

**TITLE:** Calling of Saint Matthew      **LOCATION:** Rome      **DATE:** 1597-1601

**ARTIST:** Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Italian Baroque      **PATRON:** Cardinal del Monte

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

The composition is not centered on Christ, but instead focuses on the drama and theatricality of the moment when Christ points and calls out Levi (Who will become Matthew). Christ makes his appearance in a shady backroom, with just the slightest hint of a halo. The figures are dressed in contemporary 16th century clothing. Jesus' hand is modeled on that of Adam from the Sistine chapel ceiling. The light acts as a line that guides the viewers eyes to Matthew across the canvas.

**FUNCTION:**

To decorate the left aisle near the apse of the Contrarelli chapel. To humanize the biblical figures of the New Testament through capturing a moment in time in a very Baroque treatment of a spiritual moment. There is a gritty realism to Caravaggio's work. He was known for injecting naturalism into the representation of sacred subjects, reducing them to human dramas played out in the harsh and dingy settings of his time and place. The unidealized figures that he selected from the fields and the streets of Italy, however, were effective precisely because of their familiarity.

**CONTENT:**

The Calling of St. Matthew depicts the moment when Jesus enters the customs house and calls on Levi, a tax collector, to leave his money behind and join a new cause. Jesus, whose small halo is barely visible, points from the shadowy corner just right of the window while St. Peter stands nearby. They both gesture toward Levi, who has one hand on the table grasping the day's earnings and another pointing to himself.

**CONTEXT:**

Cardinal del Monte wished to contribute a few paintings to the of Church Saint Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. The Calling of Saint Matthew was part of a series of three paintings. The other two were called the Inspiration of Saint Matthew and the Martyrdom of St. Matthew, and all three can be viewed in the dim interior of the Contarelli Chapel. At the time that Caravaggio went to work, the Catholic Counter-Reformation was in full force, pulling out all the stops to thwart the Protestant cause, albeit slightly belatedly. The pope declared 1600, the year that Caravaggio completed this painting, a holy year. He expected the masses to turn up in Rome, and he decided the best way to ensure their undying faith was with a picture of Jesus choosing a man with the most loathed job in town (IRS man) as a disciple.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The contemporary clothes of the four-seated figures show that St. Matthew could have been anyone; any observer might be able to see himself in the role of Matthew, which was both a good and a bad thing. It was good because the scene appeared more relevant, but bad because Caravaggio was constantly criticized for using models from the streets of Rome for his paintings, which always came off as a bit shady to his critics. While Caravaggio wasn't the first person to use chiaroscuro, he was the one to really perfect painting with extremes of light and dark. Painting figures shrouded in shadow only to illuminate parts of their bodies created a sense of mystery, theatricality, and psychological turmoil, was referred to as tenebrism. Caravaggio was criticized for rejecting classicism in favor of realism.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Caravaggio mastered chiaroscuro in his short career. This style of painting wasn't completely his invention, however. Leonardo da Vinci had created deep contrasts in light and dark in his work too. However, the difference was that da Vinci used chiaroscuro to help define and mold figures, giving them dimensionality, whereas Caravaggio used chiaroscuro for dramatic effect, creating a sense of mystery and injecting emotion into the artwork. Caravaggio ditched Renaissance composition, which would've placed the many characters at the center in an ordered architectural environment. Instead, there is a sense of unbalance in the painting because most of the figures, including Matthew, sit on the left side of the painting.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The art critic Giovanni Bellori wrote in the 16th century that Caravaggio was wrong to depend on nature for his models. "Now began the imitation of common and vulgar things, seeking out filth and deformity". He claimed that Caravaggio had disdain for the masters, and refused to use ancient Greek sculptures as models, but instead looked to real models in his neighborhood.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

This painting is one of a series of three commissioned at the same time (the other two being Caravaggio's The Inspiration of Saint Matthew and The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew. The church at first refused the work because they thought it was too worldly.

**TITLE:** Henri IV Receives the Portrait of Marie de' Medici, from the Marie de Medici Cycle **LOCATION:** France (Flemish artist) **DATE:** 1621-1625  
**ARTIST:** Peter Paul Rubens **PERIOD/STYLE:** Flemish Baroque **PATRON:** Marie De Medici

### **MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

#### **FORM:**

The composition is structured using a series of diagonal lines. The portrait occupies the center of the painting. There are complex pathways that lead our eyes around the canvas.

