



Diploma Lecture Series 2012
Absolutism to enlightenment: European art and culture 1665-1765

Rubénisme versus Poussinisme

Christopher Allen

14 / 15 March 2012

Lecture summary:

The *Querelle du coloris* – the ‘quarrel of colour’ – was a debate that arose within the context of the monthly ‘conférences’ held at the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* in Paris, beginning with rumblings of disagreement during the first series in 1667 and erupting into open controversy in 1671. The present lecture, while glancing at the later history of the argument and recalling the debates that preceded it, especially in Rome, will concentrate on the specific case of Paris and draw on the considerable surviving documentation. In some respects the controversy appears futile, in others merely puzzling: for everyone agreed that both drawing and colour were indispensable to painting. But in the rationalist intellectual climate of the time it was inevitable that one or other should be considered the essential, primary or defining quality of painting, while the other was in some sense subordinate. Temperamental and even moralistic differences too separated those who preferred the logic of line from those who were drawn to the sensual qualities of colour. Initially, the first group held up Raphael as their hero and the second Titian (echoing earlier Italian debates); but as the tone grew increasingly heated, the two parties updated their references to the more contemporary figures of Poussin and Rubens. Support for Rubens became implicitly a criticism of the Academy, whose hero was Poussin, although as we shall see the academic style was less faithful to Poussin’s example, and owed more to that of Rubens than it cared to admit.

Slide list:

- * 1. Guercino, *Allegory of Painting and Sculpture (the Sister Arts)*, 1637, oil on canvas, 114 x 139 cm, Rome, Palazzo Barberini
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4. Charles Le Brun, *Holy Family with the Adoration of the Child (‘Le Silence’)*, 1655, oil on canvas, 87 x 118 cm, Paris, Louvre
5. Charles Le Brun, *Portrait of Chancellor Séguier*, c. 1661, oil on canvas, 295 x 351 cm, Paris, Louvre
6. Charles Le Brun, *Portrait of Louis XIV*, oil on canvas 68 x 57 cm, Versailles, Palace
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14. Nicolas Poussin, *The Jews gathering the Manna in the desert*, 1637-39, oil on canvas, 149 x 200, Paris, Louvre
15. Nicolas Poussin, *Christ heals the blind men of Jericho*, 1650, oil on canvas, 119 x 176 cm, Paris, Louvre
16. Titian, *Madonna and Child with St Catherine and a rabbit*, 1530, oil on canvas, 74 x 84 cm, Paris, Louvre
17. School of Titian, *Virgin and Child with St Catherine and St John the Baptist*, oil on canvas, Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts
- * 18. Gabriel Blanchard, ceiling of the Salon de Diane, Versailles, official apartments of Louis XIV
19. Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne, *The Pilgrims at Emmaus*, c. 1665
- * 20. Jean-Baptiste de Champaigne, ceiling of the Salon de Mercure, 1671-81, oil on canvas, Versailles, official apartments of Louis XIV
- * 21. Charles de La Fosse, ceiling of the Salon d'Apollon, 1671-81, Versailles, official apartments of Louis XIV
22. Charles Le Brun and assistants, the Grande Galerie or Galerie des Glaces (Hall of Mirrors) at Versailles, 1678-84
23. Titian, *Madonna and child*, 1565-70, oil on canvas, 75 x 63 cm, London, National Gallery
24. Rubens, *The Descent from the Cross*, 1612-14, oil on panel, 421 x 311 cm, Antwerp, O.-L. Vrouwekathedraal
- * 25. Charles Le Brun, *The Descent from the Cross*, c. 1679, oil on canvas, 545 x 327 cm; Rennes, MBA
- * 26. Charles Le Brun, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, bef. 1685, oil on canvas, 162 x 129 cm. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts
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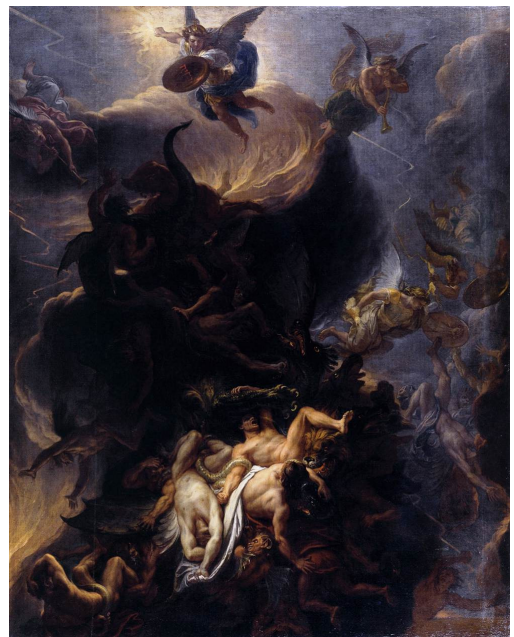
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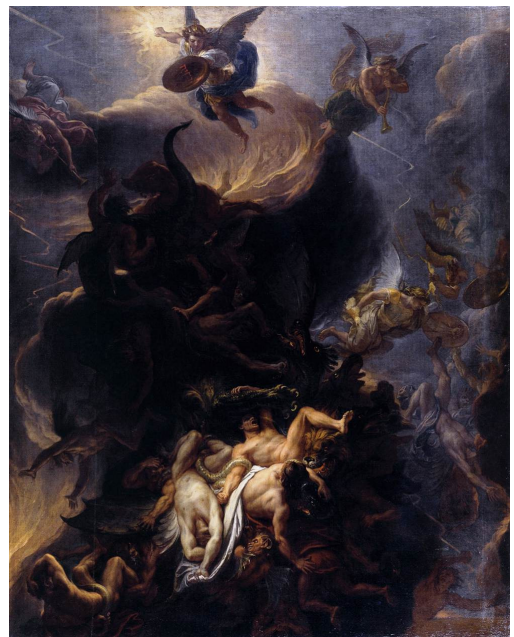
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