Small works and genre painting in the 16th and 17th centuries

Collection paintings, paintings for worship

1527, the date of the Sack of Rome by the imperial troops of Charles Quint.

Italian mannerism and studiolo painting

Mannerism started in Italy during the 16th century. This artistic movement first appeared between 1515 and 1520, particularly via the works of Rosso and Michelangelo, and really flourished after the Sack of Rome, which undermined the humanist ideal of the Renaissance. Mannerist painting deliberately breaks away from exactitude in terms of bodily proportions, harmony of colours or the reality of space, in order to produce new emotional and artistic effects: deformed bodies (Serpentina), cold and acridulated colours. Florence and Tuscany played a special role in the formation of the mannerist style with a new generation of painters including Andrea del Sarto, Rosso, Pontormo and Vasari.

The museum has a remarkable mannerist painting by Jacopo Zucchi (circa 1542-1596), The Holy Family.

Paintings for private worship in France

In opposition to the Protestant Reformation, which rejected worship of the saints and the Virgin Mary, the Trent Council encouraged images of Mary, the saints, the Holy Family and the life of Christ from the middle of the 16th century. In the 17th century, the great retablos and pictures in the churches only represented the public side of religious painting. There was also considerable production of small paintings intended for private use, which had three main functions: to instruct, to edify and to decorate.

The fine painting by Pierre Mignard (1612-1695), Christ with the Reed, painted for Louis XIV in 1690, illustrates the insults and humiliations inflicted on Jesus. The vision of his suffering is a means of reaching out to the faithful and reminding them of their condition as sinners. Christ is effectively presented to the people by Pilate who has dressed him like a king, in a purple cloak, and has given him a reed by way of a sceptre. This painting, which hung in the King’s grand apartments in Versailles, illustrates the climate of fervent piety that dominated the court at the end of the Sun King’s reign.

The painting by Jacques Stella (1596-1657), The Holy Family, is another very fine example of private worship painting. Jacques Stella was one of the great representatives of Parisian painting in the first half of the 17th century. He was highly successful, thanks to his production of small pictures mounted on precious materials such as marble and hardwood. Here the copper medium gives the work a brilliant and refined appearance. This charming representation of the Virgin with The Infant Jesus, Joseph and an angel in a very ordinary setting, provides a model that is both ideal and very close to the life of a Christian family. In this painting we find sober and elegant art, sculptural figures influenced by ancient art and the painting of Nicolas Poussin, who was a friend of Stella’s.

The Trent Council (assembly of bishops) was one of the most important councils in Catholicism. It was convened in 1545 by the Pope, reacting to the Protestant reformation, and lasted eighteen years. It would lay the foundations for a great reformation of the church (also known as the Catholic Counter-Reformation).

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Though he is relatively little known today, Jacopo Zucchi had a significant career in Florence and Rome. A pupil of Vasari, he worked in particular on decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, ornamentation of the studiolo of François 1er de Médicis and on Michelangelo’s funeral decorations. This small oil on copper is a very fine example of the decorative mannerist painting frequently found in collectors’ cabinets or studiolos.
**The still life genre**

Still life is a pictorial genre specialising in the portrayal of objects, flowers, fruit, vegetables or victuals set out in a decorative manner. This genre has been in existence since ancient times, but really developed in the 15th century, above all in Italy. Still life saw a veritable golden age in the 17th century and diversified throughout Europe to meet the demand of enthusiasts. Still life works very often have a symbolic or even moral meaning, requiring interpretation. For instance such and such an object or plant element might evoke the five senses, while a mirror, a skull or a candle symbolise the passing of time and the vanity of earthly goods (see Subeyras, White Room).

**Dutch still life**

The artist Willem Van Aelst (1627-1687) was one of the greatest representatives of the virtuosity of Dutch still life painters. His delicate and refined works were much sought after, particularly his masterly compositions of flowers in fine vases decorated with silver and gold plate and gemstones. These compositions were a reflection of the Dutch taste for reality, but also the translation of certain moral concerns. The flowers are effectively a symbol of material beauty, but their fragility is a reminder of the transitory and ephemeral nature of terrestrial productions.

