

**TITLE:** Frontispiece of the codex Mendoza **LOCATION:** New Spain (AKA Mexico) **DATE:** 1541-1542

**ARTIST:** Viceroyalty of New Spain **PERIOD/STYLE:** Colonial American Art **PATRON:** Antonio de Mendoza

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Ink and color on paper

**FORM:**

The Codex Mendoza is a history of the Mexica (a.k.a. Aztec) people and the growth of their empire. The Frontispiece of the Codex Mendoza features an eagle perched on a cactus, which represents the founding of Tenochtitlan, the site of present-day Mexico City. The gods told the Mexica people that such a sighting would show them where to settle. The year was 1325 when the Mexica people went in search of the site of their future home. Led by Tenoch, who can be seen to the left of the eagle with his own cactus behind him, the Mexica ended up settling on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco.

**FUNCTION:**

the Codex Mendoza contains the history of Mexica conquests over the Colhuacan and Tenoyucan, a list of tributes paid by the tribes they conquered, and details of everyday life. The document was sent via ship to Spain, where it was supposed to reach King Charles. However, French pirates captured the ship and took the Codex as booty. The Codex eventually found its way to a member of the French court, Andre Thevet, who was King Henry II's official cosmographer. Thevet decided to write his name on the Codex in a number of different places, adding yet another layer to its history. Later, it ended up in English hands in the library at Oxford University.

**CONTENT:**

The light-blue crossed bands at the center represent the waters of the Lake Texcoco and the center of the Mexica universe. The ten founders of Tenochtitlan surround the lake, the eagle, and the cactus. Each is designated with his own sign or glyph and a notation in Spanish. Toward the bottom of the page, Mexica warriors can be seen overtaking the peoples of Colhuacan and Tenoyucan (other indigenous tribes under Mexica rule), who are pictured much smaller than the Mexica, who are larger to show their greater importance. The warrior on the left holds a sword covered in obsidian over the head of one of his adversaries showing his dominance over these other indigenous tribes. Apart from the frontispiece or opening page, the Codex Mendoza contains the history of Mexica conquests over the Colhuacan and Tenoyucan, a list of tributes paid by the tribes they conquered, and details of everyday life.

**CONTEXT:**

Only twenty years prior to the creation of the Codex Mendoza, the Spanish conquered the Mexica with their superior weapons and the power of smallpox, which they unknowingly carried. By 1542, Antonio de Mendoza, the viceroy, or king's representative in New Spain, commissioned Mexica scribes to document their history. The eventual document was supposed to be sent to King Charles V of Spain to give him a sense of the comings and goings of his new and far-flung subjects.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The artist or artists were indigenous, and the images were often annotated in Spanish by a priest that spoke Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Nahuas (the ethnic group to whom the Aztecs belonged).

**INTERPRETATION:**

Tenochtitlan was established in the middle of Lake Texcoco in the Valley of Mexico in 1325. Given that much of the former Aztec capital is below modern-day Mexico City, the Codex Mendoza frontispiece corroborates other information we have about the capital city and its origins. For instance, it shows us a schematic diagram of Tenochtitlan, with the city divided into four parts by intersecting blue-green undulating diagonals. The city was made of canals, similar to the Italian city of Venice, and was divided into four quarters. The image displays the quadripartite division of the city and the canals running through it. The division of the city into four parts was intended to mirror the organization of the universe, believed to be four parts aligned with the four cardinal directions.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

According to Aztec myth, their patron deity, Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird Left), told the Aztecs' ancestors to leave their ancestral home of Aztlan and look for a place where they saw an eagle atop a cactus growing from a rock. He informed them that when they saw this sign, they should settle and build their city. For the Aztecs, they observed the sign in the middle of Lake Texcoco, and so established their capital on an island in the lake.

**TITLE:** Angel with Arquebus, Asiel Timor Dei **LOCATION:** Peru **DATE:** 17th century

**ARTIST:** Master of Calamarca AKA José López de los Ríos **PERIOD/STYLE:** Andean Baroque style **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

### **FUNCTION:**

Andean Baroque also combined Spanish, religious, and indigenous elements with the (stated) goal of integrating and assimilating the indigenous population. The angel dressed in trendy clothes with a Spanish-made gun represents the Catholic Church's "warriors," whose mission was to spread and defend their brand of Christianity in the Viceroyalty of Peru. The Catholic Church presented itself as an army, with angel-warriors whose mission was to protect, spread, and defend Christianity. Paintings like Calamarca's Angel with Arquebus, Asiel Timor Dei were common and well-received in the Andean region after the first wave of Christian missions had attempted to snuff out indigenous religious practices.

### **CONTENT:**

The gun featured in the painting is a harquebus, a long-barrel firearm invented by the Spanish during the 15th century. Before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, there had been no firearms in America. The indigenous populations didn't know what to think when they saw these in action. Evidence indicates that the native population in America thought firearms had supernatural powers. Note that works of art depicting angels dressed in stunning and stylish clothes and holding harquebuses were common between the late 17th century and the 19th century in the Viceroyalty of Peru and across the Andes. The angel's clothes are similar to what Andean aristocrats and Inca royalty wore; however, here they're combined with the clothing of Europeans and indigenous aristocrats. The excessive fabric, as seen in the huge sleeves, shows high social standing. The long feathers in the hat are a symbol of Inca nobility and were used during ceremonies in pre-Hispanic America.

### **CONTEXT:**

As for the angel, it represents the conquerors' goal of spreading Christianity and ending pre-Hispanic religions in the newly conquered territories. It is also a representation of Spanish power over the native population and meant to convey the protection that would be provided to those who became faithful Christians. Calamarca's Angel with Arquebus, Asiel Timor Dei was painted around 1680, when the Viceroyalty of Peru was still under the rule of Catholic Spaniards who had wiped out the Inca Empire in 1572. Little more than one hundred years later, however, the indigenous people welcomed this piece of art because they considered angels to be similar to their own ancient gods. Those Inca feathers helped; the purpose of these kinds of paintings was to make the indigenous people accept colonial society. With the Spanish conquest also came the imposition of Christianity. It's no coincidence that the angel in the painting is named Asiel, meaning "the work of God." Painted in the aftermath of the Counter Reformation, this image depicts angels as warriors in the Catholic Church's "army."

