Patrick Bade | French Painting from Watteau to Fragonard

- Morning, Patrick. Morning, Jude.

- [Patrick] Morning, Wendy.

- I've just been watching, I'm sure many people are also watching just the inauguration of the president. So, just have a look. What's the time? It's exactly 12 o'clock. So, okay, Patrick, I'm going to say, over to you. Thank you very much. Looking forward to the presentation.

Visual slides are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Right. Thank you, Wendy. I feel a bit like Marie Antoinette saying, "Let them eat cake," by presenting something quite so frivolous when all these momentous things are going on. But before I get to Watteau, I just want to say something. I'm very thrilled about the incredible response there was to the CD of the Austrian German Jewish sopranos on Malibran. And I thought I'd just point out two other CDs I put together for them that could be of interest. The one on the right-hand side is, the title in English is "Love in German." And it's songs about love, often quite cynical, quite bitter ones, from the pre-Nazi period. It's from the Weimar Republic, mostly with Jewish composers and artists, Fritzi Massary, Joseph Schmidt, Richard Tauber, and so on. And the one on the left-hand side was, I was thrilled to be able to do that. It's about four Berlin Jewish cabaret composers. There's Kurt Weill, Mischa Spoliansky, Richard Werner Heymann, and Franz Waxman, who all left of course very quickly with the Nazi takeover.

And they each spent a couple of years in Paris, before moving on to America or wherever they went. Mostly they went to Hollywood. And so their Paris period was really a kind of an extension of their Berlin period. Paris was the only other great city that had a kind of cabaret culture comparable to the Berlin one at the time. So they all worked with French artists, and they worked in French for a year or so. And that is what is on that CD. So, yes, to get back to Watteau. This is the picture that really launches this, the new period of the Ancien Regime following the death of Louis XIV. In fact, this was painted two years later, it's painted in 1717. It's called "The Embarkation for the Island of Cythera." And I will be talking in more detail about it. So in a bizarre way, you could say that Watteau is an equivalent of Caravaggio, who was a highly unconventional and original artist, who set the tone for much of the 17th century. And Watteau sets the tone for much of the 18th century. He's born in 1684, and so that makes him an almost exact contemporary of the two greatest composers of the first half of the 18th century, Bach and Handel. They were born the following year, in 1685.

But the composer I'd really like to compare him with is of a younger generation, that's Mozart. By curious coincidence they both died at the age of 37. And I think what makes them comparable is that each has a sort of surface elegance and sweetness and refinement. And underneath that elegant and refined surface, there are profound depths of emotion. And also, I think, running through the music of Mozart and the paintings of Watteau, there is a streak of

melancholy. So this picture is called "La Gamme d'Amour," "The Scale of Love." Music plays a very important role in most of the paintings of Watteau. And of course it is the music of love. And what we have in this painting is young lovers in a park landscape. But, you get, there is this sense of melancholy, there's this sense of the ephemeral. It's towards the end of the day. You can see the sun's beginning to set in the distance.

That often is a moment in the day when people feel melancholy. And you can see that it's a pyramidal composition, and at the apex of the composition is a statue. Statues are quite important in sculptures, in the paintings of Watteau. And it's a philosopher figure, an elderly man. And I think that the theme of this painting, it's not just celebrating pleasure, love, music, youth. It's also about the fragility of those things, and the fact that these things don't last. Now, Watteau was born in the city of Valenciennes, which had only been taken from the Spanish Netherlands by Louis XIV six years earlier. So, we think of Watteau as a quintessentially French artist. He has all those qualities, qualities that we envy in the French, of elegant sensuality, love, and so on. But his contemporaries didn't think of him as French.

They thought of him as Flemish. And there are strongly Flemish elements in his work. Now, one thing about Flanders is that it is possibly the most fought-over piece of land in history. Louis XIV was constantly starting wars and trying to nibble bits off the Spanish Netherlands. And so armies were going backwards and forwards, as they did, of course, in the 20th century in this area. And so it's not entirely surprising that the first paintings and images that survive by Watteau are military ones. And there is a tradition in Flemish and Dutch artists for painting military subjects. The painting you see on the left is by a late 17th-century Flemish artist called Philips Wouwermans. And it's a particular type of military subject. Not a battle scene. These armies that, as I said, went backwards and forwards across Europe, all the way through the 17th century, through the Thirty Years' War, and all those wars of Louis XIV.

