

ARTH 383 - Art & Philosophy

Lecture 2 - The 18th Century and the Question of Taste

- 18th C > genesis of Modernity, shift in taste, Industrial/social revolution
- France 18th C - 3 classes of society: estates of the realm (ordres)
 - 1st estate - clergy
 - 2nd estate - nobility
 - 3rd estate - tiers état (everyone else, commoners) >90% of people
- Industrial Revolution creates wealthy haute-bourgeoisie
 - they have wealth/education etc, but no political power
 - creates tension between different classes
 - bourgeoisie wants socio/political reorganization
- at beginning of 18th C France most popular style is Rococo
- Louis XIV (14) created 'absolute monarchy' - different from prior feudal system
 - homogenized French language
- bourgeoisie identify with Monarchy (progress) in opposition to nobility
- 1750s > 7 Year War impoverished french political class and initiated rebellion of nobility from excess taxation (to fund kings lavish lifestyle)
- emergence of the public sphere, public gathering for exchange of opinions, rise of individual will. Salon de Madame Geoffrin.
 - change from top-down monarchy
- art criticism and art theory invented in 18th C
 - prior, Academy Royal in charge of art production and art theory
- 18th C art criticism grounded in the self / feeling
- important in how we legitimate judgement (art, science, etc.)
 - the self more important than external forces

- 18th C - crisis of legitimation, questioning political powers
 - emerges Contractualism: favours system not of position but of gathering of individual wills
 - against Naturalism > natural order > the king gains authority from God
 - 2 bodies > political and natural
- 18th C emergence of concept of political inequality
 - inequality was seen as natural, now it's questioned
- Academie Royale de Peinture & Sculpture:
 - founded 1648 by Colbert under Louis XIV
 - official institution of art instruction, doctrine and patronage under the Ancien Regime
 - will occupy Louvre in 1692, organize series of Salons through 18th C (Salon de Paris)
- Diderot notes judgment of taste unforgiving in mediocrity
- Royal Academy controls access to profession of artist
 - training, exhibition, art theory/rules etc.
 - Doctrine > hierarchy of genres
 1. History painting
 2. Portraiture
 3. Genre painting
 4. Landscape painting
 5. Still life
 - established as artist based on your genre (accepted as member of Academy as Genre painter for example)
- Salon itself so important in french cultural life it was the subject of art
- offered at academy > life drawing, lectures, anatomy, geometry, perspective
 - Renaissance model, conservative teaching

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- History painting: biblical, mythological, allegorical, royal etc.
 - narrative > the invention of things requires education and interpretation
- 18th C > art should not just please us visually, it should instruct us (ideally on moral level)
 - standards of the Salon, monopoly over artistic life until mid 18th C
 - questioning of academy by external interests
 - dominant: Rococo > Neoclassicism
 - Rococo: not serious, decadent, playful, trivial/frivolous, de-dramaticized, eroticized, light
- Diderot targets Boucher as a decadent painter > lacking in simplicity
- Rococo frequently features Pastoral scenes > Diderot: “no basis in reality”
- D: monarchy no longer supreme arbiter of taste
 - desire to return to austere classic style
- D: unhappy with oval format, interchangeability of figures, frivolous treatment of serious scenes, etc.
- Empiricists > personal opinion /taste as valid/universal
 - (neo-Platonism) Shaftsbury: plotness(?), beauty as ‘higher harmony’
 - Kant: beauty as a property of the object rather than personal feeling
 - Diderot: appreciation of beauty through repeated observation
 - learn to recognize beauty
 - Diderot: relationship between parts and the whole. beauty is not contingent and concrete
- Empiricists believe all knowledge comes through experience
 - D: how do we know our feelings about art are correct?
 - D: lucidity isn't separate from passion > you can love the strengths as well as judge the weaknesses of art :)
 - (different from Kant > we can't persuade others of the truth of our judgement. Diderot says we should be persuasive in arguments through our passion)

- D: art should give visual pleasure and moral judgement

- Jean-Baptiste Greuze - *The Marriage Contract / Village Bride* 1781

- a genre painting: was very popular at the time
- narrative of payment of dowry, moral instruction
- moral painting, sentimental genre painting
 - new case for seriousness, natural
 - renders heroic the life of the middle class



- Charles LeBrun, *A Method to Learn or Design the Passions* 1734

- academic text for facial expressions, influenced Greuze

- Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin - *The Governess*

- suggests morality coming from tiers etat to instruct the decadent middle class
- Chardin > dutch still life > morality linked with simplicity
 - render the truth of objects (Diderot praises Chardin)
 - austere muted colour palette
- still life as 'antidote' to Rococo. requires wisdom and technique to show truth
- shift in taste, Rococo fell out of favour
 - shift i relation of viewer and art work > subjects unaware of audience > opposed to self-aware Rococo
- still life Chardin > rendering everyday mundane objects with ambiguity, no aesthetic intention. sparse.



- Claude Joseph Vernet, *A Storm on a Mediterranean Coast*
 - seascapes, D praises for naturalistic lighting
 - spectacular, anticipated Romanticism/Sublime
- Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of Horatio*
 - neoclassicism defended by all
 - official style of French Republic following the French Revolution
 - rendering the everyday in the guise of history
 - artists began to see themselves in painting
 - shift in taste, hierarchy loosened

