

## Gallery

# 7

### French Artists and Rome, 1600-1700

An extended trip to Italy was a requisite part of many artists' formal education, a tradition that began in the 16th century and continues to the present day. The desire to study the cultural achievements of the past and establish links with the present was very much allied to the thinking of the Renaissance world. Rome became the center for this academic and artistic exercise, and a gathering place for individuals dedicated to the cause. Many artists visiting the eternal city never returned home, securing patronage with foreign ambassadors, the papal and cardinalate courts, and affluent travelers on the Grand Tour. Thus foreign artist colonies were established, for the French, Dutch, Germans, and other nationalities, sometimes as informal associations, and in other instances as officially incorporated academies and guilds. At the center of the French community in 17th-century Rome were Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain, two painters who spent their professional lives in Italy. Poussin's brother-in-law, Gaspard Dughet, also lived in Rome, while Simon Vouet and Sebastien Bourdon visited, but eventually returned to France. Among the Italians who inspired the French artists, besides Caravaggio and his school, were Salvator Rosa and Pier Francesco Mola, who advanced the notion of romanticism and naturalism in their landscape paintings.



**Nicolas Poussin**

French, 1594-1665, active in Rome and Paris

***The Ecstasy of Saint Paul*, 1643**

Oil on panel

Museum purchase, 1956, SN 690

In this painting, Nicolas Poussin faced the tasks of flattering his major patron, Paul Fréart de Chantelou, and competing with the celebrated Renaissance artist Raphael. Chantelou owned Raphael's *Vision of Ezekiel* and intended to hang Poussin's painting next to the earlier work. According to the New Testament, angels carried Paul to the Third Heaven during an ecstatic vision. Poussin chose the subject of St. Paul as a natural New Testament complement to the Old Testament Hebrew prophet Ezekiel, and to honor his patron.



**Salvator Rosa**

Italian, 1615-1673, active in Rome and Naples

***Landscape with a Wide River, Waterfall and Three Figures in the Foreground*, c. 1656**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 153

According to Rosa's biographers and subsequent scholars, the artist did not consider his landscapes as his primary works. Yet Rosa's landscapes offer whole new ways of understanding nature. He created dramatic compositions enhanced by windblown trees and craggy cliffs. To provide a sense of scale, the figures are dwarfed by the setting. The waterfall adds an element of verticality to the strong horizontal compositions. The expansive view is similar to the gently modulating landscapes of Nicolas Poussin.



**Nicolas Poussin**

French, 1594-1665, active in Rome and Paris

***The Holy Family with the Infant Saint John***

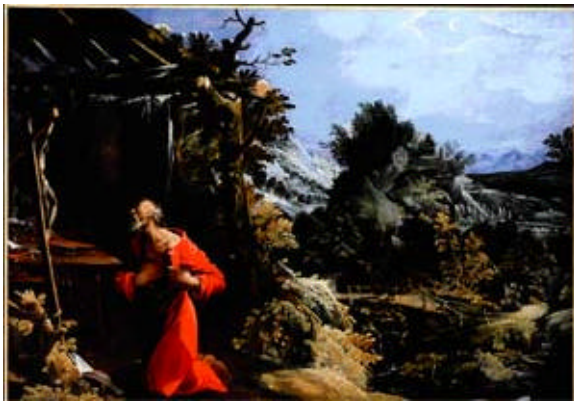
***the Baptist***, 1655

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 361

These statuesque figures are examples of Poussin's late style, called the "Magnificent Manner." In this phase of his career, Poussin continued to look to classical sculpture for models while embracing a nearly abstract geometry in his compositions. Rather than emphasizing movement through form or line, this painting is anchored by the carefully structured arrangement of the Holy Family. Resting on Mary's lap, the Christ child

majestically raises his hand to bless St. John the Baptist as St. Joseph looks on in the pose of a philosopher.



**Paul Bril**

Flemish, 1554-1626, active in Rome

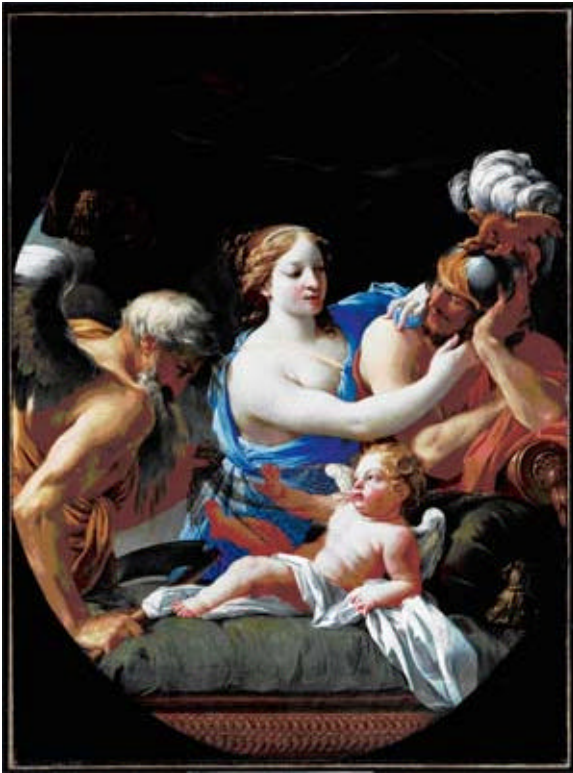
***Saint Jerome in the Wilderness***, c. 1595-1600

