

# Royal Art in Baroque France and Britain

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The development of unique styles of art during the Baroque period in the courts of France and England have many common characteristics. The styles were not uniformly the same in each court, nor was there only one style that predominated. This paper will examine and compare some of the artists of the period from each region and the elements of their work which they have in common.

Peter Paul Rubens was a Flemish artist who had received a commission to produce a series of paintings that depicted the life of the grandmother of Louis XIV, Marie de' Medici. One of the significant features that can be seen in *The Arrival and Reception of Marie de' Medici at Marseilles* is the manner in which the "fleshy bodies of the nymphs" are shown. The physical standards for what was considered beautiful was very different from what might be expected by a modern audience. In *The Kermis*, the scene is of a wedding party that has "descended into debauchery or a celebration of sensual pleasure" (Sayre 736). The colors employed are vibrant and full of vitality and present the subjects to the viewer as living life to the fullest perhaps even to overindulgence. A stark contrast to Rubens was Nicolas Poussin in whose work could be seen a more conservative approach concerning the subject of his paintings. In *The Shepherds of Arcadia* he demonstrates his belief that the scenes "should be drawn from classical mythology or Christian tradition, not everyday life" (Sayre 737). The use of vibrant color is still present but contrasted with muted overtones and backgrounds. A technique with elements of mathematics and geometry is used to frame parts of the work such as the lines of the dress running parallel to the leg of one of the shepherds. The brush techniques are clear and precise and no hint of roughness or carelessness.

Anthony Van Dyck, another Flemish painter that worked as a young man in the workshop of Rubens, was appointed as Court Painter to Charles I. A feature of his work that is

representative is a technique whereby he “flattered his subjects [of portraiture] by elongating their features and painting them from below to increase their stature” (Sayre 743). Van Dyck also employed the use of sharp contrast between light and dark to focus attention on the subject of the portrait. The rich detail in the flamboyant, cavalier style of dress in life is reflected in the art as seen in *Portrait of Charles I Hunting*. Van Dyck also showed a more conservative approach in the portrait of *Alexander Henderson* but maintained the viewpoint from below and the use light and dark contrast to highlight the subject. This style of dress is an almost polar opposite of the cavalier.

The artistic styles enjoyed by the court monarchies were varied and showed many of the same characteristics in how subjects were contrasted within a scene and how color was used. The use of rich detail and also mathematical and geometric elements in constructing a scene was also present. No one style is exclusive to either France or Britain.

## **Works Cited (Bibliography)**

Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities. Culture, Continuity and Change*. Book 4. Saddle Rock, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.