



Baroque & Rococo: Art & Culture

By Vernon Hyde Minor

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The first survey of the Baroque and Rococo periods to incorporate modern scholarship in an entertaining and accessible way. Organized thematically, rather than strictly by dates and countries, it looks at art through the context of the church, monarchy, and the establishment of the academies, and considers women artists and gender issues. Features a 4-page illustrated timeline of art and history, 1600-1760. Introduction to the Baroque and Rococo as Idea and Image. Social, Cultural, and Artistic Institutions. The Baroque Church as Setting for Mystery, Propaganda, and Worship. Interiors: Papal Tombs, Altarpieces, and Ceiling Paintings. Visual Rhetoric: Styles in the Baroque and Rococo. Portraits, Still Lifes, and Genre Paintings. Landscapes and Views. Town and Country: Baroque and Rococo Places. Baroque and Rococo Settings: Domestic Spaces, Furniture, and Gardens. Quarrels with the Baroque: How Eighteenth-century French and Italian Art Tried to Repudiate its Past. For anyone interested in Art History, particularly the Baroque and Rococo periods.

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

From 1600 to 1760, Baroque and Rococo artists brought a newfound energy, emotion, and elegance to European painting, sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts. This profusely illustrated survey is the first to incorporate modern scholarship and examine the Baroque and Rococo eras contextually. Vernon Hyde Minor explores the styles, institutions, cities, and genres that shaped this period's great artistic outpouring—and illuminates the achievements of Bernini, Caravaggio, Fragonard, Rembrandt, Rubens, Velzquez, Vermeer, Watteau, and other notable artists. With unusually thorough coverage of women artists, town planning, and domestic interiors and gardening, Baroque & Rococo brilliantly captures the swirling cultural currents of the time from Counter Reformation Rome to Louis XIV's Versailles to bourgeois Amsterdam. 359 illustrations, 150 in full color, 8 x 10" Vernon Hyde Minor is chair of the department of fine arts at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and the author of Abrams' Art History's History.

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PREFACE

Baroque and Rococo. For some years I have been struck by how literary and art historians have been beating a retreat from both these terms, as if they were redolent of an unseemly preoccupation with styles, and highly suspect styles at that. Many scholars feel more comfortable with phrases such as "Early Modern," whose meaning may be no clearer but whose overtones seem more neutral.

So what is so pernicious about "Baroque" and "Rococo," and why has an entire generation passed since the last appearance of a general textbook on the art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? First, because Baroque and Rococo were styles of courtly societies (whether religious or secular) the public of the new millennium, with its fairly consensual beliefs in a pluralist and meritocratic culture, may feel uncomfortable with the bombast and immodesty of these self-aggrandizing civilizations. Inevitably, we are reminded of the arrogant authoritarianism endemic in such centralized, statist governments. We recall all too quickly that the words "Baroque" and "Rococo" are highly implicated in displays of imperial power. Another problem is that we tend to reify the terms, to talk about the Baroque, for instance, as if it were a thing. When one writes of a "Baroque mind" or a "Baroque sensibility" one is using a permissible intellectual shorthand; but we need to remind ourselves that Baroque and Rococo were (and are) terms invented by historians and that they function as handy labels; they should not be seen as somehow living, breathing, historical entities that cross the centuries like phantoms. Perhaps it is feared that such vivid terms as Baroque and Rococo can summon to life a slumbering *Zeitgeist* and set back historical criticism a century or more.

On a basic level, I would argue that there is enough artistic cohesion and distinctiveness to the period to justify devoting a book to it. But more deeply, my intention in *Baroque & Rococo: Art & Culture* has been to brave the currents of the potentially unfashionable and anachronistic while addressing legitimate concerns about the ways in which we art historians have gone about our business. I believe that we should not flinch from artistic manifestations of power (be they of courtly or capitalist societies), but should look upon, analyze, and—another dangerous verb!—appreciate them.

Contextualization is one important facet of the so-called "new art history." For more than a century, major Western museums have been displaying works as artistic strays, images and objects pulled from their original locations and placed on pedestals or mounted on walls. To a certain extent, the same holds true of

architecture: photography has allowed us to study buildings as if they were framed, isolated *objets d'art*. To "recontextualize" art means to attempt to see works as they were seen (and where they were seen) by representative viewers at the time of their production. It is foolish to imagine that we can somehow shed our modern identities and re-enter the seventeenth century as typical citizens, worshippers, businessmen, prelates, lords and ladies, intellectuals, workers, and so on; yet the attempt is interesting and worthwhile. We study the past to increase our awareness and consciousness of what it has meant and what it does mean to be human and to be alive. By contextualizing art we can have a rich understanding of the human interest in the use of images to express emotions and ideas, assert authority and presence, concretize beliefs and summon supernatural aid, increase awareness of self and other, reflect, refract, and project one's own identity through the present and into the future.