Of course, they needed to be supplied. And they were followed by people supplying food, women supplying all sorts of comforts of one kind or another, to the army. And this is the subject of these two images. The Wouwermans on the left-hand side. And it's actually a print after a lost Watteau painting on the right-hand side. Here is a rare surviving early painting of Watteau of a similar subject. So it's a military subject, but it actually looks more like a picnic than a battle scene. I don't think Watteau was ever particularly interested in the hurly-burly or the glory of war. So he arrives in Paris just at the turn of the century, probably around 1702. And like Caravaggio before him, his entry into art is a rather unconventional one. He doesn't sign up with a major master of history painting or anything like that. He works initially with a decorative artist called Claude Audran. And Claude Audran was typical of this period, right at the end of Louis XIV's reign, when people were tired of grandeur, they were tired of the grandiose, they were tired of war making and glory and all the crap that went with Louis XIV. They wanted something lighter, more delicate, more entertaining, more hedonistic.

And Audran represented this new tendency with sweeter colours and a type of decoration which is called grotesque. I mean, grotesque, in modern language, has developed entirely different

connotations. The arts-historical meaning of the term grotesque goes back to the discovery of Nero's Golden House in the Forum in Rome during the Renaissance. It was excavated, and it had this kind of very light open decoration in frescos on the walls. And because Nero's Golden House had been buried, and the land level had risen, people thought of these rooms as being in grottoes. And that's where the term grotesque originally comes from. Here are more of these airy, light, delicate designs of Claude Audran. And this is a piece in the hand of Watteau. We can already recognise very characteristic figures of Watteau.

That's in a similar manner. And other designs that he made at the beginning of his career were published in a book of prints after his work, after his death in 1721. And this is a drawing surviving. You look at that and you think rococo. Actually, this is a very, very early date for rococo. The rococo doesn't really fully develop till actually after Watteau's death in the 1730s. But you've got all the essential elements of rococo style here. The playfulness, the asymmetry, the sort of rampant nature, the curving lines and the C-scrolls, they're already here. From Audran, he did actually move into a painter's studio, a minor artist called Claude Gillot, G-I-L-L-O-T, who specialised in subjects inspired by the theatre. So this is a painting by Claude Gillot that shows a scene from a popular play. And you can see the setting looks like a stage setting, and the people gesticulate rather like actors, rather hammy actors. So theatre is very, very important for Watteau. And he's obviously a great theatre lover.

This is an early print he made, or it's a print after a painting, probably, that is called the "Departure of the Comedians," the "Departure of the Actors." And it seems to commemorate the exile of the French commedia dell'arte actors in, this was actually before Watteau arrived in Paris. It was in the 1690s, when the Italian commedia dell'arte company had made very cheeky references to Madame De Maintenon, Louis XIV's final wife. And she was outraged by this. And the king ordered the exile of the Italian comedians from France. Now he obviously was ambitious. He wanted to be more than just a decorative artist or a hack artist. And so he did attend courses with the Academy in Paris. And he competed for the Prix de Rome, the Rome Prize. This was something that had been instituted earlier in Louis XIV's reign, that a subject would be set every year, and art students would compete to paint the subject.

And if you won a prize, you would then be sent for a period of study in Rome. And in fact, Watteau did win a prize, but obviously- In fact, we have the deliberations of the committee who decided these things, and they thought, probably quite rightly, that sending Watteau to Rome would not necessarily be good for his development. I don't think Watteau would've got much from antique art, from Raphael and Michelangelo. It was just not his thing. In as far as he was interested in Italian art, he was very, very interested in Venetian artists. And luckily, he found a patron, a very wealthy man called Pierre Crozat, who was a great art collector, who specialised in Venetian art. Now, Watteau's most original contribution to Western art was the creation of the fete galante. The fete galante, which is an idealised park landscape with young men and women in fancy dress engaged in some kind of amorous discourse, with a kind of dreamy, evocative mood. So the origins of this type of subject matter seem to be in Venetian art.

In fact, probably the first example of something that could be called a fete galante, is this painting on the left, which is in the Louvre. So it was in the French royal collection. He would've known it. It used to be attributed to Giorgione. It's called the "Concert Champetre." And it's one of those paintings where art historians disagree. It was reattributed to Titian, but some people think it was actually started by Giorgione, finished by Titian. It's really up to you to decide. And that starts off a tradition in Venice for these rather mysterious, erotically charged pictures. And that was carried on in the 18th century by an artist called Piazzetta, that I'll be talking about next week. And I'll be making a specific comparison between Piazzetta and Watteau in these rather ambiguous subjects. Flemish painting, Dutch painting, we heard recently how the Dutch like these rather naughty paintings of amorous goings-on, in brothels, and so on. And this is a Jan Steen on the right-hand side. And you've got some of the elements of the fete galante. I mean, obviously, lots of amorous activity going on here, and music, but it has a kind of a coarseness, which is very unlike Watteau.