#### **FUNCTION:**

During the reign of Louis XIII, when the Luxembourg Palace was being completed for the Queen Mother, Marie De Medici, her express desire was for a painter who could decorate the walls of its Festival Gallery in a manner matching the Italian Baroque style of its architecture. Maria's career as Henry IV queen and as Louis XIII's regent was as lacking in luster as her own mediocre talents could possibly have made it. Nevertheless, as the direct descendant of Lorenzo the Magnificent, she seemed to sense that the immortal reputations of princes often depended more on their choice of artists than on their skill in statecraft.

#### **CONTENT:**

The Capitoline Triad of Jupiter (Zeus), Juno (Hera) and Minerva (Athena), presided over the scene of Henry IV Receiving her portrait. Minerva (Athena) goddess of peace and war, whispers words of wisdom into the king's ear, as the Romans also consider this figure to be a personification of France. The celestial scene above assures everyone that marriages are indeed made in heaven, where Jupiter and Juno with her peacocks and his eagle bestow their blessings. Cupid (the god of love) holds up the portrait. Hymen (the god of marriage) is the other allegorical figure holding the frame.

#### **CONTEXT:**

Rubens's 21 large canvasses gave the needed imaginary glorification to Maria's unimaginative life. The success of this visual biography, however, belonged more truly to the man who painted it than the lady who lived it. These paintings were interesting because they were not meant for the eyes of the court, but rather for Marie herself to dote upon in a state of misty nostalgia.

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Rubens succeeded in combining the rich color of Titian and the dramatic tension of Tintoretto with an unbounded energy and physical power of his own. His concepts have something of the heroic sweep of Michelangelo, and his complex compositions recall El Greco.

### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Allegory mixes freely with historical people. Splendid costumes suggest opulent theatrical production. Royalty is considered demi-gods. There was an approval of representations that blend mythological gods with themselves. Rubens had to be very inventive to elevate the boring life of Marie to something worthy or royalty.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

Marital bliss didn't last long. In 1610, Henri IV was assassinated. Marie took over as regent for her son, given that he was too young to make weighty decisions about the kingdom's financial future. Marie loved running the kingdom so much that her son had to kick her out of the country to take over his rightful position when he did come of age. When she finally returned, she built a house to fill with paintings commemorating her years as queen, starting with the massive painting Henri IV Receives the Portrait of Marie de' Medici.

### **DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Henry and Marie were married by Proxy in 1600. Marie's uncle, Ferdinando, Grand Duke of Tuscany stood in as Henri's proxy. Henri's absence was no biggie because the Medicis threw a party without him. It was his second wedding, so he had a "been there, done that approach" to opulent wedding ceremonies. When his bride finally arrived in France to take up her post, she continued her role as a patron of the arts, commissioning sculpture, paintings, and music from the finest European minds around.

**TITLE:**Self Portrait with Saskia **LOCATION:** Amsterdam **DATE:** 1636

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**ARTIST:** Rembrandt van Rijn **PERIOD/STYLE:** Dutch Baroque **PATRON:**

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** etching

**FORM:**

Rembrandt faces onlookers head-on, his eyes looking like lasers penetrating the shadow cast by his hat. His hand rests on the page as if observers have just interrupted the master in the midst of drawing. Rembrandt's head is so large in the etching that it almost overwhelms his body or, at the very least, suggests that he is leaning forward. Rembrandt used crosshatching to fill in the dark shadows of his face and shirt, which contrast the bright white of the page. Effective use of light and shadow which add depth and drama (chiaroscuro), a technique Rembrandt is famous for mastering.

**FUNCTION:**

In addition to serving as one of many self-portraits, this small etching can also be regarded as an example of a marriage portrait. The young woman shown seated at the table with the 30 year old Rembrandt is his wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh. Rembrandt most likely met Saskia while working for her cousin, Hendrick Uylenburgh, an art dealer who had a workshop in Amsterdam. The two married on June 22, 1634 and remained together for thirteen years until Saskia's untimely death at the age of 30. Surprisingly, it is the only etching that Rembrandt ever made of Saskia and himself together.

**CONTENT:**

Rembrandt's wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh, was one of his favourite models. This etching, produced only two years after their marriage, depicts the thirty-year-old Rembrandt and his new bride. It is the only etching in which the artist portrays himself with Saskia. Rembrandt looks up confidently while drawing, or possibly in the process of making an etching, while Saskia is seated by his side.