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Asiel Timor Dei is consistent with biblical descriptions of angels, as androgynous figures. Early American images alluded to certain indigenous connections with sacred plants, and natural phenomena such as rain, hail, stars and comets. Peoples of the Andes associated the arquebus bearing angel with Illapa, the Andean deity associated with thunder. Catholic Angels were also equated with Inca tradition through myth of the creator god Viracocha and his invisible servants, the beautiful warriors known as huamicas. The extended lines of the angel's body recall the Mannerist style still preferred in the Americas in the 17th century. The dress of the angels corresponds to the dress of Andean aristocrats and Inca royalty. The dress of Asiel Timor Dei was an Andean invention that combines contemporary European fashion and the typical dress of indigenous noblemen. The excess of textile in Asiel Timor Dei indicates the high social status of its wearer. The elongated plumed hat was a symbol of Inca nobility, as feathers were reserved for nobels and religious ceremonies in Pre-Hispanic society.

### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Depictions of angels were banned in the catholic church during the Council of Trent, but it is a rule that is ignored in Baroque Spain and in the Viceroyalty of Peru.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

Asiel Timor Dei means "Fears God".

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

The seven archangels are named: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Jehudiel, Barachiel and Sealtiel.

**TITLE:** Screen with the Siege of Belgrade and hunting scene **LOCATION:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** 1697-1701

**ARTIST:** Circle of the Gonzalez Family **PERIOD/STYLE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PATRON:** The Viceroy of New Spain, José Sarmiento de Valladeres  
Juan and Miguel González

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Tempera and resin on wood, shell inlay

**FORM:**

A folding screen inspired by the art of Japan that features the battle between the Ottoman Turks and the Hapsburg (Spanish) Empire. It is a Biombo Enconchado. It has two sides, one a hunting scene that was inspired by a French Medici tapestry. On the other side are dense botanical motifs and classicising elements that double as a landscape scene.

**FUNCTION:**

The Viceroy of New Spain, José Sarmiento de Valladeres, was stating his support of the Hapsburgs by commissioning an artwork based on a Dutch print showcasing the Siege of Belgrade. The viceroy even used this screen as decoration in the room where he received important dignitaries, passive-aggressively reminding them of Spain's power. After all, he was administering the viceroyalty in name of the king of Spain, which was under Habsburg rule. Like the front side, the reverse side was also inspired by a print, this one an Italian piece printed in France. Unlike the front side, the reverse side was probably used as a display of luxury in the viceroy's wife's sitting room.

**CONTENT:**

The Screen with Siege of Belgrade and hunting scene has two sides, each telling a different story. The first side, the Siege of Belgrade, presents a scene from the Great Turkish War (1683–1699), in which the Habsburg Empire defeated the Ottoman Empire. This Habsburg victory happened not long before this piece of art was commissioned, the screen was based on a Dutch print that portrayed the same scene. The other side of the biombo illustrates a delicate and serene hunting scene with beautiful landscapes and lavish decorative flowers that appear almost woven.

**CONTEXT:**

The Viceroyalty of New Spain, which was composed of lands located in the south of modern United States, Mexico, and Central America, was under the control of Spain, which was ruled by the Habsburgs. The Viceroy of New Spain, José Sarmiento de Valladeres, commissioned this work so he could show his visitors who was in charge.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

It is famous for being the only work of art to make use of a folding screen featuring inlaid shells and painting. Folding screens were pretty trendy in Mexico at the time, where they were called biombos, while the technique of shell-inlay with painting was known as enconchados. The Screen with Siege of Belgrade and hunting scene demonstrates several elements with Japanese influences. One of the elements is the form of the folding screen itself, which in New Spain was called a biombo, from the Japanese word byōbu. The Japanese folding screen was a luxury item in vogue during the 17th century in New Spain, where it arrived via the Philippines, a Spanish colony that traded with Japan. Another Japanese element present in this work of art is the Japanese lacquered box appearance the artist gave to its borders. Lavish, delicate, and beautiful, Japanese lacquered boxes were also in great demand in New Spain.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

In addition, the Screen with Siege of Belgrade and hunting scene was influenced by Japanese objects that were entering Mexico through trade with the Philippines, which was itself a Spanish colony that traded with Japan. During the 17th century, Mexico was going crazy for Japanese objects. Some of the most popular objects were folding screens and lacquer ware boxes. That would explain why the artist of this piece decided to incorporate Japanese artistic traits, such as making the borders appear like those of a Japanese lacquer box.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The Screen with Siege of Belgrade and hunting scene was commissioned to portray power, but its greatest achievement today is demonstrating transcultural exchange during the early modern period. The shell inlay on the folding screen was Mexican in origin, the thick borders resembled Japanese lacquer box, and the narrative imagery was inspired by propagandist European prints depicting contemporary events. All of these elements reached the Viceroyalty of New Spain via new, interconnected trade routes that demonstrate how the discovery of the New World began the trend of multiculturalism we so cherish today.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

This portion of the folding screen is now in the possession of the Brooklyn Museum, while another six panels are at the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Mexico. The first wife of the Viceroy was María Jerónima Moctezuma, direct descendant of the Aztec emperor of the same name. The second was Jofre de Loaiza, granddaughter of Marquis de Villamanrique. The hunting side was considered more appropriate for women.

**TITLE:** The Virgin of Guadalupe **LOCATION:** Mexico City **DATE:** 1698  
(Virgen de Guadalupe)

**ARTIST:** Miguel Gonzalez **PERIOD/STYLE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas on wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl  
**FORM:**

**FUNCTION:**

The Virgin of Guadalupe demonstrates how the Aztecs assimilated Catholicism, the religion of their conquerors, into their own beliefs. Their goddess Tonantzin turned into the Virgin Mary, but she was a Mary with a mixed racial heritage who also happened to speak Nahuatl. By envisioning Mary in this way, the Aztec people made her their own. Although the Aztecs incorporated Catholicism in their lives, they gave their own characteristics and meaning to Catholic symbols and figures. Catholicism in New Spain was not purely European, but rather a combination of European Catholicism and elements of the local population's identity.

**CONTENT:**

This story inspired the painting of the original Our Lady of Guadalupe, located above the altar of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Miguel González painted The Virgin of Guadalupe based on the story and the painting Our Lady of Guadalupe. After the defeat of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521 and the establishment of the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Spain (Spanish rule in Mexico, Central America, and part of the U.S., 1521-1821), the Virgin Mary became one of the most popular themes for artists. One Marian cult image eventually became more popular than any other however: the Virgin of Guadalupe, also known as La Guadalupeana.