We're closer to the mood of Watteau in this painting called "The Garden of Love" by Rubens. And we certainly know that Watteau was fascinated by Rubens. He, through his employer, Audran- Claude Audran was keeper of the royal pictures, so he had the keys to the Palais du Luxembourg, which would have enabled Watteau to go and study the Marie de' Medici Cycle of Rubens. And he studied other paintings and drawings by Rubens. This is a drawing that, it's by Watteau on the left-hand side, but it's a copy of a Rubens. And this is a print after a Watteau on the right-hand side. And I think you can see pretty directly that Watteau has made a kind of direct theft from Rubens here. He was also fascinated by Rubens' use of the three-colored chalk technique on a tinted paper, with the red sanguine chalk, the black charcoal, and heightened with white chalk. And this is a Rubens drawing of his second wife, Helena Fourment, on the right-hand side.

And on the left is a Watteau copy of a drawing by Rubens of his first wife, using the same technique. So you can see in some ways this very Flemish character of Watteau's work, but it's kind of Rubens lite, slimmed-down Rubens. Here is the same subject, "The Judgement of Paris," by Rubens, on the left-hand side, and the small exquisite painting of the same subject, "Judgement of Paris," by Watteau, on the right-hand side. It's in the Louvre, a little tiny gem of a painting that clearly indebted to Rubens. And as I said, Venice- And amongst the Venetian artists, the artist that most appealed to Watteau, and that he took most from, was Veronese. On the right we have a Veronese painting of "The Finding of Moses." You can see, nobody looking very ancient Egyptian here. They look very 16th-century Venetian.

And on the left is a drawing of the same subject. There is no existing painting, but there is a drawing by Watteau of "The Finding of Moses" that is again, clearly indebted to Veronese. And I think too, he loved the way- Veronese, of course, is another artist with a lot of very erotically charged subject matters, of seductions. Veronese on the left, Watteau on the right. Where, both of them, you have these- There is this scene of seduction going on, and you have these rather unstable poses of the two lovers. Here again, Veronese on the left-hand side, and Watteau on the right. Some serious sexual harassment going on here in both paintings, and the sense of

instability and movement in both. We're on the brink of the mature Watteau. This is a painting that is dated around 1709. There is actually only one painting in Watteau's entire oeuvre, for which we can be absolutely sure of the date. And that is the second version of this subject. This subject is "The Embarkation for the Isle of Cythera."

Cythera is the isle of Venus. It's the isle of love. So, embarking for the isle of Cythera is a kind of elegant, poetic way of referring to sex. These people are going to make love, but they're dressed up in a very fanciful way as pilgrims. So, little capes, and the staffs, are symbols of the fact that they are pilgrims on the journey to love. And so, we've got these paintings which are very, very much about the interaction of men and women, with very subtle nuances in the relationships between them, taking place in these beautiful gardens. And the clothes are interesting too, 'cause nobody actually, in real life in the 18th century, wore clothes like these. These are theatrical clothes. And people weren't wearing big ruffs. Ruffs had, you know, gone out of fashion a hundred years earlier, except in theatrical costumes.

We're very lucky in London in having wonderful collections of Watteau's paintings. There's, well, there's one very lovely one in the National Gallery. There are no less than 17 paintings by Watteau in the Wallace Collection. This comes from the Wallace Collection, and it's called "Les Charmes-" no, "Les Plaisirs du Bal," that's right. The pleasures of the ball, of dancing. And again, the theatricality of it, it looks like this is taking place on a stage set. This Baroque architecture in the background, with the rusticated columns looking very Bernini-esque, looks like a piece of stage scenery. And again, the clothes are theatrical clothes, rather than real-life clothes, even that might have been worn at a ball. Now you think, oh yes, all this is elegance, refinement, and so on. But if we are to believe the leading 20th-century expert on Watteau, Donald Posner, the American historian Donald Posner, there is really quite an earthy, gritty, and specific erotic subtext to all these paintings.

And so, the music is the food of love, it's the music of love. The man and the woman engaging with one another are, in fact, this is a sort of symbolic way of describing the sex act. And this, the spurting fountain that comes up from behind the man represents really, you could say it's a refined, elegant, symbolic way of representing the climax of the act of love, and ejaculation. So, Watteau- This was, as I mentioned last week, a great period of erotic literature and erotic art. Quite a lot of the erotic art doesn't survive. Sometimes it was a case of, you know, the men would collect this kind of art. And when, men tend to be older than their wives, when they died, their wives would discover it, they'd be horrified. So there's a very high attrition rate to erotic art from this period. A lot of it got destroyed. And there is a story also that on his deathbed, when he was dying of tuberculosis, a priest got to Watteau and persuaded him it would be better for his arriving on the other side if he burnt his erotic art.