**CONTEXT:**

12 years after Rembrandt drew this, Europe finally came to a truce over a number of ongoing skirmishes, including The Thirty Years' War, a destructive conflict between Catholics and Protestants in northern Europe, and the Eighty Years' War, a conflict between the Dutch and the Spanish. It was a confusing and violent time, especially in Germany, which saw the brunt of bad mercenary behavior between warring countries. Those living in the Low Countries (currently the Netherlands) had been under Spanish Hapsburg rule until the Dutch got sick and tired. Mostly, having converted to Calvinism, a form of Protestantism, the Dutch were fed up with Catholic oppression and high taxation, hence the militia featured in Rembrandt's painting. The Treaty of Westphalia ended it all by, among many, many other territorial divisions, finally recognizing the Dutch Republic's independence from Spain.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

This etching marks the first time that Rembrandt has presented himself as an artist at work. In his left hand he holds a porte-crayon (a two-ended chalk holder) and appears to have been drawing on the sheet of paper before him. By identifying himself as a draftsman, Rembrandt draws attention to his mastery of what was regarded as the most important basic skill of an artist. Etching is a printmaking process in which a metal plate (usually copper) is coated with a waxy, acid-resistant material. The artist draws through this ground with an etching needle to expose the metal. The plate is then dipped in acid, which "bites" into the exposed metal leaving behind lines in the plate. By controlling the amount of time the acid stays on the plate, the artist can make shallow, fine lines or deep, heavy ones. After the coating is removed, the plate is inked then put through a high-pressure printing press together with a sheet of paper to make the print. Typically, an artist can produce about 100 excellent impressions from a single plate. Rembrandt is one of the most prolific etchers of his time with nearly 300 to his name

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

For the etching, a form of printmaking, Rembrandt would have drawn the scene in reverse so that when he transferred the ink from the plate, it would show the scene correctly. This was a feat unto itself without even considering that, while he could've drawn Saskia in the correct direction simply by facing her, he had to draw himself with the help of a mirror. It might be this separate process that produces the wonky perspective, in which Rembrandt appears close, while Saskia occupies a position at odds with her place on the side of the table opposite her husband. The Etching plate is deeper for Rembrandt than Saskia

**INTERPRETATION:**

Rembrandt is regarded as the greatest practitioner of etching in the history of art and the first to popularize this technique as a major form of artistic expression. Another thing that makes Rembrandt stand out among his contemporaries is that he often created multiple states of a single image. This etching, for example, exists in three states. By reworking his plates he was able to experiment with ways to improve and extend the expressive power of his images. Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (Dutch, 1606-1669), one of the most influential printmakers in the history of art, created etchings on a wide range of subjects— from incisive representations of scriptures to studies of street life. His prints possess comedy as well as sober social commentary and have influenced innumerable later printmakers.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Saskia died in 1642, which also took a toll on the artist. By 1658, his home had to be auctioned off and things went from bad to worse. Throughout the downturn, Rembrandt continued working, elevating his skills as a printmaker and painting himself in a number of self-portraits, each of which records the artist at various stages of his career.

**TITLE:** San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane **LOCATION:** Rome, Italy **DATE:** 1638-1646

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**ARTIST:** Francesco Borromini **PERIOD/STYLE:** Italian Baroque **PATRON:** Cardinal Francesco Barberini,

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Stucco and stone

**FORM:**

In plan San Carlo is a hybrid of a Greek cross (a cross with four arms of equal length) and an oval with a long axis between entrance and apse. It is a provocative variation on the theme of the centrally planned church. The side walls move in an undulating flow that reverses the facade's motion. Vigorously projecting columns define the space into which they protude just as much as they accent the walls to which they are attached. The dome is deeply coffered and seems to float on the light from the hidden windows in its base.

**FUNCTION:**

It was commissioned by the Trinitarians, a Spanish order of monks known for their poverty who had been dedicated to freeing Christians captured by the Moors. They had an existing monastery that Borromini had to work around, as well as one of the four fountains for which the street is named, placed at each corner of the intersection.

**CONTENT:**

Because of the small lot, Borromini designed the plan in the shape of an oval with a cross-like organization that recalls other churches with cruciform layouts. On the inside, an oval dome has been inserted into a rectangular space. The dome is innovative in that it's not covered in images of angels floating into the skies. Instead, the dome is like a big puzzle made up of coffers that take the shapes of octagons, hexagons, and crosses all perfectly fitted together.