Otto Marseus Van Schrieck (circa 1620-1678), who probably invented the “forest floor” genre, occupies a special place among Dutch still life painters. Snakes, Frogs and Butterflies, with naturalist precision, is close to vanitas for the moral lesson it could transmit. The delicate butterfly, image of the ephemeral, is eaten by the frog, itself attacked by the predatory snake.

**Still life in France in the 17th century**

Louise Moillon (1610-1696), is one of the most talented representatives of French still life, along with Lubin Baugin. The museum has three remarkable works by her. She came from a large family of protestant painters, and specialised very early in this genre. Some thirty works are attributed to her with certainty. Her taste for still life corresponded to the protestant thinking which had developed in cultivated circles. Louise Moillon demonstrated obvious knowledge of Flemish and Dutch painting techniques, but used a very personal pared-down approach. She almost exclusively developed the theme of a modest bowl of fruit. Her compositions are sober, but nevertheless attenuated by the use of delicate colours and a masterly play on volumes, giving her work great finesse.

In stark contrast to the rigorous productions of Louise Moillon, the works of Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer (1636-1699) are representative of French still life painting in the second half of the 17th century. His works embody the development of the genre, which became a prized adornment for the decoration of stately homes. Monnoyer, one of the most famous flower painters in the court of Louis XIV, worked with Le Brun who was then First Painter to the King, and was the director of the Gobelins Royal Manufactory. Here Monnoyer produced the designs for floral borders for tapestries, used to decorate the royal residences of Versailles, Marly, or Saint-Cloud.
The 17th and 18th centuries Dutch and Flemish painting schools

Northern mannerism

In a setting troubled by religious and political conflict with the development of Protestantism, the 16th century (from 1540) was marked in Holland and in Flanders by the appearance of a new international style from Italy: mannerism. This style is characterised by a morbid atmosphere, elongated forms and cold tones.

Cornelis Van Haarlem (1562-1638) is one of the most brilliant representatives of northern mannerism. He developed a powerful style marked by the study of Antiquity and used a colour range similar to that of the Venetian school. After 1600, his style became calmer and more formal, with a certain idealisation of forms. He mainly concentrated on the representation of mythological and biblical scenes depicting swaying, sensual figures in a vast landscape.

One of his masterpieces from the period, Before the Flood, dated 1616, is exhibited in the museum. Only the appearance of Noah's Ark in the top corner threatens the heathenish harmony of this scene of rejoicing.

The genre scene in Holland and Flanders

The conflict between the Spanish crown represented by Philippe II, and the former Low Countries claiming their political and religious autonomy, finally led to the formation of two political entities in 1579:

- The south, grouping together Flanders and the Artois region in particular, reconciled with the King of Spain and opted for the Catholic religion (Confederation of Arras).
- The north, uniting the countries of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht, broke away in 1581 from the king of Spain and the Catholicism in favour of Protestantism (Union of Utrecht). In 1648 the Munster Peace Treaty confirmed these political and territorial divisions.

This division led to a distinction between Flemish and Dutch artistic centres. In the 17th century, Rubens' baroque style marked Flanders as Catholic, while Rembrandt profoundly influenced Dutch Protestant painting. The genre scene, or representation of scenes from everyday life, was a Dutch speciality in the 17th and 18th centuries. This painting is characterised by preciousity and polychromatic richness. The genre developed in small format pictures, attracting a broad clientele throughout Europe.

Pieter Cornelisz Verbeeck (1610-1654), from Haarlem, painted many genre scenes and animal pictures. The warm golden light and idealisation of nature in his work bears witness to the growing influence of Italian painting in the northern European countries. He was also influenced by animal painters Paulus Potter (1625-1654) and Van Ostade (1621-1649) who were then masters of the genre.

Pieter Van Bloemen (1657-1720), an artist from Antwerp, specialised in genre scenes and battle scenes. After a twenty-year stay in Rome, he returned to Antwerp, where he surrounded himself with many students who disseminated his style widely. Drinkers and Dancers in front of an Inn and

The Merry-go-round are characteristic representations of scenes from popular life in the Roman countryside, known as bambochades.