So not a lot of it survives. This drawing, possibly again for a painting that was destroyed, this theme of a woman receiving an enema. Again, there's pretty obvious erotic connotations to that. And he's not- This is common in both 17th- and 18th-century art. You've got a Dutch print at the bottom, and another French 18th-century print of the same subject on the left-hand side. And a

painting like this where- This is small scale. This would certainly have been painted for a male, a wealthy male collector of this kind of thing. It has no real justification in terms of subject matter. There doesn't seem to be a mythological or a classical subject here. It's almost like a Degas of the 19th century. The woman is certainly aware of being looked at, or she's surprised to discover that she's being looked at. But she knows that she's being looked at.

We're spying on her. It's a sort of keyhole nude. And this is a Watteau. Most artists wanting to paint nudes and erotic subjects, they looked, well, they looked to the Bible quite often, "Susanna and the Elders," and things like that. But more often to Greek classical mythology. This is "Jupiter and Antiope." There aren't a lot of these kind of subjects in Watteau's work, but this one was probably a commission to go over a door. It's what the Italians would call a sopraporte. When you have this kind of horizontal shape, even if it's ovoid, very often these kind of paintings were designed to go over the doorway in a palatial interior. I'll just show you this, because it's so interesting to look at the painting, and look at this drawing, obviously made from life, by Watteau, using this three-colored chalk technique of the sanguine, the charcoal, and heightened with chalk. Another exquisite painting that's in the Wallace Collection.

This one is called the "Charmes de la vie," the charms, or the pleasures, of life. And according to Donald Posner, what we have in this picture is a sort of tentative approach to sex. Again, it's set on a stage setting with a backdrop. And it's a young man, and he is tentatively tuning his instrument with the prospect of making music with the beautiful young woman with a guitar sitting in the chair. This is such a charming- One of my favourite details of this painting is the dog. And Watteau is another artist who obviously liked dogs. He does good dogs, he's good at dog. But I think, he's obviously looking at dogs, and the way that dogs behave, and the sort of things that dogs do. But I think also, his great favourite, Veronese, is a wonderful dog artist. It's always worth looking out for the dogs in Veronese's paintings. And here is a detail of a Veronese on the left-hand side. So Watteau would, he made drawings from life, made wonderful drawings. I mean, there have been, from his time onwards, there have been people who preferred his drawings to his paintings. And he built up a kind of repertoire of poses that he would reuse in different combinations, in different paintings, with a different narrative.

So if you go and see this painting in the Wallace Collection, it's in one of the rooms upstairs. And on the opposite side of the room is a much smaller painting that reuses some elements of the composition. And again, you've got the young man who's really unsure of himself, and he's trying to tune his instrument. And you've got a slightly different narrative here. 'Cause the girl is ready to go. It's the man who isn't ready to go. And so there's another young man, as we can see on the left, who's coming up behind the girl, and he's going to steal a march on the the mandolin player, or the lute player, if he doesn't get his instrument tuned pronto. And we see the little girls in the middle of the picture, who are very knowing little girls, and they understand completely what is going on. So scenes of seduction. Seduction, flirtation. Trudy's just been on the phone to me complaining about political correctness. So these are, shall we be politically correct, and shall we say these are scenes of sexual harassment?

But of course they wouldn't have- There are endless scenes of men trying to grope women in the 18th century, and in the work of Watteau. But the mood is a light one, as compared to the rape scenes of the 17th century. It's playful. And you get the feeling that the young lady on the left-hand side, she's modestly putting up a hand to protect her breasts. But you sort of feel that she's about to say to him, "Oh, you are awful, but I like you." Now, this is the great painting. There are two versions of this, one in the Louvre, and one in Berlin, that belonged to Frederick the Great. The one in the Louvre is usually regarded as the first of the two, and the superior of the two. Now, although the French Academy failed to send Watteau to Rome, they obviously appreciated his work, and he was invited to become an academician, which was a great honour in 1712.

But if you wanted to be a member of the French Academy, just the same as the Royal Academy in London, you had to deposit what was called, well in London it was called a diploma piece, and in France it was called a morceau de reception. So he was told he had to present this, and he was very lackadaisical. He took five years to do it. There's quite a lot of documentation about this. There were repeated reminders. And finally, there was an ultimatum. And they said, "Look, this is it. You've got to present it by this date, or it won't happen." So in 1717, he presented this picture to the French Academy. And it presented them with a problem. Now, we all know that the French love rules and regulations. We know it, of course, from- It's been a problem for the British sometimes, when they were still members of the European, the French like rules. They like to categorise everything. And this painting didn't fit into any known category.

