

FROM THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

EUROPEAN OLD MASTERS

16TH-19TH CENTURY

28 September – 3 December 2017
Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre

EDUCATION KIT: 7 to 12

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition is the first time so many important European paintings from the Art Gallery of New South Wales have been shown together outside their permanent home. Spanning the mid 16th to mid 19th centuries, the exhibition offers visitors to Hazelhurst the opportunity to encounter unique works by some of the leading Italian, French, British and Dutch artists of the High Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo and Romantic periods.

The AGNSW began collecting old master works in the 1950s. Between 1951 and 1976, the Gallery acquired an outstanding group of English 18th-century portraits, including works by three of the leading painters of the age: William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds.

During these years, the Gallery also purchased landscapes and subject pictures representative of British Neoclassicism and Romanticism by artists such as Richard Wilson, John Glover, Richard Westall, William Hamilton and Francis Danby. Although the acquisition of non-British paintings were rare, three powerful and imposing figural compositions by the Baroque painters Bernardo Strozzi, Jan van Bijlert and Matthias Stomer expanded the scope and ambition of the collection.

The extraordinary donation by James Fairfax AC during the 1990s significantly enriched the Gallery's holdings of European old masters, particularly in the area of 18th-century French and Italian art, including works by Nicolas de Largillierre and Canaletto. The collection has continued to develop in more recent times with the acquisition of major Italian Renaissance and Baroque works, including the imposing altarpiece by Giulio Cesare Procaccini. These paintings offer vital historical insights into past ages and cultures.

European Old Masters: 16th–19th Century spans several art movements including: the Renaissance, High Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

EUROPEAN OLD MASTERS: ART MOVEMENTS

Renaissance

The Renaissance is a period beginning around the late 13th century associated with the notion of renewal and development in the visual arts. With the return of the Pope to Rome in 1377, the rebuilding of Rome and its reinstatement as a centre of power and authority promoted this revitalisation which continued through the subsequent papacies. The term Renaissance (*rinascita*) was coined by Italian artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) who is considered to be the first art historian. Artists began to look to antiquity, the art of ancient Greece and Rome, for models of beauty and harmony that were then incorporated into painting, sculpture and architecture. Ideas and theories about art were developed which laid the foundations for much of our thinking about art today.

High Renaissance

The period known as the High Renaissance, from 1500 to around 1520, was a brief but significant time in European art history. Patrons of art at this time were not only the Church and nobility but members of a rising mercantile class like the well-known Medici family in Florence. Italy was the centre of this development which included such luminaries as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo. During the Renaissance, art combined the study of nature, science, mathematics, geometry and perspective alongside concepts such as *disegno* (design, drawing). In the latter period, the appreciation of art began to distinguish between beauty and a more ethereal effect of art that Vasari referred to as grace (*grazia*), and a quality of experience that is more than the admiration of pictorial content.

Mannerism

The Mannerist period extends from 1520 to 1590. Originating in Florence and Rome the Mannerist style spread to northern Italy and much of central and northern Europe. Mannerism refers to a multifaceted movement and the word is derived from the Italian *maniera* meaning manner or style. Mannerists discarded the rational and harmonious rules of painting that guided the Renaissance artists and instead emphasised complexity and virtuosity. The artists attempted to fulfil the promise and possibilities of art that their Renaissance predecessors had formulated by developing a manner of stylistic innovation. Mannerist painting is often full of movement and drama, with figures in artificial and complex poses, often distorted and elongated or twisting and turning to make the spatial elements uncertain. Intellectually sophisticated, the paintings were intended for an aristocratic audience and they were full of coded narratives for those with an educated disposition.

Baroque

Beginning in 1600, the Baroque period extends to 1750. This was an era of great discovery and development in European culture with major leaps in the advancement of mathematics, philosophy, and the natural sciences. In response to the perceived threat of the rise of Protestant reform, art was promoted by the Catholic Church to reinforce doctrines of the Counter Reformation. Baroque art is characterised as being dynamic and having a realistic approach to depiction. During this period, from the mid 17th century, predominantly wealthy British young men would undertake a Grand Tour of France and Italy as an educational rite of passage and to experience art, culture and the origins of Western civilisation. This tradition continued until the mid 19th century and created a

higher awareness of European art in Britain that influenced artists and collections.

Rococo

Although the Baroque period continued into the 18th century, in the first decades an alternative style known as Rococo originated in Paris and was quickly adopted throughout France and then Germany, Austria and other parts of Europe. The word Rococo is derived from the French *rocaille* (stone) and *coquilles* (shell) which refers to the rock or shell work of the Versailles grottos, and as such the shell was a motif favoured in Rococo art. The Rococo style was ornate and employed playful themes, light colours, asymmetrical designs, curves and gold. The Rococo style began to decline in the mid 18th century when it was criticised for its ornamental excess.