**CONTEXT:**

With the Catholic Church as a leading patron in 17th century Italy, the aim of much of Italian Baroque art was to restore Roman Catholicism's predominance and centrality. The Council of Trent, one 16th century Counter reformation initiative, firmly resisted Protestant objections to using images in religious worship, insisting on their necessity for teaching the laity. Baroque art and architecture in Italy, especially in Rome, embodied the renewed energy of the Counter-reformation and the Papacy's zeal to communicate the catholic message to the populace. A passionate and troubled man, Borromini was to commit suicide, and yet, working with a single assistant and with nothing more than pen and paper, this seventeenth-century architect produced buildings that would challenge the most imaginative twenty-first-century architect armed with the latest computers, parametric theories and high-tech materials.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Borromini rethought the very nature of a church facade. In his design for San Carlo Alle Quattro Fontane in Rome (for example, the sway of the cornices.) He enhanced the three dimensional effect with deeply recessed niches. Borromini's facade therefore stands in sharp opposition to the idea, which has its roots in antiquity, that a facade should be a flat frontispiece that defines a building's outer limits. In his hands, the facade became a pulsating, engaging screen inserted between interior and exterior spaces. In fact, San Carlo has not one but two facades, underscoring the functional interrelation of the building and its environment. The 2nd facade a narrow bay crowned with its own small tower, turns away from the main facade and following the curve of the street faces an intersection. The ornate ceiling made up of circles, squares and crosses is derived from Santa Costanza.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Borromini devised a plan that embraced a complex interplay of geometric shapes. The plan is formed by two equal sided triangles joined at their bases to make a diamond shaped rhombus, which was then softened with curved lines. The facade with its rippling walls like a stage curtain, rises upward toward an oval dome. The inner surface of the dome is a geometrical triangle with its play of octagons and elongated hexagons that join to produce Greek crosses in the intervening spaces. These shapes diminish in size toward the top to suggest greater height, though it is actually quite shallow. Partially concealed openings allow light to filter in and give the honeycomb like pattern a gleaming brightness.

**INTERPRETATION:**

If a building features classical elements like columns and interprets them in new ways that make them theatrical, it's a safe bet that building is a fine example of everything Baroque. This design also required that he adapt his building to a site that was that very tiny. The result was a plan that took the shape of a star of David, also unconventional at the time. Overall, Borromini's designs were groundbreaking but a bit hard to swallow for his contemporaries.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Its name means "St. Charles at the four fountains". The Council of Trent was convened by Pope Paul III in 1545. (See page 642 of Gardners for primary source)

**TITLE:** Ecstasy of Saint Teresa      **LOCATION:** Rome, Italy      **DATE:** 1647-1652

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**ARTIST:** Gianlorenzo Bernini      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Italian Baroque      **PATRON:** Cardinal Federico Cornaro

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Marble (sculpture; stucco and gilt bronze (chapel)

**FORM:**

The entire Cornaro chapel becomes a theater for the reproduction of this mystical drama. The niche in which it takes place appears as a shallow proscenium crowned with a broken Baroque pediment and ornamented with polychrome marble. Bernini depicted the saint in ecstasy, unmistakably a mingling of spiritual and physical passion, swooning back on a cloud, while the smiling angel aims his arrow. The chapel is located in the transept of the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria.

**FUNCTION:**

Baroque art's main goal was to arouse feelings of religious adoration and mystic elation. Bernini mastered this style by putting aside all artistic restraints on expression to elicit strong emotions in his viewers. His work was dramatic and full of splendor. This chapel was remodeled by Bernini to satisfy a commission from the Cornaro family for the purposes of their burial. This family (8 members) can be seen sitting behind "prie-dieux" (prayer desks) on both sides of the chapel.

**CONTENT:**

The image is of St. Teresa of Avila (Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada), a nun of the Carmelite order and one of the great mystical saints of the Spanish Counter-Reformation who recently had been canonized by the Catholic Church. In her biography she wrote: *"In his hands I saw a great golden spear, and at the iron tip there appeared to be a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he pulled it out, I felt he took them with it, and left me utterly consumed by the great love of God. The pain was so severe that it made me utter several moans. The sweetness caused by this intense pain is so extreme that one cannot possibly wish it to cease, nor is one's soul then content with anything but God...So gentle is this wooing which takes place between God and the soul."*

**CONTEXT:**

This sculpture is on display in the Cornaro Chapel of the Santa Maria Della Vittoria (So named because of the Virgin's aid in a 1620 Catholic Victory near Prague during the 30 years war. The passionate drama correlates with the ideas disseminated by Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuit order in 1534. He was canonized in 1622. In his book *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius argued that the re-creation of spiritual experiences in artworks would do much to increase devotion and piety. Thus theatricality and sensory impact useful vehicles for achieving counter-reformation goals.