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1959, SN 707

This unusual depiction of St. Jerome takes place in the evening twilight, the moon just becoming visible. In an act of

penitence, Jerome pounds his chest with a rock, his red cloak and open book identifying him as the author of the Vulgate Bible. In the background, a lion is visible, referencing the scene in which Jerome plucked a thorn from the lion's paw. The animal then became his devoted companion. Bril was a celebrated painter in early Baroque Rome, receiving commissions from Popes Sixtus V and Clement VIII. His oeuvre is almost entirely devoted to landscape paintings, and his style was embraced by several French artists.



**Simon Vouet**

French, 1590-1649, active in Rome and Paris

***Time Discovering the Love of Venus and Mars,***

c. 1640

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 360

Trained in Italy, Vouet returned to his native France to become court painter to King Louis XIII. His Italianate treatment of light and composition, blended with a French palette, was highly influential in mid-17th-century France. As told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Venus, married to Vulcan, had an affair with Mars, the god of war, and this illicit union produced Cupid, the god of love. Vulcan

conspired to ensnare the lovers in a fine metal net, yet Vouet's interpretation on the story shows the figure of Time revealing the affair to the gods.



**Sébastien Bourdon**

French, 1616-1671, active in Paris, Rome, and Stockholm

***Burying the Dead* from *The Seven Acts of Mercy,* c. 1665**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 372

In the 1640s, Bourdon befriended Nicholas Poussin, whose classicizing

influence is evident here. Along with *Welcoming the Strangers*, also displayed in the gallery, this picture is from a series depicting the seven acts of mercy as described in the Gospel of Matthew. Bourdon represented this act by showing the scene where Tobit buries those slain by the Assyrian King Sennacherib, as recorded in the Apocryphal Book of Tobit. The strange coloring of the figures was not intentional, but rather reflects later physical changes to the paint and surface.



**Sébastien Bourdon**

French, 1616-1671, active in Paris, Rome, and Stockholm

***Welcoming the Strangers* from *The Seven Acts of Mercy*, c. 1665**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 369

This work and *Burying the Dead*, also displayed in the gallery, is part of a series of seven paintings depicting the acts of mercy outlined in the Gospel of Matthew. To illustrate this act, Bourdon chose the scene from the Book of Genesis in which Lot receives the angels, an act of compassion that spared him and his family from the destruction of Sodom. The antique dress of the figures and various accessories, along with the planar composition, are evidence of the classical style that Bourdon embraced late in his career.



**Jacques Stella**

French, 1596-1657, active in Lyon, Rome, and Paris

***King Candaules Shows Gyges his Wife Queen Nyssia*, c. 1645**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 384

Stella trained in Rome before returning to his native Lyon in 1634. He later moved to Paris, where he became *Peintre du Roi* to King Louis XIII. This small picture illustrates a scene from *The Histories* of Herodotus, in which Candaules, the 7th-century B.C. Lydian king, intentionally exposed his naked wife, Queen Nyssia, to his hesitant servant, Gyges. Upon learning of the plot, the enraged Nyssia enlisted Gyges to kill her husband. The servant obliged, avenging the queen's honor. Gyges eventually married Nyssia and became King of Lydia.



**Gaspard Dughet**

French, 1615-1675, active in Rome

*A Valley After a Shower*, c. 1655-56

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 362

Following the example of his teacher and brother-in-law, Nicolas Poussin, Dughet embraced the landscape, a rapidly developing painting genre in the 17th century. In this brightly lit view of the

Italianate countryside, the sun breaks through the dissipating rain clouds to illuminate a group of three figures in classical dress. Juxtaposing areas of light and shadow, Dughet leads the viewer's eye through the landscape, toward the classical buildings in the background. The work attempts to translate ancient poetry about the pastoral life, such as Virgil's *Eclogues* or *Georgics*, into pictorial terms.



