Seventeenth-Century Art and Architecture, 2nd Edition

By Ann Sutherland Harris

Written by a leading scholar, *Seventeenth Century Art: Architecture, 2/e* is the only text on the market that introduces students to the three major art forms—painting, sculpture and architecture, across six countries. The text engagingly and effectively combines analytical discussions with an expansive collection of vivid, illuminating illustrations that teach students the major developments of art, painting, and architecture that emerged from seventeenth-century Western Europe, as well as the socio-political and cultural background of the period.


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Seventeenth-Century Art and Architecture

Encompasses the socio-political and cultural background of the period. In the process it examines the careers of the most significant painters, sculptors, and architects, and those of less well-known artists.

Subsequent chapters focus on Flanders, Spain, France, the Dutch Republic, and England. The increasing influence of secular patronage is reflected in the popularity of mythological and biblical themes with obvious erotic content. Commissions that hitherto been the exclusive privilege of the Church, monarchy, aristocrats, and major guilds now originated from upper middle-class patrons seeking portraits of themselves and their families, landscapes of their own terrain, genre scenes for their entertainment, and still-lifes reflecting their sophisticated tastes.

Major artists covered include Bernini, Borromini, Caravaggio, Carracci, Claude, Girardon, Guercino, Hals, Jones, Le Brun, Le Van, Murillo, Poussin, Rembrandt, Reni, Ribera, Rubens, Ruisdael, Steen, Van Dyck, Velazquez, Vermeer, Wren, and Zurbaran. The seventeenth century also witnessed the emergence of successful women painters such as Artemisia Gentileschi and Clara Peeters, who receive due attention here.

Covering artistic developments across six countries and examining in detail many of the artworks on display, this book demonstrates considerable breadth and depth. Reflecting the latest developments in research, it is more substantial and up-to-date than any comparable survey. Written with great clarity, knowledge, and affection, it is a true tribute to its subject.

About the Author

Ann Sutherland Harris is Professor of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. A specialist in both Italian and French seventeenth-century art, her publications include Andrea Sacchi, Selected Drawings by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and (with Linda Nochlin) Women Artists, 1550-1950, as well as numerous articles and reviews.

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THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN as an introduction to the most significant artistic developments in Western Europe in the seventeenth century. It is intended to inform students of art and the interested reading public about a period that encompassed the careers of many of the best known artists of European history. The text
privileges painting over sculpture and architecture. Far more painting than sculpture was produced because the latter is an expensive medium and fewer artists took it up. Dutch, Flemish, and English patrons usually imported sculptors or sculpture from France or Italy, so their own sculpture is not covered here. French, Spanish, and Italian sculpture is covered with an emphasis on Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the transformative genius of this medium in the seventeenth century.

The achievements of Europe's architects and builders could easily have dominated everything else in the book. Because architectural history is usually taught separately in American colleges (except in introductory survey courses), this text focuses on a few key architects and monuments, and on city planning in Rome, Paris, and London. Those readers whose main interest is architecture of this period will find books such as the Pelican History of Art (Yale University Press) and Baroque (Kdnemann; ed. Rolf Toman) readily available sources of supplementary information.

This book focuses on the six countries whose art and architecture is usually taught in courses on European Baroque art—Italy, Flanders, Spain, France, the Dutch Republic, and England. There is no chapter on artists from eastern or central Europe (what remained of the Holy Roman Empire), because the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War, finally ended by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, did not allow any cities in these countries to provide steady patronage for native artists for most of the seventeenth century. The Habsburg court of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, where he ruled from 1576 until 1612, attracted painters, engravers, and sculptors from Antwerp, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Basle, and Milan. Their sophisticated style became the final fling of Mannerism. The court moved to Vienna in 1620. Most ambitious young artists born in the territories now called Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic left for Flanders or Italy, ostensibly to train, but many never returned; among those were the painters Adam Elsheimer, included here in the chapter on Italy, and Johann Liss from Oldenburg, who died in Venice.

The first and longest chapter is devoted to Italy. In the sixteenth century Italy became a magnet for artists from the Netherlands and France, while Italian artists were sought by courts in Spain, France, and England. The influence of Raphael, Michelangelo, and their successors soon reached Antwerp, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Basle, and Milan. Their sophisticated style became the final fling of Mannerism. The court moved to Vienna in 1620. Most ambitious young artists born in the territories now called Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic left for Flanders or Italy, ostensibly to train, but many never returned; among those were the painters Adam Elsheimer, included here in the chapter on Italy, and Johann Liss from Oldenburg, who died in Venice.