**CONTEXT:**

A Mexican legend recounts the story of the Virgin Mary appearing to indigenous American Juan Diego at the Hill of Tepeyac in 1531. The Virgin Mary appeared to him as a mestiza, or a woman of mixed racial ancestry, speaking his native language, Nahuatl, and telling him to build a church to honor her. Juan Diego ran to tell the Archbishop of Mexico City this story. The Archbishop was skeptical at first, but Juan was eventually able to prove he was telling the truth by bringing the Archbishop's signs from two subsequent visions. The Viceroyalty of New Spain consolidated its power after the Spaniards defeated the Aztec Empire. The fact that Juan Diego saw the Virgin Mary appear as a mestiza indicates that the native population was assimilating the Spaniard's Catholicism. The blending of cultures is made more evident when one considers that the Hill of Tepeyac, where the Virgin made her appearance, had formerly been the location for adoration of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

During the colonial period, new routes of trade opened. The Manila Galleons route connected New Spain with the East and the West. For that reason, Japanese luxury items were able to reach New Spain, become fashionable, and inspire art techniques that were used to illustrate European religious beliefs, such as in The Virgin of Guadalupe.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

In addition to the story that inspired The Virgin of Guadalupe, the piece is also important artistically for its mother of pearl inlays, which were used to highlight the divine appearances. The iridescence of the shell-encrusted pieces almost makes the artwork glow, just like heavenly visitors should. This technique was borrowed from the Japanese and was in high demand in New Spain during the 17th century, where it became known as enconchados. Some artists placed an eagle perched on a cactus below Guadalupe, which had long functioned as a sign for the establishment of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan that became Mexico City after the Conquest.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The Virgin of Guadalupe demonstrates how the Aztecs assimilated Catholicism, the religion of their conquerors, into their own beliefs. Their goddess Tonantzin turned into the Virgin Mary, but she was a Mary with a mixed racial heritage who also happened to speak Nahuatl. By envisioning Mary in this way, the Aztec people made her their own. Although the Aztecs incorporated Catholicism in their lives, they gave their own characteristics and meaning to Catholic symbols and figures. Catholicism in New Spain was not purely European, but rather a combination of European Catholicism and elements of the local population's identity.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Many people consider the original image of Guadalupe to be an acheiropoieton, or a work not made by human hands, and so divinely created.

**TITLE:** Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo **LOCATION:** New Spain (Mexico) **DATE:** 1715

**ARTIST:** Juan Rodriguez Juarez **PERIOD/STYLE:** **PATRON:** The Viceroy of Spain

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

They are commonly produced in sets of sixteen, but occasionally we see sixteen vignettes on a single canvas. Costume, accouterments, activities, setting, and flora and fauna all aid in racially labeling the individuals within these works. The first position of the casta series is always a Spanish man and an elite Indigenous woman, accompanied by their offspring: a mestizo, which denotes a person born of these two parents. As the casta series progresses and the mixing increases, some of the names used in casta paintings to label people demonstrate social anxiety over inter-ethnic mixing and can often be pejorative.

**FUNCTION:**

The theme of this painting is the casta system of the colonial New World. Known as casta painting, this genre became popular in 18th-century Mexico. The main objective of these paintings was to classify families according to their races. People, usually of high social status and concerned with the racial configuration of families, commissioned casta paintings. The viceroys, for example, most likely had them hanging in their houses to show off their preoccupation with “the purity of blood.” The purpose of casta paintings like this was to classify family groups according to their race and place them at the “correct” level of society in the colonial casta system. Spaniards were at the top of the casta system, while the dark skinned slaves were at the bottom.

**CONTENT:**

The subject is a man, his wife, and their two children; he’s dressed in a fashionable and expensive French styled garment. His wife is also richly dressed, but her clothes are different: She is wearing a lovely lace huipil, the traditional dress indigenous women wore in Mexico and some parts of Central America. Importantly for the time period, however, the man is white and the woman is indigenous, which can be seen in her darker complexion. Both parents are looking at the kids. One is their baby, who has lighter skin than his mother but darker skin than his father. The other boy, with darker skin, is the baby’s servant. In other words, the father is a Spaniard, the mother is indigenous, the baby is a mestizo, or of mixed race, and the servant is most likely of mixed race, as well.

**CONTEXT:**

This genre of painting, known as pinturas de castas, or caste paintings, attempts to capture reality, yet they are largely fictions. Typically, casta paintings display a mother, father, and a child (sometimes two). This family model is possibly modeled on depictions of the Holy Family showing the Virgin Mary, saint Joseph, and Christ as a child. Casta paintings are often labeled with a number and a textual inscription that documents the mixing that has occurred. The numbers and textual inscriptions on casta paintings create a racial taxonomy, akin to a scientific taxonomy. In this way, casta paintings speak to Enlightenment concerns, specifically the notion that people can be rationally categorized based on their ethnic makeup and appearance.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Casta paintings were simple in composition; their major importance lies in the message of the art rather than in the artistic techniques used to create them.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The existing evidence suggests that some of these casta series were commissioned by viceroys, or the stand-in for the Spanish King in the Americas, who brought some casta series to Spain upon their return. Other series were commissioned for important administrators. However, little is known about the patrons of casta paintings in general. Yet, we can infer to a degree who might have commissioned such paintings. Because casta paintings reflect increasing social anxieties about inter-ethnic mixing, it is possible that elites who claimed to be of pure blood, and who likely found the dilution of pure-bloodedness alarming, were among those individuals who commissioned casta paintings.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Paintings such as Spaniard and Indian Produce a Mestizo expressed the new ethnic composition of colonial America. More significantly, these paintings didn’t just depict that heritage; they also criticized it. These paintings, particularly popular in Mexico during the 18th century, demonstrate that the upper classes, the white Spaniards, were not happy about the new ethnic composition even though they were half responsible for making it. In Mexico, the colonial casta system, sistema de castas, was even implemented to make sure every ethnicity “knew its place” in society.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Spaniard and a mestizo produce a castizo (“burned tree”), while a Spaniard and a morisco (a muslim who had been forced to convert to Christianity) produce an albino torna atrás (“Return-Backwards”) and a No te entiendo (“I-Don’t-Understand-You”) with a Cambuja (offspring of an Indian woman and African man) makes a tente en el aire (“Hold-Yourself-in-Mid-Air”). Indigenous peoples who chose to live outside “civilized” social norms and were not Christian were labeled mecos, or barbarians.

**TITLE:**Portrait of Cor Juana Ines de la Cruz **LOCATION:**\_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** 1750

**ARTIST:** Miguel Cabrera **PERIOD/STYLE:** Spanish Baroque **PATRON:**\_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

Cabrera likely modeled this painting on images of male scholars seated at their desks. Most importantly, he possibly found inspiration in depictions of St. Jerome, the patron saint of sor Juana's religious order. Images often portray St. Jerome seated at a desk within a study, surrounded by books and instruments of learning.