Neoclassicism

Neoclassicism was a particularly pure form of classicism that emerged in Rome from about 1750 and spread throughout Europe, continuing into the early 19th century. It was strongly influenced by the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome following the discovery of the Roman ruins of Pompeii in 1748 and the publication of a highly influential history of ancient art by German art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann. Neoclassicism began in opposition to the dominant Baroque and Rococo styles and developed in parallel with Romanticism.

Romanticism

The Romantic period of the late 18th to mid 19th centuries was distinguished by a new interest in human psychology, expression of personal feeling and the natural world. Romantic art is associated with the sublime, sentiment and the heroic – the emphasis was on feeling as opposed to reason. Romanticism developed as a reaction against the excessive rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment, an intellectual and philosophical movement that was characterised by a rational and scientific approach to religious, social, political and economic issues. It was also influenced by the French Revolution's rejections of aristocratic, social and political norms. As a result, artists from this period looked back nostalgically to the Medieval period and to the concept of the heroic narrative.

Links to the Curriculum:

European Old Masters: 16th–19th Century Education Kit 7–12 contains background information on the exhibition as well as selected images and questions relating to the 7–12 Visual Arts Syllabus and suggested activities for Artmaking, Art Criticism and Art History. This Education Kit aims to facilitate learning under NSW Visual Arts Syllabus requirements for Years 7–12. This is done by providing information about the Artist's Practice, Historical background, questions regarding the Frames, the Conceptual Framework and Practice. Suggestions for relevant Artmaking activities are also included. It may be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition or as pre-visit or post-visit resource material.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Stage 4

Artmaking outcomes
4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6

Critical and historical studies
4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10

Stage 5

Artmaking outcomes
5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6

Critical and historical studies outcomes
5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10

Stage 6

Artmaking outcomes

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6 and H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6

Art criticism and art history outcomes

P7, P8, P9, P10 and H7, H8, H9, H10

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

1. Look at information about the *European Old Masters* exhibition and visit suggested websites to get familiar with the works:
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/touring/european-old-masters/
www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Community/Hazelhurst/Exhibitions/European-Old-Masters-16th-%E2%80%93-19th-Century
2. Discuss the artists in the *European Old Masters* exhibition. Who are they, are there common themes, subject matter and materials? What were they trying to achieve in their paintings? What artistic styles and periods are represented? What were the main influences on their artistic styles? What influences have they made on art practice today?
3. Discuss who the main patrons of art were during the 16th to 19th centuries.
4. Discuss the terminology found in the Vocabulary list

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION Years 7 to 12

- What are the main styles of painting represented in this exhibition?
- Why were artists painting landscapes and portraits? What might they have been trying to achieve?
- What are the main materials used?
- Why do you think studio painting was popular during this time? Is it popular now? Why? Why might the paintings be small?
- What do you think prompted AGNSW to create this collection?

QUESTIONS



Jan van Bijlert

Netherlands, 1597/98? –1671

Girl with a flute c1630

oil on canvas

108 x 85.8 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1967

Photo: AGNSW

Van Bijlert was a Dutch painter who had visited Rome, but returned to his native Utrecht. He was influenced by Caravaggio, favouring low-life settings such as taverns and brothels for his subjects. This work was painted during the Baroque era, with common subject matter favoured by the Protestant North and wealthy merchants. Music was used as a metaphor for amorous activities.

Questions: The Frames

How do you feel about this work?

Describe this smiling girl who emerges from the shadows, her clothes, what she holds, her gesture. How does she engage the audience?

Discuss the artist's realistic manner and how he has shown movement, volume and depth. Look at his use of direction, colour and tone.

Does this work conform to accepted conventions of the time? This will involve some research. Compare and contrast this work with a post-modern artist who critiques representations of the portrayal of women.

Art Criticism

She has clear rosy cheeks and in her ear she wears a gold ring with a black bow tied through it. A pink rose stuck jauntily into her hair stands out clearly against the background. Should the viewer innocently believe this to be no more than pastoral picture, the scanty clothing of the girl and her enticing attitude seem to suggest

there is more at stake than a musical tête-a tête. (Norbert Middlekoop, The Golden Age of Dutch Art: 17th century paintings from the Rijksmuseum and Australian Collections, Perth, 1997, p 24)

How has the artist indicated the girl's profession? What ideas and attitudes has the artist expressed regarding the gender and class of this girl?

Conceptual Framework

What would the girl's social status be? What was happening in 17th century Dutch Republic? Who may have been the patron of this work? Why did the artist create this work?