St. Teresa wrote about her visions and experiences in her biography. For more info about her life, see <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/spain/avila-convento-santa-teresa>

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

From a concealed window beams descend along darting gilded shafts and bathe the saint's figure in a miraculous golden glow. On either side of the scene are kneeling images of the members of the Cornaro family. This is a unified collection of sculpture, painting, theatrical stage design, relief sculpture and lighting tricks. John Evelyn, an English traveler noted about Bernini, *"he gave a public opera wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the engines, composed the music, writ the comedy and built the theater."*

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Bernini marshalled the full capabilities of architecture, sculpture, and painting to charge the entire chapel with palpable tension. In the Cornaro chapel, Bernini drew on the considerable knowledge of the theater that he derived from writing plays and producing stage designs.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The Baroque movement of art aimed to promote emotion, drama, exaltation, tension, and grandeur in the arts, including architecture, sculpture, literature, painting, and music. As a reaction to the simplicity, restraint, and austerity of the Protestant Reformation, the Counter Reformation promoted Baroque style and portrayed religious fervor in its art commissions. The intention was for people not to only know the teachings of the church but also to experience them through material culture. Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa embodied the Baroque style and its manifestation of spiritual rapture.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Practically holding a monopoly of the arts—architecture, sculpture, and painting—in Rome during the Bernini papacy of Pope Urban VIII. However, he fell out of favor with the ascension of Pope Innocent X, which is why he was available to work for Cardinal Cornaro in the first place. A finger from Saint Teresa's right hand is held within the red walls of Convento de Santa Teresa in Avila, Spain.



**TITLE:** Las Meninas      **LOCATION:** Madrid, Spain      **DATE:** 1656

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**ARTIST:** Diego Velasquez      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Spanish Baroque      **PATRON:** King Phillip IV

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

Velasquez has organized the picture into a series of receding planes, and by doing so he gives the figures their spatial relationships. The 1st plane is in front of the picture itself where the king and queen stand, in this way the spectator becomes a part of the picture just as the king and queen do. Next comes that in which the principal group stands in the light of the window at the right, which again is outside the picture, but provides the brilliant illumination that falls on the blond hair of the princess. The light here is balanced by that from the door at the rear which defines the plane in the background. In between is the intermediate plane with Velasquez and attendant making 5 total.

**FUNCTION:**

This painting served as a portrait of the Princess of the Royal family of Spain, while also serving as a self portrait of the artist, and a portrait of the King and Queen.

**CONTENT:**

The painter combines the formality of a royal group portrait with the informality of a more casual genre scene in his studio. In the picture attention is about evenly distributed among the various groups. In the foreground, the infanta Margarita dressed in a gown of white satin, is standing in the center. On the left, a maid of honor is offering her a drink from a red cup on a gold tray. At the right is a group made up of a second maid of honor and 2 of the court dwarfs, one of whom is poking the sleepy dog with his foot. In the middle ground, on the left, is Velasquez standing before a canvas which, by reason of its large dimensions, must be for Las Meninas itself. Here Velasquez is looking at King Phillip IV and Queen Mariana, whose faces are reflected in the mirror at the back of the room.

**CONTEXT:**

The painting is created in the artist's studio (the Pieza Principal) in the palace of the Alcazar, the official residence in Madrid. After the death of the Prince Baltasar Carlos in 1646, Phillip ordered his chambers be converted into a studio for Velásquez. Philip IV kept Las Meninas hanging in his private study, where few outsiders had the pleasure of enjoying its brilliance.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

In such a precise analytical study of space and light, which lacks both the spiritual mysticism and worldly grandeur of Venetian painters, the baroque qualities are not apparent. However, as a master of the external rather than internal vision his baroque features can be found in the play of light and shadow, the complex spatial relationships and the fact that much of what is happening lies outside the picture space itself and the subtle relationships of the characters to each other. Las Meninas gives the impression that the artist has captured a precise moment in time in an unposed, candid setting. This sense of realism makes the painting enigmatic and complex, an effect that was only more intense before anybody had ever seen a photo.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

This painting is an attempt on Velasquez's part to elevate both himself and his profession. Placed among the royal family is Velasquez with equal dignity looking his sovereign face to face. Even though he was first painter to the king, it was still a bold move for Velásquez to paint himself into Las Meninas, which turned a royal commission into a self-portrait. But that's him on the left with brush in hand. Earlier this year, the BBC called this inclusion "the world's first photobomb," even though the painting predated photography by almost 175 years.