**FUNCTION:**

**CONTENT:**

Sor Juana looks competent as a learned woman surrounded by a vast library of books, especially titles by one Athanasius Kirchner, a man of science she seriously respected. A set of quills and an inkwell grace her desk, implying that she's writing down her own thoughts, not just reading the work of the privileged men of the time. Rich red drapery hangs above her, a detail derived from the European tradition of conveying elite status.

**CONTEXT:**

Miguel Cabrera's posthumous portrait of sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) is a famous depiction of the esteemed Mexican nun and writer. Considered the first feminist of the Americas, sor Juana lived as a nun of the Jeronymite order (named for St. Jerome) in seventeenth-century Mexico. Rather than marry, she chose to become a nun so she could pursue her intellectual interests. She corresponded with scientists, theologians, and other literary intellectuals in Mexico and abroad. She wrote poetry and plays that became internationally famous, and even engaged in theological debates.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

While portraits of women at the time showed lavish clothing to convey their class or role as wives, this portrait completely breaks the rules, showing Sor Juana in a manner typically reserved for men. She is pictured as a full figure seated in a library, a space for writing letters and doing business or, in other words, men's work. As the founder of the Second Academy of Painting in Mexico City, Cabrera also represented the academic style of art in colonial Mexico. Mexican portraits weren't quite as realistic as those in Europe at the time, and Portrait of Sor Juana exemplifies this.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Miguel Cabrera positions sor Juana in such a way that the portrait insists on her status as an intellectual. He never actually met sor Juana, so he likely based his image of her on earlier portraits of her, possibly even some self-portraits. Cabrera likely modeled this painting on images of male scholars seated at their desks. Most importantly, he possibly found inspiration in depictions of St. Jerome, the patron saint of sor Juana's religious order. Images often portray St. Jerome seated at a desk within a study, surrounded by books and instruments of learning. In many ways this is a typical nun portrait of eighteenth-century Mexico. Sor Juana wears the habit of her religious order, the Jeronymites. Her left hand toys with a rosary, while she turns a page of an open book with her right hand. The book is a text by St. Jerome, the saint after whom her religious order was named.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Cabrera's portrait differs from other nun portraits in several important ways. She looks towards us, her gaze direct and assertive, as she sits at a desk, surrounded by her library and instruments of learning. The library here includes books on philosophy, natural science, theology, mythology, and history, and so it reflects the types of works in sor Juana's own library. Writing implements rest on the table, a clear allusion to sor Juana's written works and intellectual pursuits. The rosary—a sign of her religious life—is juxtaposed with items signifying her intellectual life. The books, the desk, the quills and inkwell aid in conveying her intellectual status. The red curtain, common in elite portraiture of this period, also confers upon her a high status.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Her face can now be seen on Mexico's 200 pesos bill. Cabrera was different from European painters as well because he helped popularize casta paintings, which categorized and depicted all the races of Mexico. She also wears an escudo de monja, or nun's badge, on her chest underneath her chin. Escudos de monja were often painted, occasionally woven, and they usually displayed the Virgin Mary. Sor Juana's escudo shows the Annunciation, the moment in which the archangel Gabriel informs Mary that she will bear the son of God.

**TITLE:** Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery **LOCATION:** England **DATE:** 1763-1765

**ARTIST:** Jospeh Wright of Derby **PERIOD/STYLE:** 18th Century English **PATRON:** Peter Perez Burdett.

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

Wright was known for his deft depiction of the contrasts between light and dark, also known as chiaroscuro, and his unflinching portrayal of the true personalities of his subjects.

**FUNCTION:**

The age of Enlightenment is most closely associated with scientists and inventors, but writers and artists also played major roles. They helped spread enlightenment concepts via the written word and printed image, and inspired others to think rationally about the world in which they lived. The provincial English painter Joseph Wright of Derby became the unofficial artist of the Enlightenment, depicting scientists and philosophers in ways previously reserved for Biblical heroes and Greek gods.

**CONTENT:**

An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system, a miniature, clockwork planetarium. Each planet, with its moons, is a sphere attached to a swing arm which allows it to rotate around the sun when cranked by hand. When in motion, the orrery depicts the orbits of each planet, as well as their relative relationship to each other. Most likely the man standing and taking notes is Wright's friend Peter Perez Burdett, and the man seated at the far right may be Washington Shirley, 5th Earl Ferrers, the initial owner of the work. The teacher may be modeled on Sir Isaac Newton.

**CONTEXT:**

Inspired by the provincial group of intellectuals called the Lunar Society. While this painting is significant because it exemplifies the popular candlelight painting style of the time, it's extra important because it signifies the rising importance of science. In fact, it had previously been common practice for religious figures to inspire candlelight paintings. In this painting, however, science is the source of inspiration, not religion. It should be noted, however, that Wright painted this piece without a commission, though he assumed correctly that it would be purchased after the fact by Peter Perez Burdett. As the natural sciences caught on to the revolution, Derby, Wright's 'hood, became one town on the scientific lecture circuit. Lecturers would pass through, parading their orreries and other instruments to the curious. Joseph Wright caught one such lecture and used it as a loose template for this painting. By then, the upper and middle classes had also taken interest in physics, astronomy, and chemistry and provided scientists with ample, financially generous audiences.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

As the only source of light, the lamp's rays make for a dramatic scene in the style of chiaroscuro, a technique of intense contrast between light and dark made famous by the Italian Renaissance painter and all around bad-boy Michelangelo Caravaggio. After Caravaggio, the art of candlelight painting became popular because single illuminating sources like candles could create the mysterious effect of deep pockets of shadow and intense, bright light. With high contrast, the rapt faces of the children, note taker, and bystanders become sharper and more distinct. Some even think the lecturer in the suave red coat is modeled after Isaac Newton, one of the most influential scientists of the 17th century. The events depicted, although exciting, do not give A Philosopher Lecturing at the Orrery its high dramatic impact. That responsibility falls on the paintings strong internal light source, the lamp that takes the role of the sun. Wright mimics Baroque artists like Caravaggio, who inserted strong light sources in otherwise dark compositions to create dramatic effect.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

In the 1760s Wright began to explore the traditional boundaries of various genres of painting. According to the French academies of art, the highest genre of painting was history painting, which depicted Biblical or classical subjects to demonstrate a moral lesson. Wright took this noble, aggrandizing method of portraying events and applied it to a composition showing a contemporary subject in A Philosopher Lecturing at the Orrery. Rather than a moral of leadership or heroism, this painting's "moral" is the pursuit of scientific knowledge. With its collection of non-idealized men, women, boys, and girls informally arranged in a small physical space around a central organizing point, Wright's painting mimics the compositional structure of a conversation piece (an informal group portrait) but with the dramatic lighting and scale expected from a major religious scene.