To my mind, the best general text on the Baroque has been John Rupert Martin's *Baroque* (Harper and Row, 1977). Martin did not erect a historical structure and then prevail upon it to produce his examples; rather, he allowed certain circumstances and ideas to surface. He wrote essays on style, naturalism, passions of the soul, space, time, light, and soon. The result was a singular view of the Baroque, one that is at the same time personal and grounded in history. Donald Posner and Julius Held, two important scholars in Baroque and Rococo studies, produced the widely used textbook, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century Art* (Prentice-Hall/Abrams, 1971). They followed the standard practice in traditional art history of dividing the material along geographical and chronological lines. One can read, for instance, chapters on France in the seventeenth century, or Germany and Austria in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or Dutch painting in the seventeenth century. This kind of book has the virtue of providing straightforward forms of organization. But it over looks the obvious cosmopolitanism of the period and fails to take into account the ways in which the academies themselves divided up the visual arts. The traditional survey text accepts the nineteenth-century notion that one can best understand art along two basic axes: as it develops ("perfects itself") through time and as it is an expression of "national character."

I have departed from earlier models in several important ways. The present text abandons the simpler forms of chronological and geographical organization (although these are mostly retained within individual chapters) in order to cut into the substance of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century art along different grains and for the purpose of revealing different patterns. The main form of organization is both thematic and idea-oriented. One important theme, or site, is the church. I have described representative examples from the outside in, concentrating on the basic structure and its symbolic significance. Then a survey of the church interior follows, with considerations of altarpieces, ceiling paintings, and funerary monuments. One confronts the central ideological imagery of Catholicism in altarpieces, experiences the mind's road to God on ceilings, and contemplates the church's magisterium in tombs. In addition, I have borrowed a page from the academies of art by concentrating on categories of art, such as portraits and still lifes, landscapes, genres, and views. After these comes a separate chapter on town and country, which enables readers to compare urban planning in Amsterdam and Rome and examine the construction of grand country estates, such as Versailles. Then one turns to different kinds of environments, such as domestic interior spaces (sometimes as mediated through paintings) and gardens.

Several of the over-arching themes of this text have to do with theory. Chapter 1 introduces the terms "Baroque" and "Rococo" as they have been employed by critics, scholars, and teachers of art and art history. Chapter 5 returns the discussion to elements of rhetoric, the deployment of styles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the purposes of persuasion and pleasure. Then in Chapter 10, the epilogue, I revisit some of the theories actually discussed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The movement of the text is centripetal rather than forward and linear. Instead of beginning at the beginning and working toward the end, *Baroque and Rococo* circles the art of two centuries, continually pushing the discussion back toward the center. Nevertheless, we have striven to show consideration to those concerned

about chronology. As mentioned before, *within* most chapters the progression is from early Baroque to late Rococo. And Chapter 2 is an important scene-setter, providing country-by-country background information on the politics, wars, religious upheavals and artistic milieux of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, on page 371 readers will find a ten-page illustrated timeline, which places the great artworks of the epoch in the context of broader social, cultural, and political events.

Every teacher of art history has his or her own way of organizing the material. No single approach, or textbook, is "right," because there is no *single* ideal sequence of artists and topics. It is my hope that this text will nonetheless serve the needs of students and teachers alike, that however the art of the Baroque and Rococo is presented in class, reading this text will provide important information and perspectives on a core set of issues and works of art. Above all, it has been my intention to keep works of art at the heart of the book, not to use them as punctuation marks within a narrative of cultural history. I have tried to provide readings of buildings, statues, and paintings that demonstrate the complexity of visual ideas and that respect an art that we see imperfectly (if not darkly) through the glass of the present.

Boulder, Colorado
May 1999

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ana Jimenez:

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easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The article writer giving his/her effort to put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Baroque & Rococo: Art & Culture nevertheless doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource data that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can drawn you into brand new stage of crucial considering.

Donald Freeman:

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