**INTERPRETATION:**

On another level this painting becomes a painting about the art of painting. It functions as a manifesto attempting to raise the status of painting to that of a liberal rather than a mechanical art. As part of his campaign to receive the honor of membership in the Knights of Santiago he paints himself not in a painter's smock, but dressed as court chamberlain with the keys of the office on his belt. He also adds the paintings of Rubens in the background to remind the viewer that he had received similar honors from King Charles I of England. These paintings were copies done by Velasquez's son in law Juan del Mazo and they symbolize the immortal gods as the courses of art,

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Either Velásquez, or the king himself painted in the cross of the noble order after the painting was finished. Is the King and Queen reflected in the mirror, or is that a reflection of Velasquez's canvas which is a painting for the King and Queen?

**TITLE:** Fruit and Insects **LOCATION:** Holland (The Netherlands) **DATE:** 1711

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**ARTIST:** Rachel Ruysch **PERIOD/STYLE:** Dutch Baroque **PATRON:** Johann Wilhelm

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on wood

**FORM:**

Precision and accuracy distinguish Ruysch's works. In Fruits and Insects, she depicts flowers, insects, and fruits with incredible detail and dynamism. The insects are so detailed, it appears as though Ruysch had studied them through a microscope. The butterfly seems like it's going to fly off the page to get away from the lizard. The peaches and grape look so real, it's like we could reach out and grab one if we wanted to. Her careful composition of the individual elements is evident in her arrangement of the flowers to create a diagonal running from the lower left corner to the upper right of the canvas, offsetting the opposing diagonal of the table edge.

**FUNCTION:**

Ruysch was court painter to the elector palatine Johann Wilhelm, who gave this painting and its pendant to his father-in-law, Cosimo III de' Medici.

**CONTENT:**

Composite of the studies (combined into this composition), Grapes = blood of Christ, Animals = naturalism, Corn, Squash, Chestnuts, Also Wheat = Eucharist (Christian symbolic value). In this canvas, the lavish floral arrangement is so full, many of the blossoms seem to be spilling out of the vase. However, Ruysch's floral still lifes are not pictures of real floral arrangements, but idealized groupings of individually studied flowers, often combining perfect specimens of flowers that bloomed at different times of the year and could never be placed on a table at the same time.

**CONTEXT:**

Flourishing international trade and a thriving capitalistic economy resulted in a newly affluent middle class. Wealthy merchants created a new kind of patronage and art market. Without a powerful monarchy or the Catholic Church to commission artworks (the Dutch were Protestants), artists produced directly for buyers. Like today, buyers purchased art either from professional dealers or from the artist in their studios. Subjects like big historical, mythological or religious paintings were no longer desired; buyers wanted portraits, still lifes, landscapes and genre paintings (scenes of everyday life) to decorate their homes. Proud of their newly independent country and trade wealth, they desired artworks that would reflect their success. In a competitive open market, artists began to specialize.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The scientific influence of her father made her pieces of art stand out because of their accurate depictions of nature. The richness of nature in her art was popular because the Dutch were fascinated by flowers and gardening during the 17th century. Today, her work is considered part of the High Baroque floral still-life painting movement pioneered by Jan de Heem. In 1701, Ruysch became a member of the painters' guild in The Hague. At that time, she began producing large flower works for an international circle of patrons. Several years later, Ruysch was invited to Düsseldorf to serve as court painter to Johann Wilhelm, the Elector Palatine of Bavaria. She remained there from 1708 until the prince's death in 1716.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Her father, Frederik Ruysch, was an eminent scientist and professor of anatomy and botany. He possessed a well-known collection of rare natural history specimens, which Rachel helped catalogue and record. He encouraged her artistic talents, careful observation of the natural world and scientifically accurate renderings of plants and flowers. At twenty nine, Ruysch married portrait painter Juriaen Pool, with whom she had ten children. Despite her enormous domestic responsibilities, she was remarkably prolific, producing more than 250 paintings over seven decades. Her works were in great demand, and she achieved widespread fame and international recognition. Considered one of the most successful artists of her day, contemporary Dutch writers called her "Holland's art prodigy" and "our subtle art heroine."