**INTERPRETATION:**

When art and science collided, fireworks ensued. Painting was a vehicle for conveying Enlightenment values, which championed the observation of natural laws over the superstition of old. These paintings also express the wonder many experienced in the face of novelty, and they broke with previous paintings that glorified God and angels. A key idea of the Age of Enlightenment—that empirical observation grounded in science and reason could best advance society—is expressed by the faces of the individuals in Joseph Wright of Derby's A Philosopher Lecturing on the Orrery.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

He was celebrating the progress of the physical sciences since the days of Nicolaus Copernicus. Back in the day, Copernicus ruffled a few feathers in the Catholic Church when he proposed that the sun was the center of the cosmos. Despite the death threats, Copernicus's bravado paid off because it inspired a revolution...and because he went down in history as having been right.

**TITLE:** The Swing      **LOCATION:** France      **DATE:** 1767

**ARTIST:** Jean Honore Fragonard      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Rococo      **PATRON:** Baron de St. Julien

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

The Swing is composed in a triangular shape, with the Baron and the husband forming the base of the pyramid, and the maiden in the air at the top of the triangle, in the center of the space. The scene is set against an unruly forest crowded with statuary alongside people and plants. The girl's outstretched foot, from which a slipper flies, points at the most prominent sculpture, recognizable to viewers as Etienne-Maurice Falconet's Menacing Cupid.

**FUNCTION:**

Fragonard painted The Swing with the intention of flattering the Baron and his mistress, to supply them with a lighthearted, frivolous painting and to provide an intimate memento of their relationship. To this end, he utilized only the finest of the Rococo techniques. Rococo was created by and for the rich of France. They wanted works that reinforced their wealth and pleasure in all beauty and splendor, as artists recreated scenes of arcadia. The Palace of Versailles was the ideal in decadent Rococo art and architecture, informed by ideas of the French Enlightenment.

**CONTENT:**

A lady in pink silks and a shepherdesses's hat sits suspended on a swing near the center of an edenic garden. Her tiny shoe slips off amidst the action as her dress flounces upward to reveal her ankles. One man pushes the swing from the shadows, while the other remains hidden on the ground, hand outstretched as if calling to the lady or perhaps just trying to glimpse her leg from the safety of the bushes. A cherub sculpture flanks the left edge and another one is positioned directly behind her, while a small dog yaps from the right. The garden, a space outside the artificial rules of society, was associated with freedom and the natural, heightening this thematic depth whilst allowing Fragonard to create drama through contrasts in light and shade.

**CONTEXT:**

As a landmark piece of the French Rococo, it can be defined by the masterly technique that Fragonard employed in its execution. Utilizing typical Rococo techniques such as billowing fabrics, pastel colors, and soft dappled lighting, he created a perfect confectionery painting, fit for the garden or the palace. Indulgence and expressions of pleasure were typical of the aristocracy of France before the revolution. The combination of insouciant attitude, tongue-in-cheek eroticism, pastel swirls, and pastoral scenery creates an irresistible testament to the beauty of youth and illegitimate affairs. In Fragonard's world, adultery is but a devilishly gay way to pass the time. Post-revolution, there was no room for the frivolity and shallow subject matter of what was depicted in The Swing. A great deal of Fragonard's client base died during the Terror in Paris, and he was forgotten for a time. The style and subject matter of The Swing was forsaken in favor of cleaner lines, moral severity, and classical subject matter of the Neoclassicists, such as Jacques-Louis David.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The light colors, rounded curves, and detailed wispy foliage reflect a general trend favoring shell-like undulations of form (in fact, the word "rococo" derives from rocaille, French for shell), which featured in the theater as well as the interior décor of aristocratic homes, especially after the reign of Louis XIV. Fragonard was inspired by Boucher, Rubens and the School of Fontainebleau.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

According to the poet Charles Collé, The Swing began when a man of the court initially approached another famed painter, Gabriel Francois Doyen, to paint a risqué scene of his mistress. He requested that the scene also include a swing and another bishop as a love interest. Doyen turned the request down, as it was too scandalous for his taste, recommending Fragonard as a sturdy alternative for the task. In the background of the composition one can see what was originally going to be the Bishop requested by the perverse Baron, but which was changed to the mistress's husband by Fragonard. The husband plays a lesser role, being immersed in shadow while the Baron is illuminated under the maiden's dress.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The subject, a girl on a swing pushed by a husband while a lover looked from the bushes and a shoe flew from the foot, was dictated to the painter by the Baron de Saint-Julien; Fragonard transforms the scene from a licentious allegory into a commentary on the transience of pleasure through the specifics of his composition. The swing, in the 18th century, was generally read as a sexual metaphor, due to the rhythm of movement and the positioning of the body, with extended legs, at the moment when the swing's arc reached its climax; the loss of a shoe often symbolized the loss of innocence.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"I should like you to paint Madame seated on a swing being pushed by a Bishop. " "Place me in a position where I can observe the legs of that charming girl. " The Rococo era originated from the French decorative style Racaille meaning 'decorative shell and rock work'.



**TITLE:** The Tete a Tete      **LOCATION:** England      **DATE:** 1743

**ARTIST:** William Hogarth      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Satirical painting, 18th cent. English      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

A few objects in the foreground, but overall fairly empty. All central figures in the middle ground (the obvious “focal ground” of the painting) The background consists mostly of a separate room, architectural features, and paintings. One clear area of emphasis is the cluttered mantelpiece, positioned strategically between (and a little above) the couple. Verticals lines are found the in the edges of the paintings and in the columns. Curved lines are seen most prominently in the arch between rooms.

**FUNCTION:**

The paintings were models from which the engravings would be made. Hogarth’s series are satirical and moralistic. He used his paintings to instruct the public in a variety of different topics. To provide a satirical commentary on the wealth-based marriage practices of the aristocrats at the time. To appeal to the middle class (so that Hogarth could make \$\$\$) (this is done by making fun of the wealthy) To draw distinctions between the inherited ideals of the aristocrats of the 18th century and the actual actions/lifestyles they lived by To criticize conspicuous consumption

**CONTENT:**

This painting portrays an aristocratic marriage in ruins. The husband, (Lord Squanderfield’s son) sitting in the right chair, has obviously had a rowdy night. His wife wasn’t sitting idly by, either. Her flirtatious face and open bodice indicate that she was out on the town as well—but not with her husband. A chair, a musical instrument, a music book, and other items are on the floor. A painting of Cupid sits atop the fireplace, which is decorated with a lot of distasteful figurines, symbolizing that love in this house is a disaster. In this, the second in the series of paintings, the marriage of the Viscount and the merchant’s daughter is quickly proving a disaster. The tired wife, who appears to have given a card party the previous evening, is at breakfast in the couple’s expensive house which is now in disorder. The Viscount returns exhausted from a night spent away from home, probably at a brothel: the dog sniffs a lady’s cap in his pocket. Their steward, carrying bills and a receipt, leaves the room to the left, his hand raised in despair at the disorder.

