

Baroque in France: Landscape Painting

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers French Baroque landscape painting. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the stylistic differences between French Baroque and Dutch landscape paintings from this time, and identify examples of French Baroque landscape paintings. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

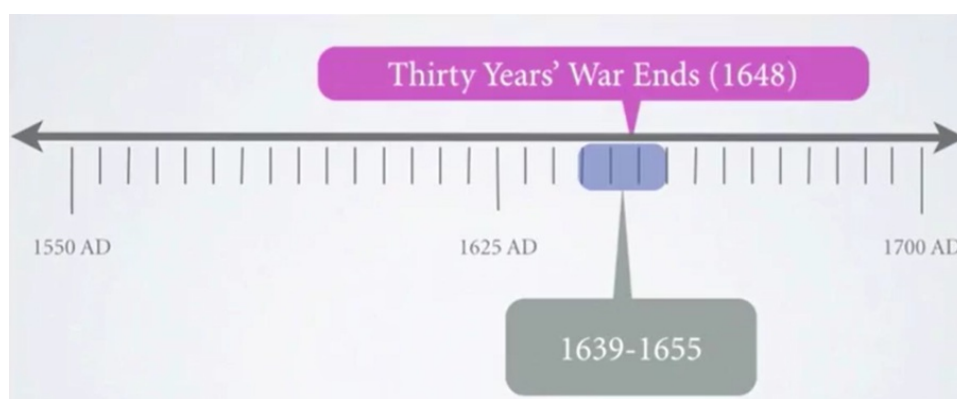


BIG IDEA

The landscape paintings of Nicolas Poussin differed greatly from Dutch landscape paintings and refrained from including the minute details and accurate depictions of landscapes in favor of more idealized interpretations.

1. Period and Location: French Baroque Landscape Painting

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from 1639 to 1655. Note that the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 is marked on the timeline as a reference point.



This lesson's geographic focus is France. It's important to point out that during the 17th century, France was becoming a major political power, culminating with the reign of Louis the XIV, the Sun King.

2. French Baroque Landscape Paintings: Stylistic Characteristics and Examples

The influence of classical Italian art is evident in paintings by French Baroque landscape painters, such as Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin. Both Lorrain and Poussin incorporated ancient ruins and references to classical antiquity into their paintings.

2a. Claude Lorrain

Lorrain had an interest in the effects of natural phenomena of atmospheric conditions, including weather, and included them in his paintings. However, he also made preparatory sketches that observed the effects of sunlight, which he reproduced in his paintings. In the painting below, you can see these effects that suggest a hazy glow or summer afternoon, as well as the excellent execution of atmospheric perspective. Notice how the middle ground fades into the almost transparent hills on the horizon. The bridge serves to connect the foreground with the middle ground.



Village Fête (also known as La Fête Villageoise) by Claude Lorrain

1639

Oil on canvas

Also notice how the emphasis here is clearly on the landscape. There's no discernible story that seems to be unfolding. The figures within seem to function only as some human interest amidst the beauty of the French countryside.

2b. Nicolas Poussin

Nicolas Poussin, a contemporary of Lorrain, was another well-known and respected landscape painter. Whereas Lorrain emphasized the landscape almost exclusively, Poussin told a story set within the landscape.



THINK ABOUT IT

How does French Baroque landscape painting differ from the Dutch landscape painting of this time period? Well, this emphasis on a narrative differs from the less specific or perhaps more ordinary stories depicted in the genre paintings of the Dutch. In fact, Poussin had stated that he was opposed to lowly

subjects and minute details, which are defining characteristics of Dutch genre paintings.

The “Burial of Phocion” tells a story of an Athenian general named Phocion who was falsely accused of treason and put to death. This painting depicts Phocion being carried to his burial location by two bearers, away from the classical city in the middle ground. The trail of the two bearers winds its way through the landscape, past farmers or shepherds and other individuals that casually go about their business.



Burial of Phocion by Nicolas Poussin

1648

Oil on canvas

Although based on a story, this event isn’t depicted in any particular period of time. The city appears to be a collection of classical structures and local buildings, rather than a specific place. It’s a timeless portrayal of a classic story.

Classical themes and Renaissance artists were clearly influential on the art of Poussin. “Et in Arcadia Ego,” which roughly translates to “Even in Arcadia, I am present,” shows the influence of artists such as Raphael in the classical pose and structure of the figures. The landscape is thought to be an idyllic version of Arcadia in Greece. Three men, probably shepherds, are huddled around a tomb reading an inscription, which is believed to reference the person inside, who once enjoyed this land as the men do now. The figure of the woman, thought to represent death or perhaps a personification of the actual inscription, reminds the men that death is inevitable.



Et in Arcadia Ego by Nicolas Poussin

1655

Oil on canvas

This painting exemplifies Poussin's style, his interest in **Grand Manner** subjects, as well as his emphasis of design over color, although it's important to note that color was still important to Poussin. He had, after all, been significantly influenced by the works of artists such as Raphael and Titian—who's known for his use of color—during his own travels to Italy. However, in an overall hierarchy for Poussin, color was second to design.



DID YOU KNOW

"Poussinistes" was the name applied to a group of conservative French artists who were members of the Academy and emphasized composition and design over color, versus the **"Rubenistes"** of the Dutch artist Peter Paul Rubens, who emphasized color first. This opposition lasted well into the 1800s.



TERMS TO KNOW

Grand Manner

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the highest category of painting, equivalent to history painting, it made stylistic references to classical Greece and the Renaissance.

Poussinistes

A group of conservative French artists in the 17th century who believed drawing was more important than color.

Rubenistes

Believed that color, not drawing, was superior due to its being more true to nature.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **French Baroque landscape painting**. In addition to learning how to identify and define today's key terms, you learned how to describe the **stylistic characteristics of French Baroque landscape painting**. By exploring **examples of artwork by the artists Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin**, you learned how to describe the stylistic differences between French Baroque and Dutch landscape paintings from this time, most notably that the former refrained from including the minute details and accurate depictions of landscapes in favor of more idealized interpretations.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



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