So again, it's a sign of how much he was appreciated, that they had to invent a new character category, which was this term that I've mentioned several times, the fete galante. So this is the defining example of a fete galante. The traditional title of this painting is "The Embarkation for the Island of Cythera." So, the same as the other picture. That these are people who are setting off for the island of love. I suppose it's an 18th- What's that T-? I don't have TV, but I know there are these TV programmes where people are sent to islands and they have to flirt with one another. This is the sort of 18th-century equivalent of that. But there is, what exactly is going on in this painting? And is the title which we've always used in fact the correct one? Because some people have said, "No, this is not- The whole mood of this is not people who are about to have love. It's people who've made love. It's a painting full of post-coital melancholia." And so, you can see, there's a wonderful proto-rococo serpentine line that runs through the whole painting. And there is a kind of a narrative here, because the couple on the right-hand side are still totally engrossed with one another. They're still in the midst of love.

The couple immediately to their left, I suppose that the man is reaching to help the woman to her feet. And the couple to the left of them, the woman is looking back, perhaps with regret, perhaps with envy at the couples who are still engrossed in love. And then the people further down are about to get into the boat. And, so are they departing for the island of love, or are they departing from the island of love? Wonderful little drawing for this couple. He's so good at these kind of momentary, slightly awkward poses of people in movement. So I'm going to show you some more of these exquisite drawings. As I said, they've always been highly, highly prized and

appreciated, sometimes more than the paintings themselves. And you can see he's been watching this one young woman as she's playing the guitar, and catching her in slightly different poses. Again, all these very momentary poses. Now, this is towards the end of his life. Was a short life, dies at 37. And it's a perhaps not one of his most attractive paintings. It shows the actors of the Comedie-Francaise, the great national Theatre of France that went right back to the 17th century. And we can imagine that this might be a scene from a play by Corneille or Racine, with lots of rather hammy, over-the-top acting.

And it's appendant to this. In 1719, the Italian comedians who'd been banned by Louis XIV were allowed back again. And I think that the two paintings make a very interesting contrast. So I think it's pretty obvious that Watteau was rather more turned on by the Italian comedians than by the rather stuffy, pretentious actors of the Comedie-Francaise. This is another of his greatest masterpieces, maybe his most profound and impressive painting, "Gilles," who's of course, Pierrot, in the commedia dell'arte. And so this is perhaps the first example of something which has a very, very long tradition in Western culture, of the tragic clown. It's a big picture, and it has a kind of serious- And for a painting of a clown, it has a surprising gravitas and seriousness. You have a very low viewpoint, and this frontal pose, 'cause he rises up the entire length of the picture, and all the other people are on a much lower level. So, it gives an extraordinary monumentality to this supposedly comic figure. A lot of speculation about this. Does Watteau himself identified with this kind of tragic outsider comic figure?

There's an interesting theory that this pose with him frontally presented to you goes back to a famous Rembrandt etching of Christ presented to the people. On the left here, we've got a Watteau drawing, preliminary drawing for the "Gilles" picture. And I leave it to you, whether you think this is a convincing comparison, that Watteau was influenced by Rembrandt. This moment, of course, in the New Testament, is one that, I know that Trudy's talked about it. Norman Lebrecht talks about it in his book. It's a very fateful moment in the New Testament, in the Gospels, where Christ is presented to the people of Israel, and they choose Barabbas, and they want Christ to be crucified, and say all this thing about, you know, "Let it be upon us and our children forever," and so on. The blame for the execution of Christ. I don't think that is, I don't think those connotations need to be read into this picture, but this sense of martyr, outsider, this tragic sense, possibly. Here it is again. And I'd be interested to know what people think about that theory, and if they find it convincing. This is the very last masterpiece of Watteau.

It's called "L'Enseigne de Gersaint." L'Enseigne is a sign. And Gersaint was a picture dealer, successful picture dealer. He had a gallery on a bridge leading to the Ile de la Cite. And he apparently was a very supportive friend of Watteau as he became very ill and as he approached death. Now, in several lectures recently, people keep on asking and I can never really answer them, "How long did this painting take, or this work of art take, to create?" Well, the legend is that this picture was painted in a kind of fever of activity in eight days. But you know, there's no proof of that. That's just a traditional story. And it seems to show the shop of Gersaint, but with the facade removed, 'cause you're standing in the street, and you just look into the shop. And it may have been used very briefly as the actual shop sign. There are also stories that right at the

beginning of his career, when Watteau was finding his way and really scrambling to earn a living, that one of the ways he earned a living was in painting shop signs, though none of them have survived from the beginning of his career.

The painting was, actually it was originally larger, with a semicircular top. The semicircular top was removed, and the painting was cut in half, presumably to make it more sellable. Here is the right-hand side of the picture. You can actually identify some of the pictures in the backgrounds, the Titian nude halfway up, and then this very famous detail that I've already talked about on the left-hand side. Which again, people have read a lot into, with the portrait of Louis XIV being packed away. So Watteau, by all accounts, was a deeply depressive character. He was very melancholic, and of course he was very sickly, 'cause he suffered from tuberculosis. He was considered to be a very different, difficult character. And he only had one pupil. And that's this artist. He's called Pater, spelled Pater. He also came from Valenciennes, which might account for the fact that Watteau was willing to take him into his studio.