The next chapters discuss Flanders and Spain, whose developments were most directly affected by Italian art. Both were Catholic countries and Flanders (the Spanish Netherlands) was still part of the dwindling Spanish Empire. The seven northern provinces of the Netherlands had effectively been ceded to the Dutch by 1609. The economic decline that resulted from their control of sea trade in Northern Europe meant that artistic production in the Spanish Netherlands gradually declined after the deaths of Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck in the 1640s. There was not another influential Flemish artist until Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), who was born in Valenciennes (which had passed to France in 1677). There were no major architects or sculptors working in Flanders (Francesco Duquesnoy spent his working life in Rome), so these arts are mentioned only in passing.

While Spain also experienced a drastic contraction of its economic resources after 1600, the Church and the
Court continued to provide substantial opportunities for painters, sculptors, and architects, notably in Madrid and Seville, and the careers of Francisco de Zurbaran and Bartolome Esteban Murillo carry the story well into the second half of the century. Velazquez made two visits to Italy but this was not typical of Spanish artists, who were less likely than their peers elsewhere to spend their formative years abroad. They usually learnt about foreign developments from prints or an occasional visit to Madrid where, if they were lucky, they might have access to the art collections of Philip IV, in which Titian and Rubens were especially well represented. Unlike their European peers, Spanish sculptors and architects paid less attention to the models offered by ancient Greece and Rome. The results are idiosyncratic and, in the case of church buildings, often spectacularly original.

The next three chapters move north from France to the Dutch Republic and finally to England. Before 1600 French artists had been strongly influenced both by the work of their Flemish contemporaries and also by that of Italian visitors working at Fontainebleau. The earlier part of the book has thus prepared the reader to understand these connections and to appreciate the evolution of a distinctive French style in painting, sculpture, and architecture during the seventeenth century. The transformation of Paris into a modern city began around 1600, so it is vital to pay some attention to its planning and major monuments.

With one exception—the new Town Hall of Amsterdam—the social and political structure of patronage in the Dutch Republic did not demand monumental buildings, and it gave few opportunities for ambitious sculptors. Printmakers and painters, on the other hand, found a huge new market among the middle classes, many of whom had enough discretionary income to form art collections. Thus, the chapter on the Dutch Republic emphasizes painting, with some attention to prints and a brief section on the Dutch adaptation of Palladian architectural models for their new churches and fancier residences.

The last chapter is devoted to England. Anthony van Dyck's presence at the court of Charles I for a decade (1632-42) transformed court portraiture by raising standards and offering a more flattering and relaxed image of the aristocracy than the stiff formulas that had prevailed before. The English continued to depend on imported talent, however, long after the death of van Dyck, except in the special field of the miniature portrait. Patronage for any other kind of painting—decorative, historical, or religious themes, landscapes or genre scenes—was slow to develop until the end of the century. The sculptors working in England tended to be foreigners too, and not of impressive originality. Only in the field of architecture did English artists emerge as rivals to their continental peers. Thus, the emphasis here is on Inigo Jones, who introduced English patrons to the work of Andrea Palladio and forever changed the appearance of British architecture, and Christopher Wren, who designed and built St. Paul's Cathedral, the largest church erected in Western Europe in the seventeenth century.

There is no simple relationship between artists' personalities and the character of their art, but knowing something about artists' lives and reading their own statements about their tastes and intentions can create empathy for work that may seem at first inaccessible. The contrast between Caravaggio's violent temper and the profound religious sentiment that he could conjure up on canvas immediately engages both specialists and the general public. Both Rubens and Poussin were serious students of the visual and intellectual culture of the Italian Renaissance and its ancient roots, but Rubens was an extrovert involved in the major diplomatic and religious issues of his time while Poussin lived quietly in Rome, working steadily except when taking a walk in the Borghese Gardens with learned friends. The differences in their personalities partly explain the differences between their paintings. Issues of competition, conflicting ambitions, and rivalries play a role in every chapter of this book. That many artists felt the need both to outdo their peers and the great names of the previous century had a visible effect on many of the works discussed here.

Whether an artist is part of the popular canon or not, this text has longer analytical descriptions of the works illustrated than is typical of introductory books. Looking long and carefully at a particular work is a skill not
mastered during a survey course; a slow examination of any visual image invariably yields deeper understanding. One may well puzzle over some fascinating details in these artworks. Why does van Dyck's Christ (see Fig. 2.39) hold a bulrush instead of a stick? Why does Murillo's beggar boy (see Fig. 3.39) have scorpions around him? Why is the table between Christ and the Virgin so large in Zurbaran's *Virgin and Christ in the Holy House of Nazareth* (see Fig. 3.19)? Why does Vermeer's servant (see Fig. 5.56) wear clothes of such beautiful colors? The interpretations offered here may be disputed, but they will at least open a dialogue with inquiring readers.

The introduction that follows reminds readers of the persistence after 1600...

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