Northern landscape artists of the 17th century

Landscape developed during the Renaissance, notably in the form of a natural setting accompanying religious or mythological scenes. During the 16th century, it became a highly appreciated pictorial genre in its own right. The artists invented the principle of atmospheric perspective (rendered by shading of colours). The Northern School artists, and especially those from Holland, played a particular role in the rise in popularity of the genre during the 17th century, thanks to their sensitive observation of the natural environment and their interest in rendering depth and space.

Monochrome painting

Anthony Jansz Van der Croos (1606-1663) was one of the Dutch painters who profoundly renewed the landscape genre, taking a different view of nature with works of great sensitivity.

View of The Hague from the North [The Bird’s Nesters], a work painted in 1655, is one of a set of panels representing

The Hague and its environs. This work is an interesting example of a landscape painting combined with a genre scene. The artist uses new plastic techniques for rendering atmosphere and light, reproducing the least variations of the sky, the vegetation and the water in rich brown and ochre monochromes. This style is now referred to as monochrome painting, a movement which developed from the 1620s on and particularly influenced artistic centres in The Hague, Haarlem and Leyde.
Some years before Van der Croos, Jan Van Goyen (1596-1665) painted a monumental view of the city of The Hague, where he had lived after travelling in France and to Haarlem. Van Goyen, along with Van Ruisdael, was one of the great representatives of monochrome painting in the period 1630-1640. His work is characterised by a focus on clarity and simplicity, shown in his choice of modest subjects: a group of houses, a clump of trees, occupying the foreground while their surroundings depict a vast panorama in which the sky is the key feature of the composition.

His Landscape depicts a charming cottage bathed in a subtle golden light.

The classical landscape

During the 17th century, the influence of the classical Italian landscape became increasingly perceptible in the works of northern artists. The classical landscape is characterised by a focus on balance and harmony, an idealisation of nature and numerous references to timeless Antiquity. Nicolas Poussin’s work is a prime example of this painterly style.

Jacques Fouquieres (circa 1580/1590-1659) was a native of Antwerp. His career took an unexpected turn when he was summoned to France by Louis XIII, in 1621, to work on the prestigious decor of the Great Gallery in the Louvre Palace. He was specifically responsible for painting topographical views of the main cities of France. The museum has two works by Jacques Fouquieres, including an idyllic landscape, On the Edge of the Forest.

Rembrandt’s influence

Rembrandt (1606-1669) was the great 17th century Dutch master. From 1625, he developed an original style marked by sombre and subtle light-dark tones, which would attract many followers among his contemporaries. During the 1630s, Rembrandt and Jan Lievens (1607-1674), created an original genre of painted figures. These were not true portraits as such, but a pretext for representation of character types or expressions. This genre, known as tronie (Dutch for ‘face’) attracted vast numbers of imitators in the period 1630-1640.

Pieter Hermansz Verelst (1618-1678) produced many figures which, by their atmosphere, echo the pictorial universe of Rembrandt very strongly. The Head of an Old Man is a good example of a tronie. The old man’s face, illuminated with a warm light, emerges from the shadow. The spectator is irresistibly attracted by his penetrating look. The costume, a fur-edged coat and a gold chain, is inspired by Rembrandt’s self-portraits.

Several works in the museum were produced by students in Rembrandt’s studio, including Lucretia at Work by Willem de Poorter (1608-1648/1649), a Haarlemer.

He was influenced by the Master’s style and throughout his career used subtle lighting with light-dark tones. This painting is the artist’s first known dated work. The subject is rare since it does not show Lucretia at the centre of a scene of rape or suicide, as is usually the case. Seated, serious and silent, she is portrayed at work, with her lady’s companions, while her husband, Tarquin Collatin, returning unexpectedly from the war, observes his wife, whose patience and virtue he has been told of, from a distance. In moralistic 17th century Holland, Lucretia’s weaving activities make her the model of the perfect mistress of the house.