Do you think the audience at that time would be shocked? How would a contemporary audience react to van Bijlert's interpretation?



Bernardo Strozzi

Italy, 1581–1644

The release of St Peter c1635

oil on canvas

125.5 x 114 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1965

Photo: AGNSW

Strozzi, a Capuchin monk, began his career in Genoa and from 1630 worked in Venice.

The Catholic doctrines that reinvigorated European art at the beginning of the 17th century include greater realism and spiritual subject matter. This work displays the Baroque conventions of a diagonal dynamic and brazen colouring.

Questions: The Frames

Who are the figures? Describe their actions and expressions and the feelings the artist is evoking in the audience.

How has the artist created a sense of drama, depth and movement? Consider tonal contrast, colour and direction.

What beliefs and ideas are represented? Why is a Biblical story depicted in this work?

Conceptual Framework

Who would the patron of this biblical work most likely have been in 17th century Italy during the Baroque era? What was the role of the church? Why was the artist intent on arousing emotions in the viewer?



Nicolas de Largillierre

France, 1656–1746

Portrait of an officer c1714–15

oil on canvas

65.5 x 54.1 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of James Fairfax AC 1995

Photo: AGNSW

De Largillierre, a French artist who trained in London and Antwerp, had achieved a reputation as a portrait painter by 1679. His portraits included Louis XIV and the French royal family, the haute bourgeoisie, provincial aristocracy and artists of the Academie Royale.

Largillierre's painting was possibly a response to the small, exquisitely finished portraits by Dutch painters then becoming fashionable in France.

Questions: The Frames

How does the officer appear to you? What does he wear? How does this inform us about his office? Describe the texture and colours that add to the visual richness of the composition.

What does he hold? What draws our eye to this letter and suggest to us that it has significance? Consider its placement in the composition and tone. What might this letter contain?

Conceptual Framework

Who would the subjects of portraiture be at this time in 18th century French history? Would common people have their portrait painted? Who would commission the portrait? Do you think there were more portraits of men or women?

What does this portrait convey to the audience about the status of this person?



Jacopo Amigoni

Italy, c1685–1752

Bacchus and Ariadne c1740–42

oil on canvas

51.0 x 61.3 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of James Fairfax AC 1993

Photo: AGNSW

Amigoni travelled widely, and was famed as a painter of mythology and religious scenes; also parlour works depicting gods at play. He appears to have had a liking for this subject, familiar to him through classical texts, earlier paintings and opera. He achieved fame as a decorator in Venice, London and Europe before becoming a court painter in Madrid in 1747.

The Rococo style adopted throughout Europe in the early 18th century was ornate, using playful themes, light colours, asymmetrical designs, curves and gold.

Questions: The Frames

What feeling is the artist evoking?

Describe the principal subjects. Who are they and why are they dressed like this?

What signifies love? How has the artist used colour, line, tone and direction to create atmosphere?

What is the mood of the work?

Conceptual Framework

Why was this style of work fashionable in 18th century Europe? Who would this work have been painted for? Where would it have hung? What is the artist's intention?



Antonio Canaletto

Italy, 1697–1768

The Piazza San Marco, Venice 1742–46

oil on canvas

67.5 x 119.0 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of James Fairfax AC 1996

Photo: AGNSW

Canaletto was a Venetian artist and the most famous view painter of the 18th century. He was interested in composition and distorted perspective to show buildings as if seen from the same viewpoint. He may have used the camera obscura as an aid.

Canaletto painted often in collaboration with studio assistants, recording the Venetian ceremonies of the Grand Canal. His early works were for local patrons but later he found painting for tourists profitable.

Questions: The Frames

Describe this view of San Marco Piazza, what do you see? Consider his highly detailed painting technique, the use of colour, line and direction. What direction is repeated most often to produce rhythm and what effect does this have?

Why would Canaletto have distorted perspective? What effect is he after?

Conceptual Framework

Who would Canaletto have painted this for? How does he want to present the Piazza to the viewer?

This painting is like a snapshot of Venice in the 1800s, capturing the Piazza, buildings and people who populate it. If you compared it to a contemporary photo of the same scene, what would it tell us about the world today?



Jean-Marc Nattier

France, 1685–1766

Madame de La Porte 1754

oil on canvas

80.8 x 64.1 cm approx

Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of William Bowmore OBE 1992

Photo: AGNSW

Jean-Marc Nattier, a French artist from a family of painters, is known for his portraits of the ladies of King Louis XV's court. *Madame de La Porte* is a fine example of the exquisite court portrait style that ensured Nattier's success at Versailles from around 1740. The artist handles paint with a softness that recalls the pastel portraits that were so much in vogue at the period. The sitter was once thought to be a comtesse, but has now been identified as the wife of the still-life painter Henri-Horace Roland de La Porte. From the Rococo period, this painting expresses the pleasure-loving age of 18th-century nobility.