Certainly in the 17th and 18th century, local patronages and all this counted for a lot. So for a while, he was Watteau's assistant and pupil in 1713. Then they had a big falling out. And then in fact, he came back right at the end of Watteau's life, and just spent the very last weeks with Watteau, and said that he learned a lot from him. He's a very prolific artist. You find his paintings in most of the great museums of the world. But again, my favourite quote from Picasso I'm always coming up with, that good artists- "Bad artists borrow, good artists steal." And I think actually Pater is not a very good artist. And he's too- He borrows, and you know where he's borrowed it from. Sometimes he'll directly quote figures or compositions of Watteau. So I mean, they're pleasing pictures. This is Pater. But he has actually none of the best qualities of Watteau. The drawing is never so good. When he has to invent his own compositions, they're not so convincing. And they're just pretty.

They're charming and they're pretty, and they lack that extra psychological dimension that the best paintings of Watteau have. Again, for comparison, this is Pater here. No, yes, this is Pater, and this is a Watteau in the Wallace Collection. The other artist who wasn't actually formally a pupil of Watteau, but owes a lot to him, but actually then is more individual, and developed something a little bit more personal, is Lancret, L-A-N-C-R-E-T. This is one of his most famous paintings in the National Gallery. It's traditionally called "La Tasse de Chocolat," but recent historians, looking at the cups and the jug, say it's actually coffee rather than chocolates that's being consumed. And you can see just a teaspoon being given to this child's first taste of coffee. This is very rococo. I mean, everything in this painting is rococo. The trees, fluffy trees are rococo, the architectural elements are all curvy and rococo. Even the dog looks like a rococo dog, and the hollyhocks look like rococo hollyhocks.

And these very sweetie pastel colours. Now at the end of last week, somebody emailed me, obviously an artist who used pastels, and she said her pastels don't have chalk in them, and that they're pure pigment. Well, there are different ways that that's possible, 'cause there are different ways of making pastels. But in the 18th century, the traditional pastels of sticks were

powderized pigment mixed with chalk or plaster, and gum arabic to hold the whole thing together. And it is the chalk or the plaster that gives the pastels of the 18th century this rather pale sweetie bathroom look. Course, this is an oil painting, so you have to really go for that look. You actually have to mix white with the pigments to get that pastel look. This is also in the National Gallery. It's one of four paintings of the time. Actually, I think this is a very charming painting. I like it a lot. It's so of its period. I mentioned last week the stock character in 18th century literature of the dissolute or renegade priest. And it's because, if you're a member of the aristocracy in France, and even in England actually, you know, the first son would inherit, and the next son would go into the army, and the next son would go into the navy.

And if you had any spare sons, what do you do with them? You put them into the church. So there were an awful lot of these young men who, you know, wore clerical garb, but actually lived a very non-religious, very dissolute kind of life. And this seems to be an example of that. So this is "The Four Times of the Day," this is "Morning." And you can see a young priest or cleric who's having breakfast with a very pretty young woman who seems, who is, suffering from a wardrobe malfunction. You can see her decolletage. If you're going to look at it in the National Gallery, you can't see it very well here on the screen, but one nipple is popping out over the top. And this is "Afternoon." God, life must have been so boring, with nothing to do except play board games, fornicate, and hunt. Now the artist who's most associated with, I suppose, all that's negative about the Ancien Regime, is Francois Boucher.

At least later he became the kind of whipping boy, the artistic whipping boy of the Ancien Regime, of its frivolity, its superficiality, its corruption, its pleasure-seeking selfishness, and so on. I'm sure you all know the famous quote of Madame de Pompadour, "Apres moi, le deluge," "After us, the deluge." So, Boucher, born in 1703, died in 1770. He seemed for many people to represent the artificiality and the superficiality of the Ancien Regime. This is an example of an arcadian scene, these shepherds and shepherdesses, you know, with rouge cheeks and powdered hair. And again, the very sweet pastel colours. I have to admit to a certain prejudice against him. There's only so many Bouchers I can look at in one go. It's like eating your way through a box of chocolates. 'Cause I'm a 19th-century specialist, really, and I can't help looking at Boucher through 19th-century eyes.

