted, and asymmetrical. But both styles are very ornate. Rococo was primarily a French movement, but the style spilled over into other parts of Europe. In Britain Rococo was toned down, made moral, and simplified, but it retained the flowing lines, graceful movements, and soft textures of the French style. Rococo style was manifested in paintings and sculpture, but also, perhaps even primarily, in interior design and furniture.

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the paintings in order of date. Which were painted first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title of the painting. After these are mastered, use the image cards to memorize the titles and artists together. Finally master the titles, artists, and a little information about the painting.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?