**INTERPRETATION:**

One common interpretation is to understand them in light of vanitas, a moral message common at the time. Taken from a passage in the Christian bible, it was a reminder that beauty fades and all living things must die. While still life paintings celebrated the beauty and luxury of fine food or voluptuous flowers, vanitas was a warning about the fleeting nature of these material things and the shortness of life. In Flowers Still Life, some flowers wilt and die while insects have eaten holes in the leaves. Wealthy Dutch consumers were being reminded to not become too attached to their material possessions and worldly pleasures; eternal salvation came only through devotion to God.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Ruysch's career paralleled the growth of the Dutch horticultural industry and the science of botany. The Netherlands became the largest importers of new and exotic plants and flowers from around the world. Once valued primarily for their use as herbs or medicine, flowers became newly appreciated simply for their beauty and fragrance. They became prized luxuries and desirable status symbols for the wealthy. Botanists and gardeners sought the rarest specimens imported from overseas trade.

**TITLE:** Woman Holding a Balance    **LOCATION:** Amsterdam    **DATE:** 1664

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**ARTIST:** Johannes Vermeer    **PERIOD/STYLE:** Dutch Baroque    **PATRON:** Pieter Claesz van Ruijven

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

A woman dressed in a blue jacket with fur trim stands alone before a table in a corner of a room. She holds a balance in her right hand and with lowered eyes waits for it to come to rest. Behind her, on the back wall of the room, is a large painting of The Last Judgment framed in black. On the side wall is a mirror. A blue cloth, some open boxes, two strands of pearls, and a gold chain lie on the table. A soft light, which passes through a window and its orange–yellow curtain, illuminates the scene.

**FUNCTION:**

This scene has religious implications that seem related to Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s instructions, in his Spiritual Exercises, that the faithful, prior to meditating, first examine their conscience and weigh their sins as if facing Judgment Day. Only such introspection could lead to virtuous choices along the path of life. Woman Holding a Balance thus allegorically urges us to conduct our lives with temperance and moderation.

**CONTENT:**

A highly idealized depiction of the social values of the burghers of his day. A beautiful young woman wearing a veil and a fur trimmed jacket stands in a room of her home. Light coming from a window illuminates the scene, as in many of the artist’s paintings. The woman stands before a table on which are spread her most precious possessions: pearl necklaces, gold chains, and gold coins, which reflect the sunlight that also shines on the woman’s face and the fingers of her right hand. In fact the orthogonal direct the viewer’s attention neither to the woman’s head nor to her treasures but to the hand in which she holds a balance for weighing gold. The scales however are empty, in perfect balance, the way Ignatius of Loyola advised Catholics to lead temperate, self aware life and to balance one’s sin with virtuous behavior.

**CONTEXT:**

Scholars believe that the troubled Dutch economy after the French invasion of 1672 negatively impacted Vermeer’s finances. Nevertheless, two hundred years after his death, Vermeer’s work was “discovered.” Today, he’s considered one of the best painters of the Dutch Golden Age, even though only 35 known paintings are attributed to him.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Vermeer was a master of pictorial light and used it with immense virtuosity. He could render space so convincingly through his depiction of light that in his works, the picture surface functions as an invisible glass pane through which the viewer looks into the constructed illusion. Vermeer was far ahead of his time in color science. For example he realized that shadows are not colorless or dark, but adjoining colors affect each other, and that light is composed of colors. Thus he painted reflections off of surfaces in colors modified by others nearby.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Vermeer used a Camera Obscura to aid his accuracy in drawing. This was a dark box with a pinhole opening that could project an image of an object or scene to be traced on a sheet of paper. Yet Vermeer did not merely copy the outlines of the projected scene. His handling of paint was revolutionary. Although in reproduction the brush strokes appear smooth and detailed, Vermeer often applied paint in dabs and pricks so that the raised surface of a point of paint reflected more light, giving vibrancy and a sense of rough, 3D texture. His technique was close to the pointillism of the Impressionists. One critique described his paint surface as “crushed pearls melted together.”