**CONTEXT:**

Set in the mid-18th century (at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) as shown in the clothing throughout the work. At this time, a middle class that wanted to buy art emerged and art became more accessible (especially through prints!). Thus, the aristocracy lost some power to the merchant class. William Hogarth capitalized upon this truth and created Marriage à la Mode directly for the enjoyment and consumption of the new middle class. The marriage of convenience, which aroused much discussion at that time. Although, traditionally, marriages of convenience were the rule, most of these couples ended up being miserable. Many authors of that time began to believe that was love the basis for sustaining a healthy marriage, and not money. The artist, with the series Marriage à-la-mode wanted to illustrate the dangers of arranged marriages.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Although his late work was not well received, Hogarth’s interest in sexuality, social integration, crime and political corruption made a lasting impact and continues to influence contemporary artists like Yinka Shonibare. “Don’t listen to evil silver-tongued counsellors: don’t marry a man for his rank, or a woman for her money: don’t frequent foolish auctions and masquerade balls unknown to your husband: don’t have wicked companions abroad and neglect your wife, otherwise you will be run through the body, and ruin will ensue, and disgrace, and Tyburn.”

- William Makepeace Thackeray

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

In Tête à Tête we look at a marriage that begins to crumble, but the story ends up much worse: the rest of the paintings tell us that the husband discovers his wife’s lover and is murdered. The homicidal lover is judged and hanged at Tyburn prison. Finally, the sentimental wife, depressed by the death of his lover, commits suicide. Through satire and irony, with a bizarrely tragic history, Hogarth shows us some of his own beliefs and views on marriages of convenience. The series, despite the artist’s success, did not have the reception expected and had to be sold for a few coins.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Hogarth knew a lot about color and brushwork, but his work is celebrated for its satire and sense of fun. His paintings were not merely narrative imagery, but a complete play presented without words. His ability to use art as a form of theater makes him one of the first artists to become an (overt) social critic. The Tête à Tête, from Marriage a la Mode, like his other works, is a morality play rather than just a painting. In addition, he cleverly used his artistic ability to make a business for himself as the middle class was rising and art becoming a product they desired to show off their new status.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The other titles in this painting series are The Marriage Settlement, The Inspection, The Toilette, The Bagnio, The Lady’s Death. The husband, has spent the night in a brothel, however, he has not had sex. The broken sword at his feet alludes to his impotence. The black patch on his neck tells us that the husband has contracted a sexually transmitted disease (this patch appears on the first painting in the series, so we know he had contracted the disease even before the marriage).

**TITLE:** The Oath of the Horatii      **LOCATION:** Paris, France      **DATE:** 1784

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**ARTIST:** Jacques-Louis David      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Neoclassical      **PATRON:** King Louis XVI

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

An organized painting with a scene set in a Roman atrium dominated by three arches at the back that keep our attention focused on the main action in the foreground. A group of 3 young men framed by the first arch, the Horatii brothers, bound together with their muscled arms raised in a rigid salute toward their father framed by the central arch. He holds three swords aloft in his left hand and raises his right hand signifying a promise or sacrifice. The male figures create tense, geometric forms that contrast markedly with the softly curved, flowing poses of the women seated behind the father.

**FUNCTION:**

David wished to instill patriotism and civic virtue in the public at large in Post-Revolutionary France. He is quoted as saying, “The arts should help to spread the progress of the human spirit, and to propagate and transmit to posterity the striking examples of the efforts of a tremendous people who, guided by reason and philosophy, are bringing back to earth the reign of liberty, equality, and law. The arts must therefore contribute forcefully to the education of the public.”

**CONTENT:**

In it, a bearded man (the father) stands dead center as three strapping and helmet-clad warriors (sons) raise their arms in war-thirsty zeal. Three women and two children hang their heads in collective distress. A series of arches occupy the background, unornamented to keep the eye focused on the climatic event. The bodies form a triangle-composition, a popular neoclassical strategy, with the sword hilts held at the pinnacle. David depicts a handful of heroes ready for battle. Three brothers from the Roman Horatii family are off to fight a trio of Curiatii brothers from their rival city, Alba Longa. Their sacrifice will end the war, determining which city will call the shots. The father of the Horatii here gives them their swords, apparently thrilled that his children will die for Rome. To the side are the Horatii’s sisters, one of whom has a Curiatii fiancé. Another is a Curiatii herself, married into the Horatii family.

**CONTEXT:**

The story of Oath of the Horatii came from a Roman legend first recounted by the Roman historian Livy involving a conflict between the Romans and a rival group from nearby Alba. Rather than continue a full-scale war, they elect representative combatants to settle their dispute. The Romans select the Horatii and the Albans choose another trio of brothers, the Curatii. In the painting we witness the Horatii taking an oath to defend Rome. In the years leading up to The Oath of the Horatii, David had gained the king’s favor after not one, but two of his works were included in the Salon of 1781. As a result, he was allowed to hang out in the Louvre, which actually housed artists at the time, and the king commissioned him to paint a scene based on a Roman account of two dueling sets of brothers, the Horatii and Curiatii. The painting was completed before Louis XVI was given the boot, but at a time when politics were still touch-and-go. The notion of giving an oath was especially significant for the King when he was looking for supporters to bolster the monarchy.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

David’s painting marked a new era of history paintings. After the Rococo craze died down, history paintings were the next big thing. Historical events, such as this Roman oath between a man of the Horatio family and his sons, were thought of as stories holding valuable lessons for the contemporary moment. The theme of making an oath was an especially popular one because it symbolized national fealty to the king (Louis XVI) even as the rumblings of social discord could be heard. Before composing Oath of the Horatii, David went to see Poussin’s Rape of the Sabine Women and employed the lictor, the caped man, on the far left as the basis for the Horatii and he directly quoted other figures from Poussin as well. Even though Poussin was his model, David knew that he was creating a new type of painting and wrote, “I do not know whether I shall ever paint another like it,” as he developed the austere composition and powerful physiques.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The moment David chose to represent was, in his reported words, “the moment which must have preceded the battle, when the elder Horatius, gathering his sons in their family home, makes them swear to conquer or die.” Instead of creating an illusionistic extension of space into a deep background, David radically cuts off the space with the arches and pushes the action to the foreground in the manner of Roman relief sculpture. The picture created a sensation at its first exhibition in Paris in 1785. Although David had painted it under royal patronage and did not intend the painting as a revolutionary statement, Oath of Horatii aroused his audience to patriotic zeal. The Neoclassical style soon became the semiofficial voice of the French revolution.