So we've got two rural scenes here, a very 18th-century one by Boucher, and a typical 19th-century one by Millet. And you can see people who liked that painting on the right-hand side would've been quite dismissive of Boucher. I think the way to look at Boucher is to see him essentially as a decorative artist. So many of his paintings, they weren't- He worked for the Gobelins, he was producing designs for tapestries. He worked for Sevres. And the paintings themselves were meant to be seen as part of an overall decorative context. This is, again, a painting made to go over a door in the Hotel de Soubise. If you want to see a great early 18th-century French interior, on your next visit to Paris, go- It's at the National Archives at Hotel de Soubise. It's the most important interior surviving from the early 18th century. And it includes decorative paintings by Boucher and a number of other artists from the period.

And you see them in the proper context. These are paintings in the Wallace Collection that were, I think, from their format, with this very elongated, tall format, must have been intended to be set into boiserie, into wooden panelling. They're now actually rather inappropriately framed. The paintings are rococo, they're Louis Quinze. But the frames are neoclassical, and Louis Seize. And they don't really go very well together. It's a very Ancien Regime, rococo view of Greek mythology, which is all about nooky, really. It's all about seductions, and adulterous relationships, and naughtiness. The Greek goddesses all look like sort of a Parisian cocotte of the 18th century. These are often thought to be his. Sorry, it's such a poor quality reproduction on the left, the one on the right is better. They're pendants, they're on the staircase of the Wallace Collection. And they are impressive when you walk up the stairs.

And they're on a big scale. They're actually, they were conceived as cartoons for tapestries, and they were commissioned by Madame de Pompadour. And they actually celebrate the love of Louis XV for Madame de Pompadour. And move on quickly, probably enough of this. His paintings can be very directly erotic, even slightly pornographic. This is a painting said to be of Miss O'Murphy, who was a teenage mistress of Louis XV. This is in the National Gallery. And I must say, this is probably my least favourite painting in the entire National Gallery. The 18th century is actually not a great era, the rococo period, in my opinion, is not a great era of landscape painting. It took the Romantic revolution to open eyes to the beauty of nature. And there is a notorious letter that Boucher wrote to Lancret, in which he said he thought that nature was too green and badly lit. So you look at this and you think, did he ever really set eyes on a tree, or anything that was- Everything about this painting is totally, totally artificial. His great patroness was of course Madame de Pompadour. And he painted numerous portraits of her over a period of years. Whatever you think of her, she was a highly intelligent woman. She's, as you can see, shown reading books.

This little painting in the Wallace Collection, it's a small portrait of her. And it's said to have been painted to celebrate her being given the title of maitresse-en-titre. So, moving on from being the physical mistress of Louis XV to being his official mistress. Here again with piles of books, showing her intellectual interest. This, for comparison, this is Maurice Quentin de La Tour. I'll talk more about him in the context of Chardin. This is a pastel. And this is the Drouais that I showed you on Sunday, the last portrait that's painted of her. I always ask people, when you're standing in front of that picture, how old you think she was. Well, she died at the age of 42, I think it was. So she's not older than that, but she looks decidedly middle-aged. That's because she's wearing powdered hair. And also, I suppose that double chin was a fashionable look of the 18th century. And move on. I forgot, left myself five minutes to talk about Fragonard. So, if you really had to choose one painting to represent the Ancien Regime, it might be this, also in the Wallace Collection, "The Swing" by Fragonard. You can't get more rococo than this.

Everything is rococo, everything is curling. The young man on the ground, his whole body is a series of C-curves, as is her body on the swing. You've got the sweet pale colours, the lovely pale salmon pink and the bluey green. And the tree is about as rococo as a tree can possibly be. It's all curving, curling, all over the place. And the mood of the painting, the subject matter of

the mood, of a young man. He's looking up his mistress's skirts as she's on the swing. She's not wearing underpants. So he's got a fairly- We have to imagine what he's actually looking at, up her skirts. So, when this was first commissioned, Fragonard actually showed the man pulling the swing was dressed as a bishop. But I think that was sort of going it a bit, even in the Ancien Regime. But it showed the essentially frivolous and irreligious spirit of the age. Now this dates from 1768. Now people always associate Boucher and Fragonard. They go together like Reynolds and Gainsborough, or Constable and Turner. In fact, Boucher and Fragonard, although they overlap, were not contemporaries. Boucher is a younger- Fragonard is a younger generation. And so he was very old-fashioned. By 1768, in Rome, and in Paris to some extent, the neoclassical style was gaining ground, which is the opposite in every possible way from the rococo. These two paintings, amazingly, were painted in the same year.

Benjamin West, it's one of the pioneering works, this "Cleombrotus," of the new neoclassical style. But Fragonard hung in there with the rococo style long after the more fashionable people had moved onto neoclassicism. This is a classical subject, but treated in a very unclassical way. This is "Psyche." Cupid falls in love with her. He whisks her off to a magic island. He's a god, she's a mortal. He's embarrassed, so he won't let us see him. They have wonderful sex, but she's never allowed to see him. And she's a bit bored and lonely. So she invites all her sisters to come and visit her, he flies them in to visit her. And they're jealous, 'cause they look like, you know, desperate women at a department store sale, don't they? They're all handling all these wonderful fabrics, and looking at all these luxury things. And they're furiously jealous that she has all of this, and you see a figure of envy at the top.