**INTERPRETATION:**

The mirror on the wall may symbolize vanity, or self knowledge. The large framed Last Judgment image on the back wall in which Christ, weigher of souls, appears in a golden mandorla directly above the young woman’s head bolsters the interpretation. Therefore this serene domestic scene is pregnant with hidden meaning. The woman holds the scales in balance and contemplates the kind of life (one free from the temptations of worldly riches) that she must lead in order to be judged favorably on judgment day.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

impasto: thickly applied paint

Vermeer was a Catholic convert in a Protestant Dutch republic)

[http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/woman\\_holding\\_a\\_balance.html#XAbXhttKiUl](http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/woman_holding_a_balance.html#XAbXhttKiUl)



**TITLE:** The Palace at Versailles      **LOCATION:** Versailles, France      **DATE:** Begun 1669

**ARTIST:** Louis Le Vau and Jules Hardouin-Mansart      **PERIOD/STYLE:** French Baroque      **PATRON:** King Louis XIV

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Masonry, stone, wood, iron and gold leaf (architecture); marble and bronze (sculpture); gardens

**FORM:**

Louis le Vau (architect to the aristocracy), André le Nôtre (landscape designer extraordinaire), and Charles le Brun (über-fashionable interior decorator and painter), Louis XIV's enormous and stylish palace was completed 21 years after it was begun in 1661 allowing Louis (and his closest friends, family, courtiers, servants and soldiers—all 20,000 of them) to officially set up court there (by that point, the next superstar architect, Jules Hardouin Mansart, had taken up the design reins). It has 700 rooms, 2,153 windows, and takes up 67,000 square meters of floor space (for those of you keeping track at home, that's over 12 American football fields).

**FUNCTION:**

King Louis XIV's intention with the construction of the palace was to demonstrate his absolute power and to consolidate it by bringing the whole royal court to live and work at his house. Louis shifted the seat of French government away from the feuding, gossiping, trouble-making noble families in Paris. Since Louis XIV's day, the Hall of Mirrors has also been used for the masked ball for the wedding of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette) and military agreements (the Treaty of Versailles that officially ended World War I was signed here in 1919).

**CONTENT:**

The Palace at Versailles is also famous for its vast gardens. King Louis XIV considered the gardens as important as the palace in terms of official ceremonies and entertaining the royal court. Andre le Notre, inventor of the classic French garden, designed them. Charles le Brun designed many of the fountains and statues, and Jules Hardouin-Mansart built the Orangerie. The king's official state bedroom is one, where the incredibly detailed lever (rising) and coucher (going to sleep) rituals would be performed each day. Both involved a whole host of courtiers waiting on the king while he got up or went to bed, following strict rules of position and rank to determine who got to perform which parts of the ceremony.

**CONTEXT:**

This "chateau" was Louie XIII's hunting lodge before. Louis XIV decided to enlarge and remodel it so that he could get his court away from the violent atmosphere of Paris. It's design is propaganda and it's baroque best!

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The basic structure is classical; it's symmetrical, repetitive, and based on simple elements that are directly borrowed from ancient Greek temples. Classical architecture was intended to remind people of the greatness of the antique Greek and Roman past (Greek and Roman civilization were often lumped together and called classical). When Versailles was being built, this ancient past was seen as the root of the intellectual and aesthetic superiority they believed had descended to the French nation. Classical architecture was the name of the game at Versailles, and although it wasn't as complicated as some of Louis XIV's other choices, he was making a direct link from himself all the way back to the great thinkers and builders of the ancient, classical, past.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Louis had the whole palace and its massive gardens built along an East/West axis so the sun would rise and set in alignment with his home. And he filled both the palace and its gardens with sculpture, painting, and fountains that all focused on himself. The most famous room is the Hall of Mirrors, which runs along the entire length of the central building. One wall contains a row of giant windows looking out over the gardens (almost 2,000 acres of manicured lawns, fountains and paths arranged in the formal garden style that André le Nôtre was known for), and the other wall is covered with 357 mirrors that catch the rising sun's rays inside the palace and remind us yet again (as if we could forget) of Louis XIV's power.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Not content with the restraint of pure classical design, he had his team create a palace that used classical structures to contain the elaborate grandeur of the Baroque style that was all the rage in the mid-seventeenth century. He wanted to make the biggest possible statement and what he ended up with was Versailles: a palace designed to glorify the French monarch by incorporating both ornate Baroque decoration that amply demonstrates his wealth and glory and the stricter rules of classicism that express his intellectual and cultural stature.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

An angry and hungry mob stormed the Palace of Versailles and threw out King Louis XVI (grandson of the Baroque visionary) and Queen Marie-Antoinette.