Questions: The Frames

How do you feel when you look at this work? Do you think the artist considered his subject to be beautiful?

Describe her appearance, her skin, clothing, the textures and colours.

How does she appear?

Conceptual Framework

What impact does the Rococo style have on the subject? What do you think was her social status and why do you think the artist painted her portrait?

How would a woman today dress in contrast to Madame de la Porte? Has the female role changed? In what way?



Joshua Reynolds

England, 1723–92

James Maitland, 7th Earl of Lauderdale 1759–60

oil on canvas

239 x 148.5 cm

Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1976

Photo: AGNSW

Joshua Reynolds acquired a knowledge of European painting from his travels outside England. Known for his 'grand manner' portraiture, we are given an impression of English aristocracy in the 18th century. He received a knighthood in 1769 and was appointed as Principal Painter to George III in 1784.

The subject of the painting is 41-year-old Lord Lauderdale (1718–89) who distinguished himself in the army, but was still young when he resigned and took a seat in the House of Lords.

Questions: The Frames

Who is the subject? Describe his clothes, crown and surrounds.

What impact does the scale of this work have on the audience? Also consider the effect of the frame. What is the overall response he might be soliciting from the audience?

The subject is a distinguished person of high social status. What indicates this?

Consider scale, clothing accessories, and the significance of the Solomonic column he leans on, including in your discussion texture, colour, tone and scale.

Conceptual Framework

Why would this portrait have been commissioned by a leading portrait painter? What does this painting reveal about the world then, including social status of the subject?

POST VIST: ART-MAKING

1 What contemporary photographer uses tonal contrast to create dramatic portraits? Create a photographic portrait that shows drama by using dark and light tonal contrasts. Consider using diagonal direction to create a dynamic quality.

2 Choose a subject and create a portrait that incorporates symbols of the subject's interests or occupation, referencing contemporary society. Consider incorporating collage.

3 Research a camera obscura and use this technology to create a pinhole camera image of a landscape. What contemporary artists use this technology?

4 Photograph a part of your school outdoors, and include buildings and people. What considerations do you need to give to place, weather, viewpoint and how will your photograph change according to time?

4 Create a series of photographic portraits of individuals, showing their profession or interests. Consider incorporation of text and art references.

5 Investigate the notion of beauty and status in a series of digital works.

6 Recontextualise the painting *Girl with a flute* by Jan van Bijlert for a contemporary audience. This exercise involves reinterpreting and critiquing the portrayal of women.

VOCABULARY

Baroque – an artistic style about 1600 to 1750, promoted by the Catholic Church to reinforce doctrines of the Counter Reformation, characterised by dynamic emotional effects with a realistic approach to depiction

Camera obscura – a darkened room or box-like device in which images of external objects are received through an aperture, to create a pinhole image; used for sketching faithful representations

Classical – ordered harmonious and restrained perfection in any style, but particularly Greek or Roman

Comtesse – Countess, French; wife of an Earl

Contemporary – belonging to the present, now

Critiquing – evaluate a theory or idea in a detailed and analytical way

Earl – a British nobleman of a rank above a Viscount and below a Marquis; a Count

Formal – artwork produced according to established rules

Mannerism – an art movement which reflected the perplexity, tension and discord of the Reformation

Parlour – a living room

Patron – a person who supports an artist, writer or gallery with money, gifts or other benefits

Postmodern – a movement that developed in the mid to late 20th century that is defined by an attitude of scepticism and a rejection of grand narratives

Realism – a faithful representation of subject matter as seen by the eye; an artistic movement (c1850–10) which set out to faithfully represent life and everyday subjects without Romantic exaggeration

Recontextualise – to place or consider in a new or different context

Renaissance – the rebirth of Roman Classical ideas from the late 13th century to around 1520 when

artists began to look to antiquity, the art of ancient Greece and Rome, for models of beauty and harmony

Rococo – an ornate style of art originating in France from early to mid 18th century, characterised by elaborate and graceful ornamentation with light-hearted treatments of mythological and courtship scenes

Romanticism – a style of art c1800 to c1900 in which the artist's own mood or attitude is reflected by the adoption of a personal interpretation and free handling of the subject matter; it was a reaction against Classicism and the Rococo style of painting

Rhythm – repetition of a formal element

Solomonic column – a column with a twist

Tête-a tête – a private conversation, usually between two persons

Tonal contrast – having a difference of light and dark, in colour, tints or shades

Written and produced by Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Art Centre Public Program and Education team 2017