**INTERPRETATION:**

One might read Oath of the Horatii as a painting designed to rally republicans (those who believed in the ideals of a republic, and not a monarchy, for France) by telling them that their cause will require the dedication and sacrifice of the Horatii. Those who support this view cite some of the rousing lines from Corneille’s tragedy such as, “Before I am yours, I belong to my country,” as well as the response of contemporary left-wing writers who praised David’s republican sentiments. Those who disagree with this interpretation argue that David was enmeshed in the system of royal patronage, that the painting was accepted into the Salon with no negative response from official quarters and later royal commissions followed.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The women know that they will also bear the consequence of the battle because the two families are united by marriage. One of the wives in the painting is a daughter of the Curatii and the other, Camilla, is engaged to one of the Curatii brothers. At the end of the legend the sole surviving Horatii brother kills Camilla, who condemned his murder of her beloved, accusing Camilla of putting her sentiment above her duty to Rome.

**TITLE:** Monticello **LOCATION:** Virginia, U.S. **DATE:** 1768-1809

**ARTIST:** Thomas Jefferson **PERIOD/STYLE:** Neoclassical Architecture **PATRON:** Thomas Jefferson

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Brick, glass, stone and wood.

**FORM:**

The architecture combines myriad elements, mostly neoclassical in design, such as the Doric columns, an octagonal center dome, pediment (the triangle form above the columns), and the general symmetry of the architectural plan. The single story home (2nd story hidden behind balustrade) with an octagonal dome set above the central drawing room behind a pediment capped columnar porch sits on a wooded plot of land with mountain vistas all around.

**FUNCTION:**

To build for himself a country villa inspired by the ones described by the first century Roman author Pliny. Jefferson believed art was a powerful tool; it could elicit social change, could inspire the public to seek education, and could bring about a general sense of enlightenment for the American public. If Cicero believed that the goals of a skilled orator were to Teach, to Delight, and To Move, Jefferson believed that the scale and public nature of architecture could fulfill these same aspirations.

**CONTENT:**

At a time when most brick was still imported from England, Jefferson chose to mold and bake his own bricks with clay found on the property. Monticello's grounds provided most of the lumber, stone and limestone, and even the nails used to construct the buildings were manufactured on site. Designed to accommodate not only Jefferson's steady stream of houseguests but also his boundless collections of books, European art, Native American artifacts, natural specimens and mementos from his travels. Monticello was also filled with Jefferson's unique—and often ingenious—inventions. These included a revolving bookstand, a copying machine, a spherical sundial and a toenail clipper, among dozens of other devices.

**CONTEXT:**

In those days, it was common for landowners to choose a stock design for their home from an English architectural handbook; a contractor would then oversee the project from start to finish. But this particular landowner was Thomas Jefferson, the quintessential polymath, whose passions ranged from political philosophy, archaeology and linguistics to music, botany, bird watching and pasta making.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The discovery and excavation of Pompeii inspired an interest in all things Roman, and Neoclassicists capitalized on this interest by copying the style in new buildings. Neoclassicists stood for order, symmetry, and austerity in design. Sculptures look very still, architecture is very balanced, and there are usually a lot of pillars, pediments, white stone, and domes, as in the U.S. Capital Building. The philosophy behind Neoclassicism was inspired by Enlightenment values, including order and logic. This home was inspired by the Maison Carree, The Villa Rotanda, and the Chiswick House.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The writings of Andrea Palladio, an Italian Renaissance architect, influenced Jefferson's interest in Neoclassicism, a style employed for structures such as America's Capital Building and Monticello itself. Even so, architecture was an expression of patriotism and democracy for Jefferson. Although he was deeply inspired by Neoclassicism, he combined a number of styles, including Palladian, French, Roman, and Chinese, to create a new, undeniably American style. He was all about establishing a non-European, non-British political standard and visual language, and he applied this vision to The University of Virginia, another one of his projects. Jefferson also drafted the blueprints for Monticello's neoclassical mansion, outbuildings, gardens and grounds. Though he had no formal training, he had read extensively about architecture, particularly that of ancient Rome and the Italian Renaissance. Years later, he would become an accomplished architect whose designs included the Virginia state capitol and the main buildings at the University of Virginia.

**INTERPRETATION:**

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987, the property is considered a national treasure not only for its beauty and historical significance but also for what it reveals about the third U.S. president, a complex and controversial figure whose political philosophy fundamentally shaped the nation. As Franklin D. Roosevelt once wrote, "More than any historic home in America, Monticello speaks to me as an expression of the personality of its builder."

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Monticello was not just a residence but also a working plantation, home to roughly 130 enslaved African Americans whose duties included tending its gardens and livestock, plowing its fields and working in its on-site textile factory. One of these slaves was Sally Hemings, who as a teenager accompanied Jefferson and his young daughters to Paris and later served as a chambermaid and seamstress at Monticello. For nearly two centuries, it has been speculated that Jefferson and Hemings had as many as six children together. These claims were bolstered by a 1998 DNA study that revealed a genetic link between their respective descendants (although some have argued that Jefferson's younger brother, Randolph, could also have been the father). This paradox is inherent in the legacy of Jefferson himself, who wrote that all men were created equal yet made no secret of his ambivalence toward the institution of slavery.

**TITLE:**Self Portrait      **LOCATION:**France      **DATE:** 1790

**ARTIST:** Elizabeth Vigée Lebrun      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Rococo and Neoclassical      **PATRON:** Grand Duke at the time being Marie Antoinette's brother

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

### **FUNCTION:**

In Florence, Vigée Le Brun admired the famous collection of artists' self-portraits in the Corridoio Vasariano at the Uffizi. Asked to add her own image, she later wrote: "I painted myself with a palette in hand, in front of a canvas on which I am drawing the queen in white chalk." Both her subject and her elegant black silk gown were intended to evoke the power and prestige of her position as a painter to the king of France. The scarlet sash adds a bold touch.

### **CONTENT:**

The artist sits in a relaxed pose at her easel and is positioned slightly off center. She wears a white turban and a dark dress—in the free-flowing style that Marie-Antoinette had made popular at the French court—with a soft, white, ruffled collar of the same material as her headdress. Her belt is a wide red ribbon. Vigée-LeBrun holds a brush to a partially finished work; the subject is probably Marie-Antoinette—perhaps intended as a tribute to her favorite sitter. Slightly used brushes are at the ready along with a palette, she has everything cradled in her arm close to the viewer.

