



Speaker: Many people in France, particularly the middle classes, were suspicious of, if not outright appalled, at the behavior and tastes of the ruling classes. To them, the Rococo style of visual art in architecture became a symbol. It was the embodiment of the moral decline of the French leadership. If you recall from the Baroque era, divisions existed within the French Academy of Art, the Poussinistes and the Rubenistes. Certainly, the Rococo style was an extension of the Rubenistes with their preference for bold sweeps of color and sensuousness.

As the public at large started voicing their concerns over the moral content of art, artists who favored the Poussinistes linear style with rigor orderliness started a trend that was anti-Rococo in nature. By the mid-1700s art critics were publicly announcing their critique that there was a lack of large and grand history paintings. This was followed by a major catalyst and that catalyst was the discovery of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii in 1738 and 1748 respectively.

The scientific discovery of these ruins inspired the imagination to reflect on the culture, which viewed through the mists of time, seemed to be much more virtuous and public-minded. A culture where duty and responsibility were placed above selfish desires. You take those two things, the swing towards the Poussinistes style, and then this wonderful scientific discovery, and what happened was a change in artistic style.

By 1775 the French Academy was regularly turning down Rococo art in favor of this new, more vigorous, orderly Classical style. Just about the same time Madame du Barry who was one of the mistresses of Louis the 15th, she rejected panels that she had commissioned from Fragonard for her new chateau, and so bada bing bada boom, almost in a blink of an eye Rococo style was gone, replaced by Neoclassical style.

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