**Pier Francesco Mola**

Italian, 1612-1666, active in Rome and Bologna

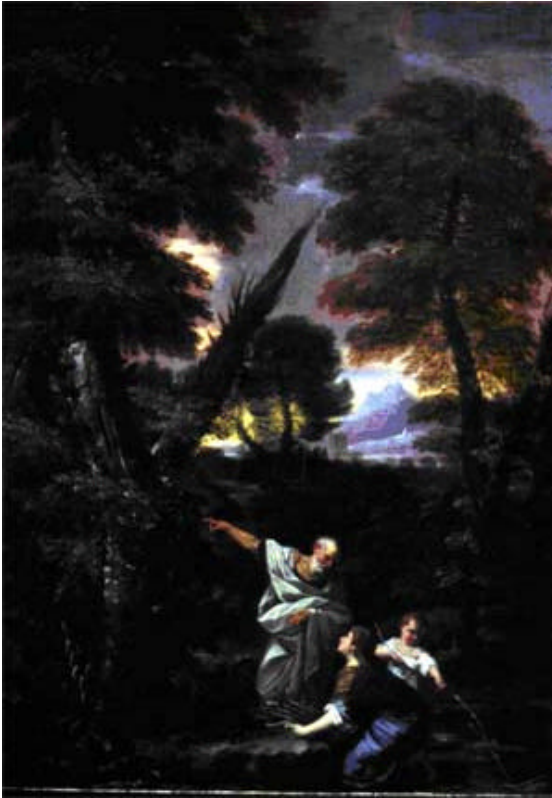
*The Prophet Elisha and the Rich Woman of Shunem*, c. 1650

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 139

As told in the Book of Kings, Elisha was a companion to the prophet Elijah. After God took up Elijah, Elisha became the religious leader of the Israelites. He favored a rich lady from the village of Shunem who had given him hospitality. He is shown telling the woman to leave the area with her son and thus escape a famine. Mola may have painted this work and its pendant, *The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarepath*, for the

church of San Martino ai Monti in Milan at the behest of Monsignor (later Cardinal) Luigi Omodei.



**Pier Francesco Mola**

Italian, 1612-1666, active in Rome and Bologna

***The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath*, c. 1650**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 138

This picture, along with *The Prophet Elisha and the Rich Woman of Shuneh*, was likely commissioned for the church of San Martino ai Monti in Milan. According to the Old Testament Book of Kings, Elijah asked a woman to give him her remaining food during a famine. Because she did so, Elijah ensured that she and her family were miraculously fed by a never-empty jar of flour and flask of oil. Though technically a narrative, the painting explores the expressive nature of landscape and light, and betrays a response to Venetian painting.

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**Salvator Rosa**

Italian, 1615-1673, active in Rome and Naples

***Landscape with a Lake, Mountains and Five Soldiers in the Foreground*, c. 1656**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 154

This large horizontal canvas contains all the elements of Rosa's signature landscapes. The contrasting clouds in dark sky cast deepening shadows on the moving water and the windblown trees. The rugged scenery, with fragments of branches and foliage scattered throughout, gave a vibrant dimension to the composition. Remarkably influential during the 17th century, his works foreshadow 19th-century Romanticism. In the 18th century indeed he was referred to as "Savage Rosa."



**Salvator Rosa**

Italian, 1615-1673, active in Rome and Naples

***An Allegory of Study*, c. 1649**

Oil on canvas

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 152

The young man at his desk was originally thought to be Salvator Rosa himself. A prolific satirist and poet as well as a celebrated artist, Rosa produced many self-portraits in allegorical disguise. Although the face does not resemble that of Rosa, based on other portraits, the figure may symbolize the artist's notion of himself as a philosopher and author. Contrary to common practice, Rosa rarely executed preparatory drawings for paintings, preferring to paint directly onto the canvas from the live model. The loose handling of the paint and brush reinforces the sense of immediacy with the sitter.

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**Claude Vignon**

French, 1593-1670, active in Rome and Paris

***The Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra*, c. 1640**

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1951, SN 653

A famous story from ancient history about the courtship of the Roman general Anthony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra concerns a contest in the form of a banquet. Each presented dishes reflecting their great wealth. Anthony served exquisite morsels on elaborate gold tableware. Cleopatra held out a cup of wine and dropped a large pearl inside, offering it to Anthony to drink. The pearl dissolved in the wine, and Cleopatra won the contest. Vignon's highly original style employs widely varying brushstrokes and impasto that enhance the illusion of gold, jewelry, and diaphanous silk.





**Jean Tassel**

French, 1608-1667, active in Rome,  
Langres, and Dijon

***The Judgment of Solomon*, c. 1650**

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, 1957, SN 702

Tassel was in Rome in 1634, where he associated with Nicolas Poussin and Sebastian Bourdon. He also absorbed the sculptural forms of Raphael and the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio, fusing them in this depiction of the Judgment of Solomon. According to the story, found in the biblical Book of Kings, a woman, upon the death of her child, abducted the baby of another

mother, who woke up to find the dead infant in place of her own. Both women argued before Solomon, who judged that the child still living should be cut in half and divided between the women. The true mother pleaded with Solomon, and her child is returned to her.