



American Federation of Arts

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EVOLUTION OF 18th-CENTURY FRENCH ART EXAMINED IN MAJOR TRAVELING EXHIBITION

From the Sun King to the Royal Twilight: Painting in Eighteenth-Century France from the Musée de Picardie, Amiens

(January 2000)–*From the Sun King to the Royal Twilight: Painting in Eighteenth-Century France from the Musée de Picardie, Amiens*, a rich overview of French painting from the end of the reign of Louis XIV to the fall of the French monarchy, opens on August 26, 2000, at the Columbia Museum of Art, where it remains on view through October 29. Comprising 76 paintings from the renowned collection of the Musée de Picardie, Amiens, France, the exhibition reveals the development of pictorial variations within the established genres of history and religious painting, landscape, portraiture, and still life, over the course of the politically tumultuous century.

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and the Musée de Picardie, Amiens.

Guest curator Matthieu Pinette, director of the Musée de Picardie, Amiens, arranged the exhibition chronologically according to the reigns of Louis XIV, the Sun King (1643–1715), Louis XV (1715–74), and Louis XVI (1774–92). Masters like François Boucher (1703–70), Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806), Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743), and Hubert Robert (1733–1808) are represented alongside lesser-known artists, many of whom were first painters to the king or directors of the powerful French Academy in Rome, such as Louis Aubert (1720–98), Noël Hallé (1711–81), Jean Restout (1692–1768), and Charles-André, called Carle Vanloo (1705–65). The paintings reflect the shift from royal commissions to patronage by the emerging bourgeoisie, and portray the movement away from the official and, at times, historical subjects highly prized under Louis XIV, toward an intimate and more imaginative rendering of the same subjects.

Each of the three sections is introduced by a grand portrait of the ruling sovereign, on loan from the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Orléans. The first section, devoted to the reign of Louis XIV, brings to life the pomp of the court of Versailles with splendid portraits, including *Portrait of a Magistrate* (ca. 1715), *Portrait of a Magistrate's Wife* (ca. 1715), and the opulent *Still Life with Fruit* (ca. 1695–1700) by Nicolas de Largillière (1656–1746).

Works created during the reign of Louis XV make up the largest portion of the exhibition. The grandiose yet elegant art that epitomizes the period is represented by works such as *The Ailing Alexander Receives the Potion from His Doctor, Philip* (1747) by Restout and *The Martyrdom of Saint Theodora of Antioch and Didymus* (ca. 1740) by Pierre Subleyras (1699–1749). A group of pastoral scenes (ca. 1720), attributed to Bonaventure de Bar (1700–1729), embody the emerging taste for fêtes galantes, picturing graceful, amorous figures in park-like settings. Four fine paintings by Boucher, including *The Abduction of Europa* (1732–34) and *The Birth of Venus* (ca. 1740–50), represent the diverse genres in which the artist excelled, including fêtes galantes and mythological scenes. This section also demonstrates the courtly taste for hunting scenes, including paintings from the illustrious series by Charles Parrocel (1688–1752), Boucher, and Nicolas Lancret commissioned by Louis XV for the Petite Galerie at Versailles. Examples of the intimate, subtly colored still-life paintings of Chardin, such as *Still Life with Two Rabbits, Gamebag and Powder Horn* (ca. 1750–55), reflect a pervasive artistic climate at the end of the reign of Louis XV.

The graceful style and aesthetics made popular by Boucher continued under Louis XVI, with paintings by Fragonard, Hallé, and Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805). Fragonard's lively brushstroke and skillful use of *chiaroscuro* can be seen in *The Cradle* (ca. 1761–65). Hubert Robert (1733–1808) is represented by several major canvases depicting scenes set among ancient ruins, including *Landscape with a Man Lifting a Block of Stone at the Foot of a Statue of Hercules* (ca. 1790–1800).

In describing the collection of the Musée de Picardie, Amiens, in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Pierre Rosenberg, director of the Musée du Louvre, writes, "It must be admitted that few museums in the world can pride themselves on so rich and diversely stimulating an ensemble of French paintings from the period."

PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue published by the American Federation of Arts accompanies the exhibition. *From the Sun King to the Royal Twilight: Painting in Eighteenth-Century France from the Musée de Picardie, Amiens* features an introductory essay by the guest curator on the 19th-century revival of the collection of 18th-century French paintings as exemplified by the Lavalard brothers; and a foreword by Pierre Rosenberg, director of the Musée du Louvre. 192 pages, 9 5/8 x 10", approximately 76 color and 20 halftone illustrations, paperbound.

NATIONAL TOUR

- Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC, August 26–October 29, 2000
- The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, PA, November 17, 2000–January 14, 2001
- Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE, February 3–April 1, 2001
- Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA, April 20–June 17, 2001

MUSÉE DE PICARDIE, AMIENS:

Located in Amiens, France, the collection of 18th-century painting at the Musée de Picardie is particularly notable for its numerous royal commissions and for a donation of over 250 paintings made in the 1890s by the Lavalard brothers—two devoted collectors of works from the French classical age.

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS:

Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the AFA is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. The AFA provides its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art.