### **CONTEXT:**

Created soon after her swift departure from France at the onset of the French Revolution, Vigée-LeBrun's Self-Portrait in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, is one of her best-known pictures. It is a late example of the Rococo style. Rococo epitomized a fashionable ideal, wherein perpetual youth was libertine and pleasure-loving, its sexual gratification taken without guilt or consequence. The 18th century witnessed a growing legion of women artists who competed with their male colleagues and each other for patronage and positions in the prestigious academies. This resulted in restrictions on female memberships and a ban altogether in the French Royal Academy, which voted in 1706 to no longer admit women. This was eventually modified to include a max of 4 female academicians, the opportunities for women to achieve the fame of their male contemporaries was limited, and was made worse by their inability to train in the academic schools or attend life drawing classes.

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

While she often painted Marie Antoinette, fully regaled in exaggerated hoop skirts, constricting corsets, endless amounts of lace, and big hair, she preferred a simpler, more neoclassical style for herself, as can be seen in her self-portrait. In painterly technique, she aired more on the side of Rococo, employing softer edges and pastel colors, but her faithfulness to realistic anatomy was decidedly neoclassical. There were a number of 18th century women artists that became known for their talent, teaching, stylistic innovations, influence on other artists, and professional prosperity. Nowhere can this be better seen than in the life and work of the French painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun. The great Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens had a profound impact on Vigée-LeBrun's color, glazing techniques, compositional approach, and use of light. She made copies after his Medici Cycle in the Luxembourg Palace while still a teenager, but was particularly impressed with works she viewed on a trip to Flanders with her art dealer husband, J.B.P. Lebrun, in 1781. When she returned home she painted two self-portraits under Rubens influence.

### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The faint beginnings of a portrait of a female, possibly herself, are visible on the canvas to her left, and in this inclusion, she cleverly creates a mise-en-abyme, or a scene within a scene. It was not uncommon practice, moreover, for artists to make compositions in the act of working; Dutch painter Rembrandt and the Spanish painter Diego Velasquez portrayed themselves similarly, paintbrush and palette in hand. Vigée Le Brun was one of few women, however, who dared to paint herself in a similar scene as her male cadres

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The painting expresses an alert intelligence, vibrancy, and freedom from care. As she painted this portrait, her Queen was being driven from power by revolutionaries who hated the profligate lifestyle of the nobility and would later execute both Marie-Antoinette and her husband, King Louis XVI. Given these circumstances, Vigée-LeBrun—a working painter, wife, and mother—displays an extraordinarily sanguine persona.

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

Her most important patron was the much maligned Queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Vigée Le Brun painted over twenty portraits of this Austrian-born monarch, beginning in 1778 and ending with the artist's own exile from France on the night the king and queen were taken prisoner by a Revolutionary mob on October 6, 1789.

**TITLE:** George Washington      **LOCATION:** \_\_\_\_\_      **DATE:** 1788-1792

**ARTIST:** Jean-Antoine Houdon      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Neoclassical Sculpture      **PATRON:** Virginia General Assembly and Thomas Jefferson

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

**FORM:**

Washington stands in a contrapposto pose with one knee slightly bent, a posture inspired by classical and neoclassical sculpture. He coolly rests one arm on a fasces, or a bundle of thirteen rods. In Rome, fasces represented civil authority, and Houdon gave the symbol an American spin by using thirteen rods to represent the original thirteen colonies. In the statue, Washington's other arm rests on a regal cane. Evoking classical, neoclassical, and Roman senatorial sculpture, Houdon meant to glorify Washington as the leader of the Revolutionary army.

**FUNCTION:**

Commissioned by the Virginia General Assembly to commemorate the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Harrison allowed Thomas Jefferson to choose the artist. Because he was the minister to France at the time, he knew he wanted to hire a French artist. Houdon was, by the middle of the 1780s, the most famous and accomplished neoclassical sculptor at work in France.

**CONTENT:**

Rather than hold his officer's sword, a symbol of military might and authority, it instead benignly hangs on the outside of the fasces, just beyond Washington's immediate grasp. This surrendering of military power is further reinforced by the presence of the plow behind Washington. This refers to the story of Cincinnatus, a Roman dictator who resigned his absolute power when his leadership was no longer needed so that he could return to his farm. Like this Roman, Washington resigned his power and returned to his farm to live a peaceful, civilian life.

**CONTEXT:**

For his Washington, Houdon combined the ancient and time-honored with the current, and tempered classical idealism with a down-to-earth naturalism, creating a version of classical taste that appealed to Americans. Houdon presented Washington as a modern Cincinnatus, the Roman farmer and general who left his land to fight for his state and, after victory, returned to his farm as man of peace and simplicity. In this figure the artist balanced the dualities of military and civil, war and peace, ancient and modern.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Houdon's statue quickly became an authoritative likeness of Washington, a resource for other artists, but its popularity had damaging effects. There was a demand for copies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because it was believed Washington's likeness in public locations would serve as an exemplum virtutis, inspiring beholders with the example of his greatness.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Washington disliked this classicized aesthetic and insisted on being shown wearing contemporary attire rather than the garments of a hero from ancient Greece or Rome. With clear instructions from the sitter to be depicted in contemporary dress, Houdon returned to Paris in December 1785 and set to work on a standing full-length statue carved from Carrara marble. Houdon insisted upon coming to America to study Washington himself. He left France in July 1785 and arrived October 2 at Mount Vernon for a two-week stay. During the visit, he modeled a terra-cotta bust of Washington, made a life mask, and took measurements of his body. Washington was apparently intrigued by the artist's activities and recorded them in his diary. On October 17, 1785, Houdon left the plantation with a plaster mold of the bust, the mask, and notes. The original terra-cotta bust remains at Mount Vernon, and the mask is at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Washington wears his uniform but holds a civilian walking cane with his right hand. To the left of and behind the general is a farmer's plowshare, yet he rests his left hand on a bundle of rods called a fasces, the Roman symbol of civil authority. Houdon translated the symbol to an American usage by forming the bundle from thirteen rods, to stand for the unification of the thirteen original colonies, and adding arrows in between that likely refer to Native Americans or the idea of America as wild frontier. Washington is portrayed as a man, not as a god.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

In 1789, Washington began his tenure, which ended up lasting for two terms. During that time, Houdon created the marble sculpture as an ode to Washington's achievements in the American Revolution. When the Marquis de Lafayette, Washington's friend and compatriot, saw the statue for the first time, he said: "That is the man himself. I can almost realize he is going to move." Washington saw the statue and declared it a accurate likeness of himself.