So they persuade her to break her promise not to look at Cupid. And she lights a candle and looks at him with disastrous consequences. So this is a completely frothy late Baroque rococo treatment of a classical subject. Fragonard actually doesn't paint many classical subjects, and certainly doesn't paint religious or biblical subjects. He paints genre scenes, everyday life, with a sweetness. Well, depends on how sweet a tooth you have, whether you like these or not. I personally find this a little bit, really, too sweet for my taste. But I mean, what you can't take away from him is that he is a master of the brush. When he really lets rip, when he lets go, the freedom, the boldness, you know, it's up there with Frans Hals. Look at that brushwork, the amazing rhythmic bold quality that it has. Going to move on, I think. Lots of erotic paintings by Fragonard, with a kind of very explicit, direct- I find him, somehow, his eroticism, directer and more healthy than that of Boucher. This could be a scene from "Fanny Hill."

It's called "The Bolt." Rather obvious sexual symbolism of the bolt in the lock, and what's going to happen to her in a minute. And his final, well, they're not final, 'cause it's 1771 and he lives till 1806, but probably his most celebrated masterpieces, were a series of monumental wall paintings with the title "The Pursuit of Love." Entirely appropriate as a commission from the royal mistress, Madame du Barry, who you see in the insert painted by Madame Vigee-Lebrun. These are now of course in the Frick Collection in New York. And it's the ultimate subject matter of the Ancien Regime, of playful seduction of a young woman. They were commissioned for the country house of Madame du Barry. And she also at the same time commissioned this pavilion

by the extremely severe architect Ledoux. So this is a quite severe, rectilinear, tough form of neoclassicism you see at the top. And I think obviously, when the pictures arrive, or started to arrive, she thought, "Whoops, no, I think I've made a mistake here.

These pictures do not go with the architecture of Ledoux." And also, I think she was very fashion conscious, and she was aware that actually this frothy rococo was going out of fashion. So she actually rejected the series, and instead commissioned new neoclassical paintings from an artist called Vien. And here you see one of them on the bottom right-hand side. It must have been very, very humiliating for Fragonard to realise that he'd so passed out of fashion. I think the thing to learn from this story is that to be up-to-date, to be modern, to be progressive, is not always to be the best. I think nobody today would think that the Vien painting was as good as the ones that Fragonard did, even though they were sort of avant-garde and modern. And I'm going to finish now, and see if there is anybody who has any questions, stop share, or comments. Questions. Not many, do we have, but some. To hide subtitles. Yeah, right.

- I just want to say-

- Why were the-

- Sorry.

- Sorry.

- I'm sorry, Patrick. Just to say that, you know, some people are complaining about the texts that are coming through, but it's really to aid those people who can't hear.

- Yeah.

- So- And we've had many, many emails thanking us for doing that. So it's really, you know, for those who can hear, they don't need it. And they can also press a button to get rid of the texts. So you know, it's not compulsory.

- Right, good.

- They have-

- Thank you, Wendy.

- Thanks.

- Why was this an- I think, why, I mean, the 18th century, as I mentioned last time, is a great period of theatre, with very famous actors and theatrical performances. The influence of theatre is very pervasive throughout the 18th century. Somebody's mentioning a Julian Barnes short

story, which they're recommending. Oh, thank you very much. Somebody is saying Vigee-Lebrun memoirs readily available on Amazon. I do recommend them. They're very, very readable. She's a terrible snob. You know, she loves a title, or a princess, or a duchess, but otherwise she's really a very good writer, a very intelligent woman. One striking feature of the clown figure by Watteau is the disproportionately small head of the figure in contrast. Yes, I mean, I think it makes the figure look taller, doesn't it? To have the smaller head. It's in the Louvre, the "Gilles." Good, thank you.

The sexual symbolism of the shoe in "The Swing." I'm not really- well, I mean, I suppose it certainly- I don't know if there's a very specific sexual symbol of the shoe coming off, but I think it's certainly an indication of this very loose atmosphere, and what is going to happen when she comes off the swing. Can I read the question before answering? I do try and do that, don't always remember. I think that's it, then. Short. Small number of questions. Thank you, everybody. And we move on to Bavaria and German Baroque next, on Sunday.

- [Wendy] On Sunday. Thank you so much, Patrick, and thank you to everybody who joined us, and we'll see you all in an hour for Judge Dennis Davis. Thanks everybody. Bye-bye.

- Bye-bye.